

To what extent did the prohibition era ignite the rise of al capone?



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

I've Built My Organization Out of Fear: Al Capone, Prohibition and the Rise of The Bootlegging Industry

Research Question:

To what extent did the Prohibition Era ignite the rise of Al Capone?

Table of Contents

Table of

Contents..... 1

1:

Introduction.....2

1. 1: Alcohol in America to Prohibition.....2

1. 2: Al Capone to Prohibition..... 4

1. 3: Thesis..... 5

2: Government Ineptitude and

Prohibition..... 5

2. 1: The Poisoning Scandal..... 6

2. 2: The Government, The Law, and How It Couldn't Defend

Itself..... 8

2. 3: Corrupted Politicians and Police Officers to Gangster's

Profits..... 9

2. 4: Conclusion of Government Ineptitude.....	
10	
3: Gang Tensions and Prohibition.....	10
3. 1: Consolidation of The Other Gangs.....	11
3. 2: The St. Valentine’s Day Massacre.....	12
3. 3: Conclusion of Gang Tensions.....	13
4: Did Prohibition <i>Really</i> Cause Al Capone’s Rise?	13
5: Conclusion.....	
14	
Bibliography.....	
17	

1: Introduction

It has been consistently said that the more something is unattainable, the more someone would pursue it. And one man took advantage of that in the roaring (and drying) 1920s.

1. 1: Alcohol in America to Prohibition

Alcohol had been a part of American culture for some time. During the 150 years before the shot heard ‘round the world, colonists of North America

“tended to regard heavy drinking as normal” (NCBI). The colonists brought them from Europe as a high-priority beverage that is well regarded. Many of all classes drank during work (“at 11: 00 and 4: 00 workers broke for their ‘bitters’”), at home (“ wine and sugars were consumed at breakfast”), and parties (“ gatherings as barn raisings, fairs, and the mustering of militia were all accompanied by alcohol”) (NCBI). It is also an important source of revenue, as “ taxes on alcohol were an important source” for the “ fledgling colonial governments” (NCBI). At the time, drunkenness was seen merely as a sin, but only as “ an abuse of a God-given gift” (NCBI). This was a time when many people have not cared about the alcohol in their system. However, after the American Revolution, the view on alcohol changed. Many people now saw alcohol as a poisonous and dangerous drug, and many drunkards were now viewed as victims rather than evildoers, and it destroyed families one by one. Soon, this delved into religious revivalism that dealt with anger against alcoholism.

The roots of the movement stretched back to the early nineteenth century, specifically in the 1820s and 1830s. These were religious and temperance movements that believed that drunkenness was a curse and should be banned for good. Initially, the American Temperance Society (founded in 1926), “ renounced indulgence in liquor and other vices” and promoted the end of alcohol use (NCBI). However, said society also spawned numerous temperance organizations, who in turn demanded the ban and prohibition of alcoholic beverages, as well as “ vowed never to consume ardent spirits again” (NCBI). Many religious sects and denominations (especially Methodists) pushed heavily during the temperance movement, and women

were especially supportive of these movements; one organization, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, was particularly proactive in the prohibition. During the Progressive Era (a part of US history from the 1890s and the 1920s where society wanted to be structured as progressive and accepting), there was intense scrutiny to counter the consequences of industrializing alcohols due to the alcoholic culture (as well as saloons and bars) being long associated with people of immigrant nature, and was ruinous to an accepting society. This only grew " especially after the formation of the Anti-Saloon League in 1893" (The Ohio State University). With Christian and Protestant support, The Anti-Saloon League "[linked] Prohibition to a variety of Progressive era social causes" in an effort to eliminate alcohol, and slowly grew to become the most powerful political movement group in American history (Digital History). Soon, states such as Massachusetts and Maine started Prohibition acts (although these were quickly repealed). After an initial languishment, the ASL led a renewed call for prohibition around the beginning of 1906. Soon, speeches, advertisements, and demonstrations at bars, advocates tried to get people to quit alcohol and convince people to do the same. They used tactics such as connecting alcoholism to violence. After an increased number of states started to push for prohibition acts, the Eighteenth Amendment, which stated that alcohol bans were to be " implemented on a national scale", was introduced in 1919 to rapturous applause and " at 12: 01 A. M. on January 17, 1920, the amendment went into effect and Prohibitionists rejoiced [alcohol bans] at long last" (PBS). This resulted in the Prohibition era kickstarting many things, such as abuse of alcohol, but more importantly, gangsters and bootleggers. These groups of moneymakers intended on <https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-did-the-prohibition-era-ignite-the-rise-of-al-capone/>

priming on the thirst of alcohol and one man in particular stood upon the holster of taking advantage of this epidemic.

1. 2: Al Capone to Prohibition

Born on January 17, 1899, Alphonse Gabriel "Al" Capone grew up in a destitute immigrant family; his father, Gabriele Capone, was a barber, and his mother, Teresa Capone, was a seamstress. In school, while Al Capone was an intelligent boy, he would often fall back on his studies and had to repeat the sixth grade. In his second year of sixth grade, he "quit school" after an incident with a teacher and a beating tool, moved to a better home in the outskirts of the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, and got himself involved "with a notorious street gang, becoming accepted as a member" led by Jonathan "Johnny" Torrio, who would later become Al Capone's mentor and business partner (FBI). Eventually, he did break off and intended to commit himself to honest work, especially after marrying Mae Josephine Coughlin and had a son, Albert Francis "Sonny" Capone, and started becoming a munitions factory worker and paper cutter. However, in 1920, his father passed away and Johnny Torrio invited the Capones to Chicago. There Al Capone "[became] an influential lieutenant in the Colosimo mob" and started getting involved in massive bootlegging. After a violent attack on Torrio, he resigned and gave Capone the entire operation, thus allowing Capone to become a successful leader and the most powerful bootlegger of all time.

1. 3: Thesis

Many people tend to connect Al Capone to the failures of the Prohibition and how it managed to get him and others to rise, since he circumvented the eighteenth amendment and sold many alcoholic beverages, and is now considered to be the most notorious bootlegger in American history.

However, no one seems to connect the minuscule dots of why he has risen because of the Prohibition era. That is why the question that should be answered is to what extent did the Prohibition Era ignite the rise of Al Capone?

This can be answered as: to a large extent, because of government ineptitude and gang tensions.

2: Government Ineptitude and Prohibition

One thing was for sure during the Prohibition era: the federal government was *such* a big hit with the general public. The fact that they approved the amendment was an achievement on its own, as “ public opposition to prohibition began even before the Volstead Act passed, especially among labor unions” (Levine, 2004). However, opposition definitely increased after 1926, “ when one organization, the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment (AAPA), took over the campaign for repeal” and recruited wealthy businessmen, led by Pierre DuPont, to fight for the repealing of the eighteenth amendment. The government certainly was no help to ease up the anger of the public or fight Al Capone and the bootleggers; in fact, they might have been even worse. As a result, Al Capone managed to rise among the public, and this was because of government ineptitude, which in turn was aided by the poisoning scandal that killed hundreds of thousands of people

as well as the inability to defend its own law and its own corrupt politicians and police officers.

2. 1: The Poisoning Scandal

Through one disastrous and bone-headed move, the government ineptitude helped Prohibition let Al Capone rise.

In 1926, the government was trying to figure out ways to fight back against the bootleggers and get the public to become sobered up. However, instead of finding a reasonable solution, they resorted to drastic actions. In a desperate move to “to enforce the so-called ‘Noble Experiment,’ mandated adding poisons (including methanol) to industrial alcohol so as to discourage people from drinking it” (NCBI). This was meant to scare people from alcoholic beverages. However, it resulted in much worse consequences: the poisoning killed more than ten thousand people by the time Prohibition ended in 1933. This was a major letdown by the government who was hired by the people to take care of them. Scientists were also extremely unhappy with what the government did; Charles Norris, the Chief Medical Examiner for New York City, attacked the government, claiming that the government killed more people than alcohol did, and stated that ““ the government knows it is not stopping drinking by putting poison in alcohol. It knows what the bootleggers are doing with it and yet it continues its poisoning process, heedless of the fact that people determined to drink are daily absorbing that poison. Knowing this to be true, the United States Government must be charged with the moral responsibility for the deaths that poisoned liquor causes.”” (NCBI). However, despite public outcry and increased death tolls,

this continued until the twenty-first amendment murdered the eighteenth amendment.

This helped Al Capone in numerous ways. First of all, as well as other bootleggers, came up with some strategies to evade the alcohol poisoning. One strategy was when they chemically altering industrial alcohol to make it drinkable. Essentially, they reversed the denaturing process of industrial alcohol. Essentially, they “ were stealing 60 million gallons of denatured alcohol each year” and cured it via “[re-distilling] it to remove most of the bad tasting and sometimes toxic substances” (Alcohol Problems and Solutions). This allowed them to retain business and actually create more support from the public, making Al Capone more popular. This also increased popularity for Al Capone and other bootleggers, as the government, as mentioned before, has lost a ton of respect, and it resulted in people increasing in funds for alcohol usage.

The people were betrayed by their own government through this poisoning scandal, but they also had free reign, as the government couldn't do a thing about the very law they passed.

2. 2: The Government, The Law, and How It Couldn't Defend Itself

Not only did the government betray its own people, but it didn't help itself by not defending itself, due to lack of motivation/money and its lack of ability to defend itself.

Even though the government was overwhelmingly anti-alcohol, they did not have the money or the motivation to enforce it. When the amendment was

approved, they lacked a way to enforce it. As a result, Congress passed a separate law, the National Prohibition Act. The government, lacking the funds for the execution due to other issues such as the fallout of World War I, they only “ provided funds for only 1, 500 agents at first to enforce Prohibition across the country” (Prohibition: An Interactive History). Since the number of states is 48 in the 1920s, that is roughly 30 to 31 officers per state. While they “ were issued guns and given access to vehicles, many had little or no training”, so their enforcement was weak (Prohibition: An Interactive History). The individual states at the time were not very helpful, either, letting federal officers handle the Prohibition themselves. The operating funds only amounted to less than five hundred thousand dollars. Not to mention that the officers that the Americans had were easily susceptible, as many were fired because of corruption and involvement in Anti-Prohibition and alcoholic acts.

This benefitted Al Capone’s rise. When Al Capone became head of the bootlegging company after Johnathan Torrio retired, he began to bribe and intimidate in order to take over council elections, making him hard to capture by the police. This further proves that the federal government was unable to defend itself against gangsters, as they had little enforcement already. This also resulted in many political corruptions, and further public distrust of the government. Due to the low salary of the agents, which “ ranged from only \$1, 200 to \$3, 000 per year”, there were a number of agents that accepted payouts from gangs such as Al Capone’s (Prohibition: An Interactive History).

Because of the weak enforcement of their own law, government ineptitude led the Prohibition to the rise of Al Capone. However, corrupt politicians and police officers also played a factor.

2. 3: Corrupted Politicians and Police Officers to Gangster Profits

The corrupt politicians also played a factor in Prohibition leading to the rise of Capone. Corrupt politicians have always existed, but “ Prohibition led to the growth of widespread crime” throughout (Hanson). Essentially, gangsters, particularly Al Capone, pay them so that they can continue business. For example, Al Capone himself “ had half the [Chicago’s] police on [his organization’s] payroll” (Hanson). These corrupt police officers would “ often [warn] speakeasies of impending raids or let evidence, such as liquor, disappear,” allowing gangs to go free (Hanson). Other incidents involving police officers and politicians getting caught involve “ the sheriff, deputy sheriff, and assistant chief of police” getting “ arrested for conspiracy in Ft. Lauderdale”, “ the former county prosecutor of Morris County” getting “ convicted [for] taking bribes from Prohibition violators”, and “ a number of officials in South Jacksonville, Florida” was indicted “ on charges of corruption” (Hanson). This boosted Prohibition because of how corrupt politicians got and how it allowed the alcohol rampage and law breaking to increase in power. It also boosted Al Capone because he and other gangsters are now the real bosses of Chicago, and Prohibition helped them because they came in and corrupted these police officers and allowed him to make more money and feed on America’s thirst for alcohol. Political and police corruption had allowed Prohibition to contribute to Al Capone’s rise.

2. 4: Conclusion of Government Ineptitude

Because of government ineptitude via the poisoning and killing of tens of thousands of people, lack of enforcement, and political corruption, Prohibition managed to incite Al Capone's rise. However, gang tensions were a major part in this as well.

3: Gang Tensions and Prohibition

Because of gang tensions within his community, Prohibition inadvertently led to Al Capone's rise as a ganglord.

Many gangs were in fierce competition during the Prohibition era, as many violently attacked each other in order to get more profits. For example, many smaller gangs were terrorized so that the larger gangs could "steal a certain percentage of their profits" (Umich). The gangs had virtually no option: they could "either [be] killed and [have] their businesses destroyed by means such as bombing, or [donate] some of their proceeds to the superior gangs" (Umich). Al Capone was particularly notorious for this type of behavior, as everyone had to pay him a fee, thus making him extremely rich. Not only that, but many gangs started to bring out the worst in people, such as inciting riots and corrupting political officials so that Al Capone can stay in the limelight, continue making money and keeping his properties in line. He didn't want to see himself fall anytime soon. Al Capone rose further into the stead thanks to gang tensions, aided by consolidation of many gangs and the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

3. 1: Consolidation of The Other Gangs

Gang consolidation contributed to the overall gang tensions that was happening in 1920s.

During the Prohibition era, smaller gangs were predatorized by the bigger gangs and were forced to cut out a portion for them partially out of the bigger gangs' pure greed and desire to keep the smaller gangs weak and dependent. Al Capone was "notorious for this type of coercion" and would have his "gambling house keeper, handbook owner, vice resort keeper, and beer runner" pay him a percentage of their profits, else they risk being "taken for a ride" (Umich). The gang also conducted takeovers of other rival gangs, such as "stripping the gambling business away from Mont Tennes" and consolidating it so much that he was able to sponsor political candidates to keep his property (breweries, gambling units, etc) while at the same time "order his competitors' breweries, gambling joints, and other illegal establishments to be raided and destroyed by his crooked law enforcement agents" connecting back to his gang tensions due to consolidation of power and competition against his rivals. This connects to Prohibition because of how gangs started to rise and started to compete in the world of bootlegging, while also increasing business and acting against each other. This benefitted Al Capone because of how he was suddenly able to increase his funds to \$100 million, and started to become a predator to his competitors. He was therefore benefitted and rose thanks to Prohibition.

Because of consolidation of power by Scarface, gang tensions drove Prohibition to ignite Al Capone's rise, but one infamous event also played a massive part.

3. 2: The St. Valentine's Day Massacre

The St. Valentine's Day Massacre is also a massive factor in gang tensions forcing Prohibition to put Al Capone's rise into gear.

The St. Valentine's Day Massacre was a brutal murder of seven gangsters, all members of Bugs Moran's rival business in the North Side Gang (Al Capone was in the South). Bugs Moran was another bootlegger that served as Capone's biggest rival in the business. Things began heating up after Capone took the leadership role from John Torrio, and relations weakened after associate Dean O'Banion and Hymie Weiss were "killed in retaliation" for ratting out a brewery and "[making] an attempt on Torrio's life" respectively (The Life and Crimes of Bugs Moran). Moran retaliated by killing multiple important figures on Capone's payroll and planning an attack on Capone's inner circle. Capone anticipated this, and ignited the massacre. Four thugs dressed up as police officers, then killed the seven men. While "the prime suspect was Al Capone", law enforcements were unable to prove this, as Capone was in his Florida home at the time of the massacre (The Life and Crimes of Bugs Moran).

This is beneficial to helping Prohibition helping Al Capone. The competition in bootlegging became rampant during Prohibition, and violence rapidly grew with both gang tensions and civil violence. This benefitted Capone because it was a violent way to grow his sales. Bugs Moran was also his biggest rival, so Al Capone needed a way to consolidate his business and get more money. Thanks to the St. Valentine's Day massacre, Al Capone was rising further into the stratosphere due to Prohibition.

3. 3: Conclusion of Gang Tensions

Because of gang consolidation and the St. Valentine's Day massacre, gang tensions led Prohibition to incite Al Capone's rise.

4: Did Prohibition *Really* Cause Al Capone's Rise?

There is, however, evidence to prove that Prohibition did very little to cause Al Capone's eventual rise. Organized crime was not created in the Prohibition era, but in the 1800s, with gangs fighting for "opportunity for all and equality for all", with ghettos being created in Chicago, where people were able to get a job (SkyMinds). The gangs capitalizing on the main criminal activities started appearing in the 1900s, "established in gambling and prostitution rackets" (Umich). Essentially, gangs had already been established before Prohibition started, so it wasn't a direct connection to Al Capone due to him already being part of gangs that existed prior in the early 1900s. Capone was also someone who was invited by someone in 1919, before Prohibition was revitalized, so his rise was only inevitable due to him already being gang-minded prior.

However, while he was a part of a gang that spread before him even before his crowning glory, alcohol bans and the subsequent thirst for booze had boosted him greatly. Prohibition "opened up a new illegal market for the gangster to develop and monopolize"-even Al Capone himself claimed that "somebody had to throw some liquid on that thirst", indicating that he was influenced by the era to sell alcohol. This represents that despite the popularity of gangs back in the day, as well as Al Capone's gang experience,

it was the alcohol demand and the event that caused it that truly helped Capone rise to where he is back in the 1920s.

5: Conclusion

Thanks to government ineptitude stemming from lack of ability to defend its own law and its betrayal of its people through poisoning, as well as gang tensions led by Capone consolidating his business and murdering on the day of love, Prohibition did indeed cause the rise of Al Capone to a large extent. Poisoning the alcohol not only killed a hundred thousand people, but when found out, it alienated both the civilians and scientists, thus putting more trust in gangsters; the gangsters also found ways to secure its alcohol and denature it, thus making them more formidable. They were also unable to prevent their own law being broken and can only fund up to 1. 5K police officers, allowing Capone to gain power and start to corrupt politicians and police officers, allowing him to further grow. He also managed to corrupt politicians to make sure his gangs were never caught and he could continue business. He also used gang tensions to rise, such as consolidation of his competitors so that he can increase his own business and viciously murdering his biggest rival's workers so that he would be a threat to his competitors. Despite his own experience back in his young adult days and the popularity of gangs back in the early 1900s, it was indeed Prohibition that led him to his rise.

Overall, as time went on, Al Capone and his business went downhill fast. Soon after the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, Capone was arrested for "reluctance to appear before a federal grand jury on March 12, 1929, in response to a subpoena" (FBI). Soon after, he was arrested for contempt of

<https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-did-the-prohibition-era-ignite-the-rise-of-al-capone/>

the court and later for concealing weapons, both charges which he served but release early on bail and good behavior, respectively. However, he was soon arrested again, this time for tax evasion. While never actually being convicted for illegally bootlegging alcohol, Al Capone was eventually arrested for failing to admit a federal subpoena, and the government was starting a tax evasion case against him, anyway. He “ was convicted” and “ sentenced to 11 years in prison” (The Mob Museum). However, he was eventually released when paresis, caused by syphilis, a disease he had since 1928 and had never gotten treated for, had ravaged his mental and physical health, down to the point where he had “ the cognitive processes of a 12-year-old boy” (The Mob Museum). “ Mentally incapable of returning to gangland politics”, he retired to his Florida home (FBI). He eventually died on January 25, 1947 at age 48.

As for Prohibition, by 1929, “ after nine years of Prohibition, Americans were discouraged” by the sheer intensity of how Prohibition has gone wrong (The Mob Museum). Initially, attempts to end it were unsuccessful. When Herbert Hoover, the 31st President, took office, he requested for (and succeeded in) getting Congress to pass a bill that would “ create a special commission chaired by former U. S. Attorney General George Wickersham to study” the enforcement of Prohibition and deduce whether its repeal is necessary (The Mob Museum). However, this was “ criticized as inadequate”, especially after the Great Depression started, so people started advocating more (The Mob Museum). By 1930, “ various organizations opposed to Prohibition joined together to form the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment” with the common goal of ending Prohibition (The Mob Museum). When Franklin

Delano Roosevelt, the 32nd President, came into power, the 21st Amendment was ratified and set into motion in 1933, thus ending the Prohibition era successfully.

While alcohol is an issue to people's health and safety, it also (admittedly) helps the economy, and Prohibition helped the economy fall into a depression. While the American alcoholism movement is still going on today, it's more about weaning off alcoholism than outright banning it. It also taught a government a lesson in rights; respect a citizen's rights, while also protecting the citizen and their rights, else people like Al Capone will rise and take advantage of government failure.

Bibliography

- "Alcohol in America: Taking Action to Prevent Abuse." NCBI. Accessed November 9, 2018. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK217463/>.
- "AL CAPONE: THE STORY BEHIND HIS RISE AND FALL." The Mob Museum. Accessed December 4, 2018. <https://themobmuseum.org/blog/al-capone-rise-and-fall/>.
- "Deaths During Prohibition: Government Poisoned Alcohol to Stop Drinking." Alcohol Problems and Solutions. Accessed November 12, 2018. <https://www.alcoholproblemsandsolutions.org/deaths-during-prohibition/>.
- FBI. "Al Capone." History: Famous Cases. Accessed November 12, 2018. <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/al-capone>.

- Hanson, David J. "Corruption During Prohibition of Alcohol in the U. S. in the U. S. was Rampant: The Public Demanded Alcoholic Beverages." Alcohol: Problems and Solutions. Accessed December 17, 2018. <https://www.alcoholproblemsandsolutions.org/corruption-during-prohibition-of-alcohol/>.
- Hanson, David J. "Negative Effects of Prohibition: Do You Know These 17?" Alcohol: Problems and Solutions. Accessed December 17, 2018. <https://www.alcoholproblemsandsolutions.org/effects-of-prohibition/>.
- Levine, Harry G., and Craig Reinerman. "Alcohol Prohibition and Drug Prohibition." Cedro. Last modified 2004. Accessed November 12, 2018. <http://www.cedro-uva.org/lib/levine.alcohol.html>.
- Lerner, Michael. "Prohibition: Unintended Consequences." PBS. Accessed December 11, 2018. <http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/prohibition/unintended-consequences/>.
- "Organized Crime and the Prohibition." SkyMinds. Last modified July 6, 2007. Accessed December 23, 2018. <https://www.skyminds.net/organized-crime-and-the-prohibition/>.
- "Organized Crime-How It Was Changed By Prohibition." Accessed November 27, 2018. http://umich.edu/~eng217/student_projects/nkazmers/organizedcrime2.html.
- "Poison's Legacy." NCBI. Last modified November 9, 2010. Accessed November 12, 2018. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2972336/>.
- "Prohibition." Digital History. Accessed December 23, 2018. http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=2ψd=3383.

<https://assignbuster.com/to-what-extent-did-the-prohibition-era-ignite-the-rise-of-al-capone/>

- “ Prohibition: Roots of Prohibition.” PBS. Accessed December 11, 2018. <http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/prohibition/roots-of-prohibition/>.
- Thale, Christopher P. “ St. Valentine’s Day Massacre.” Encyclopedia of Chicago. Accessed November 29, 2018. <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1191.html>.
- “ Why Prohibition?” The Ohio State University. Accessed November 12, 2018. <https://prohibition.osu.edu/why-prohibition>.