

Prohibition in usa 1900-1930

Politics



Prohibition in USA in the 1900's The prohibition was brought on by the strong temperance movement happening in America in the early 1900's. These groups were devout Christians who vowed to be sober as they saw the affect alcohol had on families. But the members of this movement campaigned for everyone to give up alcohol. The arguments of the Temperance groups were so strong that they eventually convinced state governments to prohibit the sale and produce of alcohol in their state.

Politicians backed this movement as it secured them votes in the rural areas, and by 1916, the sale and production of alcohol had been banned in 21 states. USA's entry into the war strengthened this movement, as drinkers were being labelled as ' Unpatriotic cowards' for not entering into the war. The fact that Germany supplied most of the countries alcohol also helped the movement, as Germany was seen as the enemy. Despite the great efforts made by the government, the sale and production if alcohol didn't entirely cease.

People all over the US started making their own alcohol, these were called ' bootleggers' People also set up illegal bars selling black market alcohol and providing entertainment, these were referred to as ' Speakeasies' and made a fortune. Over the 13 years that the prohibition lasted, over 37, 000 illegal distilleries, or ' stills' were shut down, and nearly 23 million gallons of illegally produced or imported alcohol was seized. But even after all that it is said that only a fraction was discovered, although it is Impossible to know for certain.

Temperance groups had been around for many years, but their quest for a dry country wasn't prominent until the early 1900s. These groups were
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strong in rural areas of the US, but after America's entry into the First World War in 1917, this movement was strengthened. America's deep sense of patriotism previously weakened the temperance movement, as citizens were proud of who they were and all enjoyed a good drink. But when the war was over, and Germany was distinguished as the enemy, patriots were unwilling to support their economy by buying their alcohol, which greatly helped the movement as most of the US' alcohol was supplied by Germany.

With majority of the country on their side, the temperance movement grew stronger and by 1917 they had enough states on their side to propose the eighteenth amendment, which 'prohibited the manufacture, sale or transportation or intoxicating liquors' and in January of 1920 it became a law, known as the Volstead Act. The prohibition was not for everyone, and although a lot of Americans agreed with the movement, there were plenty who did not.

People began to see there was potentially a lot of money in this, and began to set up illegal bars selling illegally made alcohol. A lot of these people were immigrants, who were poorly educated but also ruthless and clever. The government enforced the prohibition by implementing 'prohibition agents' who discovered and arrested offenders. But despite the work of these agents, who were poorly paid and had a large area to cover, it became apparent that it was practically impossible to effectively enforce prohibition in the cities.

Many speakeasies thrived as bootleggers took advantage of the underpaid officers, and bribed them to keep quiet. Many people made a vast fortune through the movement, one of the most well-known being Al Capone, who

made an estimated 2 billion dollars throughout the 13 years of prohibition. Al Capone was a well-known gang leader, and was renowned for his ruthlessness. His criminal activities were not exactly 'quiet' but it was virtually impossible to convict him as he had such a strong control over the police.

In 1929 Capone and his gang dressed up as police and murdered 7 members of an opposing gang, which is now known as the 'St. Valentine's day massacre'. It was at this point where it became apparent that things had gotten out of hand, and some say it was this event which essentially led to the end of the prohibition. At about the same time, there was a massive crash in the American stock market. People were losing jobs and the economy was crumbling. By this stage the police were corrupt, the country was lawless and the gangsters were rich and powerful.

To make matter worse, by 1930 a great depression had set in and arguments were raised that if the ban on liquor was raised, it would create more jobs, the gangsters would have less power and less money, and it would open resources which were dispensed to the agents in charge of the unrealistic task of enforcing prohibition. These ideas were frowned upon by many, but the country was in need of change. In 1932, the democrat Franklin D Roosevelt was elected president, and by 1933 the eighteenth amendment was revoked.

It was said by many that the prohibition was a complete failure, as from day one it was an immense struggle to enforce the law, and people continued to drink despite it, which resulted in huge profits for the people illegally producing and selling alcohol. Many people also think that the prohibition

was a contributing factor to the greatdepression, and impacted the country in a negative way. Americanculturewas greatly changed by the movement, as police became more corrupt than the offenders they were allegedly trying to imprison, and gangsters were controlling the cities which put the country into a state of constant fear.

Crime andviolencerates rose greatly, the government lost a lot of money from alcohol taxes and the country struggled to support itself without the income which alcohol used to provide. It wasn't until the St Valentines Massacre that people realised how out of control the whole situation was, and it is referred to as a ' turning point' as it is thought that this event made the government see that the prohibition was causing more trouble than it was fixing. In conclusion, the prohibition really did not achieve what it set out to do, stop people from drinking and create a more civilised country, in fact, it did quite the opposite.