

# Alcohol prohibition in 1920s history essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Women, the driving factor in prohibition, believed that prohibition would make alcohol's presence in society go away this would resolve the majority of societal issues.. The prohibition movement only made the alcohol problem worse by increasing the percentage of alcohol in one drink, due to the new group of people it created. This group was coined with the name moonshiners or bootleggers, and these people were in the very profitable business of producing alcohol illegally. Not only did they make alcohol illegally, but the alcohol that they did make was a lot more potent than the alcohol that was sold prior to prohibition. They could not transport beer, or even wine very easily because of the sheer volume that it would take to intoxicate a person. Moonshiners had to resort to something that would be more profitable and easier to transport. " Well, one of the things that happen when you outlaw any product is that the product returns underground. Correct? But it returns underground in a more concentrated form. And the problem with beer is it's very difficult to hide. So, in most parts of the United States, beer actually was not available during Prohibition. Instead, you had to substitute bathtub gin."(See Appendix 3) Alcohol sold before 1920 was usually low proof, but when moonshine came about it was up to 190 proof , or 95% alcohol. The picture " Still Diagram" shows a diagram of how moonshiners built their valuable stills that could produce very high proof alcohol. (See Appendix 1) This was something that women did not think about. They just believed that they alcohol would go away, not be transferred into a different more potent form. People would get a lot drunker a lot faster only making worse the problem that women saw before. This alone made prohibition a complete failure.

Seeing that moonshine was illegal, this turned many citizens, who used to be good law abiding citizens, into criminals. These citizens were people who held respectable jobs, and were very capable members of society, and not just people who were the stereotypical criminals. With more people breaking laws, and a new underground business, this led to the ever rising crime rate, leaving the police outnumbered. “ The most successful gangs became ever larger and more organized. With the money made from liquor they were able to branch out into a variety of other criminal enterprises, and eventually they used the money to take over legitimate business. The structure of what we now call organized crime was born during prohibition.” (Cohen 49)

It was very hard for authorities to keep up with something so new that they had never had to combat before. What started out as a good idea was falling apart day by day. “ The demand for alcohol was outweighing (and out-winning) the demand for sobriety.” (National Archives)

This became such a profitable business that in most cases the ends would justify the means. After all, this was a tax free business, and the money that was coming into bootleggers from selling their moonshine was more than most of them have seen in their entire life. Women did not approve of this at all. This was not what they had intended when they posed the idea of prohibition. Creating more problems in a society that they had already deemed as corrupt was the last thing they want to do, but they did not realize their ideology was just fueling the issues they felt that were already bad enough in their society.

The government was not prepared to get involved into a long drawn out battle with its own citizens like the prohibition act in any way. The word drug-crime was not even something that the government had ever had to think about before. They had to do something and decided to hire more agents to try and enforce the amendment. The government, in a time of war, could not afford to pay the enforcing agents very well. They got somewhere from thirty-five to fifty dollars a week and were many times offered large bribes in order to not turn in the bootleggers. It was beneficial for them to pay off the police at any cost because the industry that they were in was very profitable and the thought of getting shut down and put into jail was not an option. In many cases they did not go to jail even if they did not pay off the authorities. Moonshiners getting arrested was a very common act, but compared to the people that were in this illegal industry, this was not even making a dent. (See Appendix 2) The court system was so overwhelmed with these problems that as many as seventy-five thousand<sup>6</sup> cases were thrown out in only one year. Seeing that seventy-five thousand cases were thrown out, the number of altogether cases that a court saw was staggering, and nothing it was prepared to handle. Many people were able to get off scot-free due to this releasing people who are now dangerous back into society without any punishments. Seeing that authorities were outnumbered, out powered, and many dangerous people were escaping the justice system, many more deaths occurred after the 18th amendment was put in place that was ever fathomable before when alcohol was still legal. It was estimated that forty<sup>7</sup> percent of the homicides during the prohibition period were due to drug related crimes. This was a shocking number to society and they had

not seen anything close to this before. Prohibition had created a problem that was almost nonexistent before it was brought about.

Government got into a terrible place by being involved with prohibition. This was not the place of the government and it violated people's personal freedoms. Government's involvement actually made the issue worse. People could have made it more of a socially shunned activity and scorned people into not drinking. If people were actually on board with the prohibition act, that would have worked tremendously, but seeing the majority of society did not believe in prohibition this act did not work. This further proves the ideology that prohibition was a failure and never should have been made a law. Unfortunately the government tried to do this in a roundabout way, but again only made the principle issue worse. The government decided that it was going to poison the ingredients of alcohol, specifically the wheat. Their plan was if people saw other people becoming sick from alcohol, they would not want to drink. This ideology couldn't be farther from the truth. The only two things that happened from this outrageous movement by the government were people distrusted them, and as many as 10, 0008 people lost their lives due to the tainted product. This was a lot of people that died just so that the government could try proving a point. " Although mostly forgotten today, the " chemist's war of Prohibition" remains one of the strangest and most deadly decisions in American law-enforcement history" (Slate)

The government was put into place to help better society, but killing people intentionally just to prove a point was a ridiculous event. Ironically, the government is to serve justice to people who kill or injure another person, so

<https://assignbuster.com/alcohol-prohibition-in-1920s-history-essay/>

why, during the prohibition did the government come up with a scheme which results in thousands of deaths just prove a point. That was very contradictory to what the American people stand for. Also, this contradicts what the founders of prohibition had wanted. They wanted to have a society that was free of crime and had good morals. When their own government was breaking all of these issues that were supposedly going to be fixed by prohibition, this was yet just another signal that prohibition was a complete failure.

Prohibition had some serious economic gains, or serious economic loses, depending on what side a person was on. With most of prohibition, it ultimately cost the government a lot of money. When prohibition started, in 1920, the amendment cost the government approximately \$2, 5009. By 1930 enforcement costs were \$38, 700

. Starting out in 19209, the Bureau of Prohibition was the only agency involved. Five years later the Bureau of Prohibition was just not enough, and the Coast Guard had to get involved. The price for enforcement increased so exponentially because people were making so much money on bootlegging, that they would do anything to stay in business. This also meant the opposite for the government. As the bootleggers got stronger, the government forces to counter act these bootleggers had to get stronger also. People also saw how much money a bootleggers were making on alcohol and the high the demand for alcohol and they wanted to also make this much money.

Combine this with the rise in drug related crime, and this produces a mixture that is going to require a large number of enforcement officials that are going to be needed, which ultimately means more cost for the government

<https://assignbuster.com/alcohol-prohibition-in-1920s-history-essay/>

and money being basically the only factor why someone would want to risk everything to become involved in bootlegging.

Enforcing the prohibition of alcohol almost became a futile effort. Gang, organized crime, and moonshiners, proved to be much stronger than the agents that were enforcing the laws, and required government to continually up the number of people on the case. When most of society was breaking these laws it was next to impossible to enforce the prohibition law. The amount of force that it would have taken to enforce the laws the way it was written would have been a task that America was not up to in the 1920s. That is why as many as seventy-five thousand

cases of prohibition law infractions were not even taken to court, and the cases were dismissed. Another reason why the prohibition battle was a futile effort is because the citizens were not behind the prohibition of alcohol. There were some members of society that were very into what prohibition was created for and believed very strongly about it, but the majority of society were on the non-supporting side. Women had just received the right to vote in 1920

and were still living in a mostly patriarchal society, and males did not support this movement. This made it very hard to keep enforcing without the support of males. All of the factors proved to be a bigger undertaking than the women, Anti-Saloon league, and a developing nation could handle. On December 5, 1933

the 18th amendment that started the prohibition of alcohol prohibition was repealed with the 21st amendment.

<https://assignbuster.com/alcohol-prohibition-in-1920s-history-essay/>

The laws that were put in place during the prohibition period were obviously not effective and ended up not standing for what they initially meant. The government realized that the amendment was actually causing more issues than it was solving. A lot of time and money was wasted in trying to force the prohibition of alcohol on citizens who just didn't think that it was the right decision for them. The government's stance finally changed on the issue when they realized they could actually make money off of this and regulate alcohol and actually reduce the number of harmful events associated with this issue. Franklin Roosevelt

was the first governmental authority to come to conclusion. The decision that he made during his term in office was a very good decision seeing that government had now regained control of the alcohol and was not actually spending large sums of money trying to stop it. The opposite was actually true. The government was in the industry of something that was high demand and was finally getting the money from the taxes that the government should have gotten before. Listening to the citizens in this issue put government in a place where the citizens respected them more, and virtually eliminated the drug crime scene that was so prevalent during the prohibition period. Alcohol prohibition ultimately had a lot of goals that were all targeted at bettering society. In the end the prohibition period only did the exact opposite of what it was meant to do, and when the 21st amendment was added the prohibition was declared as a complete failure.