

Prohibition in america mistake not to be repeated history essay



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Research Question: The lack of enforcement of the Volstead Act resulted in prohibition being completely ineffective and damaged American society.

Part A- Plan of Investigation

The purpose of this investigation is to evaluate the negative effects prohibition had during the thirteen years it was in effect. This investigation will focus on how the lack of enforcement of the Volstead Act resulted in prohibition being completely ineffective and damaged American society. The Volstead Act was also known as the 18th Amendment, this act banned the selling and drinking of liquor throughout the whole nation, it was passed October 28, 1919 and fell into effect on January 16th, 1920. In order to assess these effects, evidence will include statistics comparing crime before and during prohibition and corruption within the American society. Two of the main sources used in this essay are, Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 157: Alcohol Prohibition Was a Failure by Mark Thornton and Prohibition: Thirteen Years that Changed America by Edward Behr, will be evaluated according to their purpose, origin, values and limitation.

Mark Thornton is the O. P. Alford III Assistant Professor of Economics at Auburn University and has been praised for his previous books on prohibition. Edward Behr is an author who has published many books relating to world history including wars. This investigation does not include the effects of crime rate and corruption right after prohibition was lifted nor does it assess the views of abolitionists.

Part B- Summary of Evidence

Argument 1: The rise of organized crime led to the increase of criminal activity, resulting in the failure of prohibition

Amount of alcohol consumed by a person of had been declining since 1910, hit an all-time low during the depression of 1921, and then started to increase in 1922.

According to a study the number of crimes increased 24% between 1920 and 1921 in 30 major U. S cities. The 30 cities had a combined population of more than 10 million.

The amount of inhabitants charged of prohibition violations increased 1, 000 percent between 1925 and 1930. Two-thirds of all criminals admitted in 1930 had been arrested for alcohol and drug charges and that figure shoots up to 75 percent of violators if other commercial prohibitions are included.

According to Thomas Coffey, the death rate from poisoned alcohol was horrendously high throughout the nation. In 1920 the nationwide toll was 1, 064, as compared to 4, 154 in 1925.

Argument 2: The creation of illegal organizations fostered corruption during prohibition.

Mabel Willebrandt Assistant Attorney General noted “ the speakeasies were the assembling places and allies of crooked politicians who manipulated elections in the interests of the grabbers of franchises for street railways, electric light and gas plants and other seekers of special privilege... the so-

called decent citizens have done little anywhere permanently to curb the reign of the corrupt manipulators of city affairs.”

Bill Mellin a Justice Department spy exposed the amount of corruption going on when one of his investigation reported that George Remus had bribed forty-four corrupt people, and some of these people included Federal prohibition agents and deputy marshals, \$1000 each and a United States officials in Cincinnati merely responded “ Go back to New York and forget it”.

The Bridge Whist Club was a speakeasy opened in 1925, financed by secret federal funds, the purpose was to collect proof to imprison bootleggers, but it continued to operate throughout prohibition even after the investigation ended.

Part C- Evaluation of Sources

Two major sources were used to conduct this investigation. One of the sources was the Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 157: Alcohol Prohibition Was a Failure by Mark Thornton. This was an in-depth report on the facts and effects of prohibition in America. It was researched and published in 1991 with the purpose to inform the audience about particular facts related to crime and how it led to the failure of prohibition. The value of this article is that it provides a reduced bias as it only focuses on facts before and during prohibition and has no opinionated statements. It was also published in 1991, 58 long years after prohibition was repealed, due to this bias was lessened considerably although it does not totally disappear. Another value of this article includes ideas of many different authors, and does not only focus on facts collected by one person. This article was also valuable as the

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author, Mark Thornton, was a focused and determined researcher on Prohibition and had been praised by other historians such as Murray Rothbard, who stated “ Thornton’s book... arrives to fill an enormous gap, and it does so splendidly.... This is an excellent work making an important contribution.” Though this report was very informative it had limitations, facts proving that prohibition was effective were excluded from the report, and hence only focused on proving that prohibition was a mistake, while that is not completely true.

The other main source used to complete this research was Prohibition: Thirteen Years that Changed America by Edward Behr. This book was published in 1996 by Arcade Publishing in New York. The purpose of this book was to inform the audience about the step by step events during prohibition in America, so that they can find out the scandals, the crimes and also the positive effects prohibition of Prohibition. This book was valuable of as it provides detailed accounts of prohibitionists and anti-prohibitionists, so it covers both sides of the story and it also covered facts before, after and during prohibition. This book also has its limitations, Edward Behr was a British journalist, and therefore information he received might have been altered as he was not in America during prohibition. Although this book provided both sides of the story, bias was clear as more emphasis was put into proving prohibition was a failure, as the conclusion of the book states focused on how repealing prohibition had “ saved America from future problems”

Part D: Analysis

The Volstead Act (Prohibition) also known as the 18th Amendment was applied to the U. S constitution to keep America safe, but in reality it brewed problems for the American society. Organization of crime caused illegal actions within the country to increase, which led to the downfall of prohibition. Before prohibition was enforced the drinking rate was decreasing every year. Prohibition was put into effect to abolish the drinking of alcohol in the United States, but that had not happened. Illegal production and allocation of liquor continued to swell and grow during prohibition due to the lack of enforcement. Government officials were not strict enough regarding the issue. The organization of crime, made it simple and convenient for anyone to obtain drinks from places such as speakeasies. A business man from New Jersey stated that 10 times more locations were available where one could get a drink during prohibition, than there had been before. Due to this, violations of the Volstead act were becoming largely common as drinking rates increased. Making prohibition illegal motivated citizens to consume alcohol as they were angry at the government and could not stop drinking and therefore the public crime rate had increased. This led to the increase in the number of criminals were jailed, violations included drunk driving, vandalism, and robbery. Liquor made and drank during prohibition was bootlegged, it was it was not prepared carefully and was not approved by the government or the health foundation and would poison alcohol leading to many health problems. One of the finest academic supporter of prohibition, Even Fisher confirmed bootleg liquor almost always contains other harmful chemicals and not only ethyl alcohol. The death rate increased due to the greater availability of alcohol, if bootlegged alcohol was not as

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widely consumed not only would criminal offenses decrease but so would death rates. The negative effect of prohibition on American society might not have been as great if the government was firm about following the Volstead Act. Not only did the prohibition increase criminal activity which harmed Americans but it also had another negative impact.

Corruption throughout the American society was created due to the creation of illicit organizations. Prohibition had introduce corruption in America, everyone from minor police officers to major politicians and organizations had accepted bribes or offered bribes. It was enormously profitable and immensely important for politicians to let the speakeasies operate as they were receiving huge sums of money. Speakeasies were illegal organizations that included many members, bootleggers and gang members. In order for the speakeasy to continue operating, the government had to disregard and ignore the events taking place at the speakeasy. These bootleggers, gang members and other people involved with the creation of the speakeasy would vote for the politicians who will not come in the way of the speakeasies. Politicians wanted power and therefore had allowed speakeasies to operate. Not only did politicians receive votes by performing corrupt deeds, they were also offered bribes by gangsters and speakeasies. Politicians saw how profitable. Politicians were not the only ones who were corrupt, police officers, whose duty was to expose the illegal activities of speakeasies and bootleggers, had accepted bribes for their own personal benefit. Speakeasy owners had also obtained lots of profits as they did not have to pay taxes and charged higher prices for alcohol. Corruption might have seemed helpful for many people but corruption cause the government

was losing money for enforcing prohibition because taxes on liquor had now disappeared. Liquor taxes were a major source for income for the government and had helped pay for the huge costs of the civil war. \$300,000 on taxes had been given up because prohibition had been enforced which closed down many breweries and saloons. Politicians, police officers and speakeasy owners made huge amounts of profit for themselves. Prohibition was not a smart move as it increased problems faced by the American society.

Part E- Conclusion

Prohibition increased felonies and corruption due to the lack of interest from the government in enforcing the law. Organized crime became an empire, and therefore crime rates had increased during this time period. Corruption was a major part in successfully creating and maintaining organizations that violate the Volstead Act. Prohibition had changed the face of American society, America was under the influence of corrupt officers, leaders, and officials who violated the 18th Amendment at every stage of prohibition to obtain liquor. Crime had increased and the amount of criminals had increased. Prohibition had not succeeded in reducing crime and corruption, and hence it failed to resolve the problem it was enforced for.

Part F- Bibliography

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