

**NOTE:** The original 1,000+ page manuscript for *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America* had to be cut by more than half before its first publication in 1998. This is an edited excerpt that was deleted from the original manuscript.

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## **The Roaring Twenties: A Noble Experiment Changes America's Drinking Patterns**

*If you think this country ain't dry, just watch 'em vote; if you think this country ain't wet, just watch 'em drink.* Will Rogers (Cited in Sinclair, 1962, p. 195)

### **The Prohibition Context**

The story of alcohol and other drug prohibition movements that reached their peak in the early 1920s cannot be told without mention of the broader transformations that were taking place in American culture. The alcohol and drug prohibition movements of the early 20th century reflect many larger stories.

The prohibition movements reflect a story of changing American demography. Seven million immigrants entered the United States between 1865 and 1900, nearly half coming from Germany and Ireland. They brought with them their labor and their tendency to drink alcohol. The former helped fuel the industrial revolution, and the latter added fuel to the drive for alcohol prohibition.

America's new immigrants clustered in urban industrial areas, where the number of saloons doubled between 1880 and 1900 (Mendelson and Mello, 1985). Nowhere was the change in the urban landscape more visible than in the areas that came to be known as "Skid Rows." The term "Skid Row" dates to 1852 in Seattle, Washington. A sawmill built in Pioneer Square near Puget Sound used skids (tracks of peeled logs) to carry the timber to the mill. This area, which later became home to vagrants and destitute alcoholics, was known as Skid Road—and later shortened to "Skid Row." A similar name was "the Bowery," a term that originally referred to a 16-block street on the lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City. The terms "Skid Row" and "Bowery" were picked up by the national press to describe the blighted city areas frequented by alcoholics. The terms were applied to city neighborhoods characterized by vagrants, alcoholics, cheap hotels and lodging houses, bars, brothels, temporary employment agencies, pawnshops, second-hand stores, soup kitchens, and missions. The Skid Row and Bowery neighborhoods—and those who lived there—seemed to be in the last stages of deterioration (Abel, 1987; Fleming, 1975; Levinson, 1974). The number of these areas in America grew dramatically between 1870 and the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Rubington reports that, in 1940, approximately 750,000 men lived in about 150 Skid Rows in America. (Rubington, 1982, p. 324) The estimated percentage of alcoholics who fit the Skid Row stereotype has varied over time. At mid-century this group was said to range from 25 to 50 per cent of all alcoholics (Henderson & Bacon, 1953, p. 249), but the estimate later dropped to the 5% commonly quoted today. The special characteristics of the

The Skid-Row alcoholic, and the broader problem of increased public intoxication, attracted more and more civic attention and civic resources during the last half of the 19th century. Concern with the chronic alcoholic was the centerpiece of growing worries about public order. Responsibility for public inebriates placed pressure on local police, who in turn generated pressure for new local community remedies to the problem of chronic alcoholism. The climate was ripe for the emergence of a new institution: the urban rescue mission.

This growing national focus on urban problems was a signal that something was fundamentally shifting in America, and the nature of that shift became evident in the 1920 census. For the first time in American history, more people lived in cities than in rural areas. America was shifting from a rural to an urban culture, and the battle over alcohol served perhaps more than any other to absorb the struggle to see who would shape America's social and moral norms. The prohibition debate, like the "Scopes Monkey Trial" in 1925<sup>2</sup>, was filled with disguised, "coded" language that allowed much larger social issues to be played out in symbols and metaphors. The prohibition movement—and the repeal movement that followed—reflect larger stories. These social movements were carried by broader reform movement currents and filtered through stormy world events. World War I set the climate for the beginning of prohibition, and the Great Depression set the climate for its end. But one should be careful not to read too much into the larger forces that fueled the drive toward alcohol prohibition. At its most central point, this drive was exactly what it represented itself to be: an attempt to solve the problems that alcohol was creating for individuals, families, and communities. The fact that the prohibition movement had its symbolic aspects shouldn't cloud the facts that, in the decade before the Eighteenth Amendment, per-capita alcohol consumption had reached its highest level in more than 50 years and alcohol-related problems were becoming increasingly visible. (Blocker, 1979). In spite of the fact that America continued her love/hate relationship with alcohol after its enactment, prohibition was one way the country could address these problems by saying, "Enough!"

### **The Final Prohibition Campaign**

Although the drive to legally prohibit the sale of alcohol ebbed and flowed between 1850

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Skid-Row alcoholic have been the subject of considerable speculation and study. Reports on the Skid-Row alcoholic note a variety of factors that lead people toward this lifestyle. These factors range from psychodynamic and developmental explanations that focus on early childhood deprivation, guilt and masochism to theories that emphasize discrimination and economic displacement. Some studies focus on how the culture of Skid Row transforms those who venture into its boundaries. (Levinson, 1974, pp. 25-33) Alcoholics on Skid Row are often as enmeshed in the lifestyle of the Row as they are addicted to alcohol. Treatment must involve a disengagement of the alcoholic from the Skid Row culture and the replacement of this culture with an alternative culture of recovery. Treatment, in this context, is as much a resocialization process as it is one of physical and psychological healing. The two definitive works describing the culture of Skid Row and its transformative powers are Samuel Wallace's *Skid Row as a Way of Life* and James Spradley's *You Owe Yourself a Drunk*.

<sup>2</sup>John T., Scopes, a public school teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, was arrested and tried for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution. The trial, which pitted Clarence Darrow against William Jennings Bryan, captured the interest and attention of the nation.

and 1900, a new combination of arguments and circumstances in the first two decades of the 20th century led to the final success of this movement. The major thrusts of these arguments were the following.

1. *Alcohol is an evil substance that contributes to personal debauchery and social disorder.* This argument had its origin in the 19th-century temperance movement's struggle between the rural Protestant farming class and the urban Catholic industrial class. Gusfield's important study, *The Symbolic Crusade*, presents prohibition as a movement by the former to control the latter.
2. *All other American social reform movements depend on alcohol prohibition.* The drive to prohibit the sale of alcohol unfolded in an era of reform never before seen in America. Alcohol prohibition arose among progressive movements to address such issues as civil rights, women's suffrage, child labor, anti-trust legislation, universal public education, conservation, social services for unwed mothers and prostitutes, and prison reform. Alcohol laws unfolded alongside parallel movements to ban other drugs and behavior whose morality was in question. "Blue laws" defined what people could and could not do on Sundays, and other proposed laws sought to enforce standards of propriety in music, dress, and dance. Alcohol reform was only one thread in a broader tapestry of American reform movements—but it was portrayed as the thread upon which the success of all others relied.
3. *America's industrial success hinges on the effective prohibition of alcohol.* The call for alcohol prohibition came in the middle of the rising American industrial revolution. Nothing was to interfere with the business of business. America was shifting from a self-employed artisan workforce (characterized by "alternating periods of frenetic production and self-declared holidays") to an organized industrial workforce that demanded consistent sobriety and productivity. To make this shift, the capitalist economy demanded that the problem of alcohol-related worker impairment be brought under control and—wherever possible—eliminated (Steinsapir, 1983). Nothing—not even alcohol—would be allowed to threaten productivity and profit. Alcohol threatened industrial efficiency and safety, and money spent on alcohol was money that couldn't be spent on other manufactured goods. America's industrialists—the Rockefellers, the Fords, the DuPonts—passionately supported prohibition and waged a campaign to change their employees' historical view of alcohol as an entitlement and a reward for hard work.
4. *Alcohol prohibition is essential as an emergency wartime measure.* Alcohol prohibition was presented as essential for victory in World War I.

While these were presented as rational arguments for alcohol prohibition, the campaign to instill these beliefs was anything but rational. Like the prohibitionist campaigns described in earlier chapters, the campaign for alcohol prohibition used quite inflammatory themes and images.

The mainstream temperance movement, reflected in the WCTU and other women's temperance organizations, attacked alcohol for its role in corrupting the morals of young women and in drawing women into white slavery. This media campaign helped create a sexual double

standard based on the idea that men were lustful and women were pure. This meant that it was the job of the latter—whose sexual desires did not exist—to restrain the former—whose sexual desires were insatiable. Alcohol and other drugs, it was argued, were the method by which otherwise pure women were emotionally seduced and deflowered. In this view, alcohol prohibition was necessary for the protection of American womanhood.

In another posted excerpt, we looked at the role of racism in the anti-opium movements of the mid-1870s and the anti-cocaine movements of the late 1800s and early 1900s. The theme of linking a drug targeted for prohibition with a politically powerless minority or a foreign enemy continued in the drive toward alcohol prohibition. Racial animosity and fear was exploited by groups like the Anti-Saloon League, particularly in the South. The demeaning and stereotypical portrayal of Blacks in this campaign was evident in the literature and the public pronouncements of the prohibition leaders. Liquor, as the story went, encouraged the Black man to "loose his libido on White women, incited...by the nudes on the labels of whiskey bottles." There were particular products, such as Mr. Levy's "Nigger Gin," that were singled out for attack in this campaign. A 1908 report in Collier's Weekly Magazine was typical of these attacks.

*In every negro dive of the South, they sell brand names of gin, whose very names, for the most part, I cannot mention here. Obscene titles, obscene labels. . . .The viciousness lies in the double meanings, clear to every man who knows the Southern negro, in the pictures of white women on the labels, in every greater obscenities. The suggestion that he do the nameless crime, to avenge which the Southern white lynches and burns, is before every negro consumer of gin. (Irwin, 1908, p.10)*

At home and abroad, prohibitionist missionaries spread the word that the poor and "colored people" of the earth were dangerous when drunk. This theme would be stated directly by many of the dry leaders as they made their case for national prohibition of alcohol. In 1914 Congressman Hobson, in defense of his resolution for an alcohol prohibition amendment, used the racial tactics that had worked so well to support the prohibition of cocaine and opium:

*Liquor will actually make a brute out of a Negro, causing him to commit unnatural crimes. The effect is the same on the white man, though the white man being further evolved it takes a longer time to reduce him to the same level. (Quoted in Sinclair, 1962, p. 29).*

The prohibition campaigners also manipulated religious prejudice. Alcohol was subtly webbed through stories of Jews "buying up the virtue of Gentile virgins" or of Roman Catholic priests "seducing Protestant girls in nunneries" (Sinclair, 1962, p. 59).

As World War I approached, another target of the alcohol prohibitionist emerged: The brewers Pabst and Busch were German. Liquor stopped soldiers from shooting straight. Grain for alcohol took food away from starving allies. Liquor was unpatriotic. By the time alcohol prohibition was implemented in 1919, alcohol was strongly associated with the German war effort, Catholicism, and the growing urban environment with its high percentage of foreign immigrants (Sinclair, 1962). The alcohol prohibition campaign was portrayed without subtlety

as a struggle for the power to shape American values. The drama, as depicted by the prohibitionists, pitted rural against urban, "native" against immigrant, Protestant against Catholic and Jew, and white skin against skin of color.

The campaign was highly effective in briefly rallying American interest in pursuing the prohibition experiment. One indicator of just how far this new idea had permeated the American culture can be seen in the attitudes toward alcohol prohibition among college students of the day. Drinking had become an important part of student and faculty life at America's earliest colleges, but during the second half of the 19th century, under the influence of the temperance and prohibition movements, most colleges discontinued the practice of providing alcohol for their students. What may be even more surprising by today's standards is the active role that American college students played in the drive toward legal prohibition of alcohol. Between 1910 and 1920, national alcohol policy was the subject of heated debate at most colleges, and most colleges had active temperance chapters. The Intercollegiate Prohibition Association (IPA) was quite active, having sponsored a multi-school anti-alcohol speech contest since 1887. By the end of 1900, IPA had more than 100 local IPA chapters. Harry Warner's review of the surveys of student attitudes toward drinking during this period reveal that overwhelming numbers of students favored both legal prohibition of alcohol and rigid enforcement of the prohibition laws. Surveys of campus administrators during prohibition also revealed that students' drinking had declined dramatically in the years before prohibition and continued to do so through the first six to seven years of prohibition (Warner, 1970).

After a century of agitation, America was ready to launch a bold new social experiment.

## **The Eighteenth Amendment**

By the time the U.S. Congress implemented national alcohol prohibition by constitutional amendment, most of the country was already dry—and had been so for some time. Most of the South, for example, was dry by 1907. The growing trend toward county and state alcohol prohibition came in the wake of increased per-capita alcohol consumption in the opening decade of the 20th century (Blocker, 1989). The potential success of constitutional prohibition of alcohol was apparent as early as 1914, when the call for a constitutional amendment was put before both houses of Congress. The House of Representatives cast 197 votes in favor and 189 votes against this proposal. Although it lacked the two-thirds majority needed for passage of an amendment, the growing strength of the prohibitionist vote was clearly evident. This power was also reflected in the number of alcohol prohibition laws being passed at the state and local levels. By the time National Prohibition was voted on and passed, 65% of the U.S. population already lived under local or state prohibition laws. Thirty-three of the 48 states had at one time passed state prohibition laws, and 28 states had statewide prohibition laws in force. The momentum toward federal action was building—a momentum orchestrated in part by the Anti-Saloon League, the political action group that linked thousands of American temperance groups.

The 65th Congress of the United States convened in March, 1917 and immediately declared war on Germany. It then took many actions to prepare the country for demands of the coming war, including the passage of a wartime measure banning the production and sale of alcohol. This action was designed to conserve the grain that would be needed for the war effort. Senator Morris Sheppard of Texas called for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would

prohibit the manufacture and sale of alcohol as a beverage. Sheppard's resolution passed both houses of Congress and required only ratification by two-thirds of the state legislatures before becoming the law of the land. The states took this action, and alcohol prohibition went into effect on January 16, 1919 (Mendelson and Mello, 1985).

The Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution prohibited the production, importation, transportation, or sale of alcohol in the United States. The exceptions to this law included hard cider for personal consumption, alcohol for religious ceremonies, and alcohol used as a medicine. The new federal law was a far stricter measure than those to which many states had already become accustomed. The enforcement machinery for the Eighteenth Amendment was created in the Volstead Act, which was passed over the veto of President Wilson in October, 1919. (Wilson's veto was based on the fact that the wartime rationale for prohibition no longer existed.)

### **Physicians and Alcohol Prohibition**

During prohibition alcohol continued to be available from a variety of sources. It was smuggled into the United States. It was brewed and distilled illegally. Industrial alcohol was "washed" and re-routed into the illegal alcohol market. And—perhaps most interesting—it was available by doctor's prescription.

Doctors played an interested role in alcohol prohibition in the United States. In 1917 the head of the American Medical Association (AMA) came out in favor of prohibition, and the AMA's House of Delegates passed the following resolution:

*Resolved, the American Medical Association opposes the use of alcohol as a beverage; and be it further resolved, that the use of alcohol as a therapeutic agent should be discouraged.* (cited in Sinclair, 1962, p. 61)

In spite of the above resolution, the AMA was successful in making sure that alcohol prescribed for medical purposes was listed as an exception under the Volstead Act. In the six months following passage of the Volstead Act, 15,000 doctors and 57,000 druggists applied for licenses to prescribe and sell alcohol (Sinclair, 1962). Doctors prescribed beer, ale, and malt liquor; they prescribed wine; and they prescribed whiskey, gin, and brandy (Jones, 1963). More than 45,000 physicians eventually registered to prescribe alcohol. In one year, these physicians issued more than 13,800,000 prescriptions for alcohol (Lewin, 1931). By 1928, doctors were making an estimated \$40 million a year writing prescriptions for whiskey. During the 14 years of prohibition, physicians wrote an average of 10 million prescriptions for alcohol per year. Regarding this practice, Fantus commented in a 1920 article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that "The popularity of proprietary medicines. . . is directly proportionate to the amount of alcohol they contain and the inoffensiveness of their other ingredients" (Fantus, 1920, p. 1143). Physicians were not the only ones who profited from this loophole in the Volstead Act. Louis Lewin attributed the increase in the number of pharmacies in the State of New York—from 1,565 in 1916 to 5,190 in 1922—to the pharmacies' new role as distributors of alcohol' (Lewin, 1931, p. 185).

The use of alcohol in medicine became a point of great controversy. Dry interests fought

to get whiskey and brandy removed from the U.S. Pharmacopoeia, and more than 20 states outlawed medicinal alcohol (Jones, 1963).

## **Prohibition and American Drinking**

In the years 1921 and 1922, Americans consumed less alcohol (3/4 gallon per person per year) than at any time in American history (Blocker, 1989). Although overall alcohol consumption declined during prohibition, the nature of American drinking practices changed profoundly during this era.

### *The Shift to Distilled Liquor*

Prohibition influenced what Americans drank. What is most significant is that it sped up the shift in preference toward distilled alcohol. This dominance of distilled liquor during the 1920s was due primarily to the greater difficulty involved in producing, transporting, and storing beer and wine (Levine, 1984). Fancy cocktails became something of an American institution during the prohibition years. The cocktail fit the sought-for elegance of the nightclub and speakeasy and served to mask the taste of badly made and watered-down booze. During prohibition the portability of distilled alcohol made the hip flask an icon of the daring and sophisticated.

### *From Saloon to Speakeasy*

Prohibition also changed the location of American drinking. By the end of the 19th century, while the saloon was under assault from the temperance advocates, a new alcohol-serving institution emerged. Just as the saloon replaced the colonial tavern, the nightclub arose from the ashes of the saloon. The Cabarets and Nightclubs of the pre-prohibition years evolved into the exclusive speakeasies of the 1920s. This new institution was stylish and catered to the upper classes.

Prohibition also brought alcohol into the home, where it was both made and consumed. Alcohol was a source of income for some women during this time. Widows, in particular, were known to support themselves and their children by operating “stills,” or homemade distilleries.

In the homes of the affluent—and those who wanted to reach that status—mixing exotic drinks became as much a male domestic task and claim to fame as barbecuing would a generation later (Grimes, 1993). Some critics of prohibition claimed that the alcohol industry wasn't eliminated, just reorganized. One critic retorted to the dry reformers: "You did not exterminate the brewery. You made millions of little breweries and installed them in the homes of the people" (Sinclair, 1962, p. 354.). While prohibition reduced overall alcohol consumption, it brought women and children into much more direct contact with alcohol than had been the case in the days of the saloon.

### *Prohibition and Women*

The drinking habits of American women changed dramatically during the first decades of

the 20th century. In his 1908 text, *Social Welfare and the Liquor Problem*, Warner noted:

*There is a decided growth in the drink habit among young and middle-aged women in society functions, at restaurants, soda fountains and refreshment parlors, making this their main business, as they are becoming nothing but woman's saloons* (Warner, 1908, p.219).

Prohibition escalated this trend and brought women into drinking rituals in a way that had not been seen since the early colonial period. New social institutions emerged that helped change women's relationship to alcohol. The saloon had been the province of men, but the nightclub, the cabaret, the speakeasy, and the jazz clubs of the 1920s were consciously designed to include women. Although most women stayed away from the saloon because of its associations with prostitution, these new social establishments admitted well-to-do women and provided an environment in which women could drink with social approval. Special clubs for women were even started, such as the Cafe des Beaux Arts in New York City, where a man could be admitted only if he were accompanied by a woman (Erenberg, 1980).

The increased acceptability of drinking by women that evolved during the prohibition and early repeal years is clear in the results of a 1936 survey of young adults in New York City. That study revealed that 83% of those surveyed drank at least occasionally and that there were no significant differences in the percentages of men and women who reported drinking. Other surveys of the period showed that the increases in alcohol use by women were greater in the use of distilled spirits (in the form of cocktails) than in the consumption of wine and beer. A *Literary Digest* survey conducted in the 1930s concluded that women no longer felt any "moral revulsion" associated with drinking (Warner, 1970). With the laws restricting the sale of alcohol to women now gone—and the stigma against women's drinking on the decline—women took to drinking in great numbers.

Class distinctions further shaped women's drinking during the prohibition years. Although the alcohol-related admission of women to public institutions declined significantly during prohibition, admission of women to private hospitals and sanitariums catering to more affluent clients increased during this period. For example, during the years 1920 and 1933, admission of women and men for alcoholism at the Bloomingdale Hospital in Plains, New York reached a ratio of one woman for every two men (Wall, 1937, p. 943).

### **Alcohol and Other Drug Use Becomes Chic**

The pre-prohibition image of the drunkard and the saloon gave way to a "Roaring Twenties" view of alcohol. According to Mendelson and Mello, this image "portrayed drinking as fashionable, defiant, trend-setting, sophisticated and convivial—a perfect complement to the new leisure-class life-style made possible by the automobile, the cinema, the radio and the phonograph" (Mendelson and Mello, 1985, p. 89). Alcohol consumption among the poor and the working class declined in the 1920s, just as drinking was becoming a symbol of "conspicuous consumption" among the affluent and of "conspicuous rebellion" among the young (Clark, 1976, p. 148). Prohibition gave alcohol and the institution of the speakeasy an image of risk and daring—a defiance of convention that was very attractive to a culture that seemed in a



particularly festive mood. Alcohol was fused into changes in clothing styles, the rising popularity of jazz, new dance forms, co-ed colleges, and the emergence of the automobile as an American institution. Living on the fringe of the law brought excitement to the lives of the celebrities and the idle rich of the 1920s. Three spots were at the center of these changes: Greenwich Village, Harlem, and Hollywood. Each exerted its own influence on the national culture.

Greenwich Village was the first Bohemian colony to touch the American consciousness. In the 1920s the term "Bohemian" evoked images of young radical thinkers and artists living unconventional lifestyles in the midst of their self-imposed poverty. Located in New York City, Greenwich Village drew an exotic assortment of intellectuals, social activists, writers, artists, and musicians, as well as the young and affluent who visited the Village in search of pleasure and adventure. The Village's literary credentials were indeed impressive, with authors like Willa Cather, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Eugene O'Neill, Edgar Allen Poe, and Edna St. Vincent Millay living and writing there.

The young men and women of Greenwich Village enjoyed laughing in the face of conventional standards almost as much as the newspapers and magazines enjoyed publishing their antics. The coverage of Greenwich Village during the 1920s portrayed hedonistic lifestyles that tended to normalize drinking and other drug use—this during the most intense period of drug criminalization in the country's history. The Village was a gathering place for those who sought escape from social convention—and for those who felt like outcasts. Gay men and lesbian women found the Village a haven, and the Village was one of the few places where the races easily mixed without incident. The exotic atmosphere of the Village drew many people to its apartments and lofts and made it a gathering place for the social elite. Young college men, and their dates in full flapper style, flocked to speakeasies like Julius' or to jazz joints like Nick's (Churchill, 1959).

The young women portrayed in the Greenwich Village stories were part of a larger picture unfolding in America. This was a wave of protest against the social and legal restrictions within which women lived their lives. Images of "Flapper Girls" smoking and drinking were but one dimension of this broader protest and challenge of gender-based social conventions. Saloons, which had been the territory of men before prohibition, gave way to the speakeasies, nightclubs, and cabarets that men and women shared. The cigarette and the drink became standard props for young women in the social scene of the 1920s. They became accepted feminine symbols of a new era of liberation—a trend manipulated in part by tobacco companies whose psychoanalyst consultants suggested that cigarettes be portrayed to women as "torches of freedom" (Heiman, 1960, p.250). As drinking became chic and the nightclub, cabaret, and speakeasy emerged as the new social institutions of the 1920s, women who would have never entered a saloon walked through the doors of these new institutions again and again.

This new trend also changed the African-American community. In cities like New York, downtown rich folks traveled uptown to Harlem to visit speakeasies and nightclubs like the Cotton Club and the Savoy Ballroom. Whites were drawn by what they perceived to be the sensuality of Harlem. Erenberg's study of the transformation of New York City Night Life in the 1920s noted that white visitors came to Harlem looking for "hotter music, hotter dancing, life lived at its quickest" (Errenberg, 1981, p. 257).

Prohibition changed many African-American communities. In many cities Blacks

became the center of urban nightlife because the Whites who controlled vice tended to concentrate their speakeasies, prostitution, and gambling in predominately black areas. This period also saw a decrease in the influence of the church and an increase in alcohol consumption in the African-American community. Economic opportunities arose for entertainers, musicians, dancers, and people in all the other roles that supported these institutions. Areas like Harlem were wide open during prohibition. Drinking patterns in Black communities were fundamentally altered as these communities were drenched with bootleg alcohol. While the nightclub culture was raging in northern cities, poor Blacks in the South were playing an increasing role in the South's underground bootlegging complex. Blacks helped distribute bootleg alcohol for White bootlegging operators and sold the alcohol to other Blacks.

In his classic study of prohibition, Andrew Sinclair noted: "Prohibition, instead of keeping Negroes from vice, put them in control of it" (Sinclair, 1962, p. 290). As the nightclub culture touched many areas of the Black community, an increasing number of people found their livelihoods drawing them into environments that centered around drinking. Given this continual exposure, it is little wonder that drinking by Blacks increased. Other factors during this period also helped alter the role of alcohol in the lives of Blacks in America. The depression was particularly hard on Blacks, and the few available methods of survival included involvement with bootleg operations. During the depression, normally law-abiding citizens hosted "house-rent parties," in which they charged admission and sold drinks in order to pay for rent and food (Larkin, p. 127-128). This infusion of alcohol into the Black community set the stage for a dramatic rise in alcohol-related problems. Denies Herd describes this transition:

*The strong emphasis on temperance among 19th century blacks (forged by the close association of temperance with the anti-slavery movement) gave way to new cultural images of alcohol as an elixir of freedom and pleasure. . . .The generational shifts in cultural attitudes and drinking patterns were mirrored in the massive increases in cirrhosis mortality for blacks born after the turn of the century. (Herd, 1987, p. 220)*

Hollywood must be added to Greenwich Village and Harlem as a detonation point for changing perceptions of alcohol. What Hollywood contributed was a new medium—talking movies—that boldly normalized drinking in marked contrast to alcohol's illegal status. Drinking and smoking were transmitted in continuing fashion through the rise of American stars. From Fields, Cagney, Gable, Powers, and Bogart to Garbo, Harlow, and West, new lifestyles that included cigarettes and alcohol were being held up for the world to imitate (Clark, 1976). Men's and women's enjoyment of glamorous night life during the prohibition years was portrayed in such films as *Night Life in New York* (1925) and *Queen of the Night Club* (1929) (Brownlow, 1990). Johnson describes the effect of this normalized drinking in the enormously popular new medium of motion pictures with sound.

*Those who began drinking during this era were, to some extent, emulating their favorite motion picture celebrities. Those who chose not to drink were reminded each time they went to the movies that they were out of step with the times (Johnson, 1959, p. 176).*

By the end of alcohol prohibition, social drinking was increasing among the middle class

and moving from the cities into the American countryside. So was the increasing trend toward smoking among women. The latter emerged under the influence of tobacco industry marketing campaigns. These campaigns included tactics such as paying attractive models to smoke in public and ad campaigns that promoted cigarettes as a weight control device through such slogans as, “For a Slender Figure—Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet” (Sobel, 1978, p. 101).

## **Prohibition Repealed**

Prohibition advocates claimed that prohibition failed because of flaws in the construction and enforcement of the law. Foremost among these charges were that the Act:

- excluded certain types of alcohol, such as hard cider;
- placed criminal penalties on the seller, but not on those who possessed or consumed alcohol;
- placed enforcement responsibilities on the Treasury Department, rather than on the Justice Department;
- provided an inadequate number of people and adequate salaries to provide for a fully functioning professional enforcement operation; and
- allowed legal production and distribution of alcohol for scientific, medical, and religious purposes—alcohol that was routinely diverted into bootleg operations (In 1924 nearly three million gallons of "sacramental wine" was withdrawn from government warehouses, allegedly for religious purposes.) (Sinclair, 1962, p. 290).

Public efforts to undermine enforcement began even before the last state approved the Eighteenth Amendment. After national prohibition became the law of the land, juries in some areas refused to convict those who violated prohibition laws. Lender and Martin (1982) report that, of 7,000 people arrested for violation of prohibition in New York between 1921 and 1923, only 27 were convicted. This lack of support for enforcement suggests that a correction of the above-noted flaws in the law might have brought repeal efforts more quickly, rather than led to the sustained triumph of alcohol prohibition.

Proponents of national Prohibition continued to agitate for stricter enforcement of these laws and for tougher penalties. Some advocates suggested stricter measures that included deporting all aliens, poisoning bootleg liquor to kill the alcoholics, and sterilizing or tattooing drinkers. As if these measures were not extreme enough, one proposal suggested the execution of drinkers and their offspring to the fourth generation; another suggested that any liquor-law violator be hung by the tongue under an airplane and flown across the United States (Sinclair, 1962). As people became disillusioned with prohibition, it might have provoked a tightening of the Volstead Act and its enforcement, or it might have provoked stronger sentiment for repeal of prohibition. The suggestion of extreme measures such as those described above may have helped tip the scales toward repeal.

Many factors contributed to the loss of public support for the continued prohibition of alcohol in America. By the mid-1920s, the fight for prohibition—which had been as much a fight against the corrupting influence of the saloon as it was against alcohol—seemed to have been won. The saloon as the center of crime, vice, and political corruption was gone, and its

replacements—the nightclubs and speakeasies—seemed remarkably invisible and harmless by comparison. There was also growing resentment over the class differences in the application of the prohibition laws. The public was coming to realize what Sinclair would later note of the 1920s: “. . .the rich drank openly and well under prohibition, while the poor were forced to drink badly” (Sinclair, 1962, p. 346)

Drinking “badly” could include dying. There were casualties among alcohol consumers during prohibition, mostly among the poor. Those drinkers who could not afford imported alcohol became vulnerable to contaminated and outright poisonous concoctions. In 1927 12,000 deaths were blamed on “bad booze”—wood alcohol meant for industrial use but rerouted into the illegal alcohol traffic. In addition to deaths, this highly toxic form of alcohol could also produce serious neurological injuries, including blindness and partial paralysis of the hands and feet. This last condition became popularly known as “jake foot.”

There was also growing concern that prohibition itself was giving birth to new and more dangerous forms of crime and violence. Many incidents drove this point into the national consciousness, but perhaps none more graphically than what came to be known as the Valentine’s Day Massacre. On February 14, 1929, five of Al Capone’s men, dressed as Chicago Police officers, raided the turf of a rival bootleg gang and executed gang members. Pictures of the bodies of the slain men riveted the attention of the nation and speeded public calls for an evaluation of the harm that prohibition might do. The fact that criminals appeared to be getting rich—Capone’s annual income was being reported at more than \$100 million per year—while working class people were being crushed by the depression forced many people to rethink their earlier support of prohibition (Brownlow, 1990).

As America entered a Depression of unimaginable dimensions, economic concerns began to dominate discussions of the repeal of prohibition. First, the maintenance of prohibition was getting expensive. Six new federal prisons had been built to house the growing number of people jailed for liquor offenses (Sinclair, 1962). Second, as the depression deepened, support for prohibition was gradually replaced with the possibility that a legitimate alcohol beverage industry might bring employment and needed tax revenues. The industrialists themselves, who had been such a driving force for prohibition, withdrew much of their support out of fear that open violations of the prohibition laws would lead to a general disregard for law and public order. In an era of anarchists, Bolsheviks, contentious labor strikes, urban riots, and widespread economic hardship, it is not impossible to imagine that legal alcohol might have been embraced as a way of “sedating” growing social discontent. While wealthy industrialists were particularly preoccupied with the potential threat of public disorder that could evolve out of escalating disrespect for law, they also hoped that renewed alcohol tax revenues would offset personal and corporate taxes (Levine, 1984; Levine, 1985). There was, in the end, a growing public perception that the problems prohibition was creating outweighed the problems that it was meant to eliminate.

The final blow to the Noble Experiment might have been that people simply stopped taking it seriously. More and more aspects of prohibition had become a sort of cultural joke that threatened to create a broader disrespect for law and social order. This change was reflected in the changing perception of a single figure: Carrie Nation. When Carrie Nation attacked the Carey Hotel Bar in Wichita, Kansas in December, 1900—then repeated the act at other such establishments that were supposedly illegal under Kansas law—the image of her somber face

and hatchet-wielding hand became a symbol for the fight of good against evil. Twenty-five years later, the same image was used more in mockery than in respect as she was at once immortalized and ridiculed in cartoon after cartoon, and in films such as *The Kansas Saloon Smashers* and *Why Mrs. Nation Wants a Divorce* (Brownlow, 1990).

By 1928, general support for prohibition and its strict enforcement had dramatically deteriorated. After 1928, student attitudes shifted against prohibition, and student drinking began to increase (Warner, 1970). A Literary Digest Poll of 1930 noted that 30% of the public wanted prohibition to continue, 30% wanted it to be modified, and 40% wanted total repeal of prohibition. Major defections from the “dry” camp, such as John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and William Randolph Hearst, tipped the public opinion scales toward the final collapse of prohibition and the inevitability of repeal. (Clark, 1976, p. 196)

Several organizations fought for the repeal of Prohibition, including the Crusaders, The Moderation League, and the Constitutional Liberty League. But none was more effective than the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment, an organization that had been actively pursuing repeal since 1918. Many constituencies came together in support of repeal—alcohol industry representatives, financially strapped state governments, business people, philanthropic causes seeking alcohol industry financial support—but none is more interesting than the story of women’s role in the repeal efforts (Aaron and Musto 1981).

The popular notion of the role of women in prohibition history calls up images of women standing at pledge booths, or of Carrie Nation unleashing her famed hatchet against the Kansas saloons. However, women played important roles on both sides of the prohibition debate. In 1929, Mrs. Charles Sabin resigned as a National Republican Committeewoman and announced that she was going to organize support among women for the repeal of national prohibition—an act that challenged the 1928 Republican Party plank calling for prohibition enforcement. Under her leadership, the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform (WONPR) was founded in Chicago on May 28, 1930. In 1931, membership in WONPR surpassed that of the WCTU, and by 1933 it had reached 1,326,862 for the organization’s third national conference, held in Washington D.C. (Blocker, 1989). Through its speaker’s bureaus, publicity campaigns, and active lobbying, WONPR played an important role in the movement to repeal national prohibition of alcohol. One of the founding principles of WONPR effectively summarized what would come to be one of the folk justifications for the repeal of prohibition.

*...its [the Eighteenth Amendment and Volstead Act’s] attempt to impose total abstinence by national government fiat ignores the truth that no law will be respected or can be enforced unless supported by the moral sense and the common conscience of the communities affected by it. (Root, 1934, p. 161)*

A key stage in the history of prohibition repeal began with President Herbert Hoover’s appointment of the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement to investigate crime in America. The Commission’s findings, known as the Wickersham Report, documented what much of the country knew already: The United States had enacted a prohibition law that was not and could not be effectively enforced, and which was in itself contributing to crime in America. The report noted many examples of the incompetence and corruption that had undermined prohibition enforcement. Although the report stopped short of recommending

repeal, its detailed criticisms constituted a mortal wound for prohibition.

The status of prohibition was a significant issue in the 1932 Presidential Election. Hoover promised to address the shortcomings of the “noble experiment,” while Franklin D. Roosevelt promised from the moment he was nominated that “the Eighteenth Amendment is Doomed!” Almost immediately after he was elected, Roosevelt asked Congress to raise the legally allowable alcohol content in beer from 0.5% to 3.2%. Beer (the 3.2% variety) became legal again on April 7, 1933. In February 1933, the Senate and the House of Representatives passed a resolution calling for passage of the Twenty-first Amendment (the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment); and on December 5, 1933, the Utah legislature became the 36th state to ratify this Amendment, casting the deciding vote for the nation. America’s 14-year experiment with national prohibition was over. In spite of many proposals for moderating prohibition, the forces of full repeal had won.<sup>3</sup>

The alcohol beverage industry wasted no time. Families that grew rich running booze during prohibition rapidly retooled for the now-legitimate alcohol distribution and sales. By 1935, some 225,000 retail outlets were doing a brisk business (Burnham, 1993). But all was not as bright for the liquor industry as one would think. As we shall shortly document, Americans were not drinking as much after repeal as they were in the years before prohibition. The industry also found itself facing stronger competition in the 1930s. The American soft drink industry had grown in sales from \$135 million in 1919 to \$175 million in 1931—and would reach \$1.5 billion by the 1950s (Baron, 1962).

The perception that prohibition had failed and the growing revenues generated by liquor sales (from \$259 million to \$2.3 billion in federal tax revenue in the 12 years following repeal) served as powerful antidotes to any new efforts at alcohol control (Courtwright, 1992). The passage of the Twenty-first Amendment limited the federal government’s role to the taxation of alcohol and placed the responsibility for regulating alcohol back on the individual states. Rockefeller, who had been instrumental in both the passage and repeal of prohibition, also shaped the post-repeal era by subsidizing a study by Raymond Fosdick on how alcohol might be best controlled after repeal. Fosdick’s findings and recommendations, published in 1933 as *Toward Liquor Control*, was highly influential.

What emerged after prohibition were local option laws that allowed states and counties to declare themselves wet or dry and, if they were wet, to determine how alcohol was to be regulated. Most states responded with variations on one of two systems. The first was a licensing system through which private businesses distributed and sold alcohol under guidelines set by the state. In the alternative—the monopoly system—the state was the only legitimate seller of alcohol. Mark Keller described the significant differences in state regulations governing alcohol after prohibition.

*Some laws required that drinks could be served only with food; but elsewhere the provision of food in liquor-dispensing places was forbidden. Some laws required that the windows of drinking places be curtained from public view; others, that they be*

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<sup>3</sup>Passage of the Twenty-First Amendment did not provide legal access to alcohol for all adult men and women in the United States. Federal prohibition of alcohol sales to Native Americans continued until 1953. (Weibel-Orlando, 1989, p. 124).

*uncurtained. Some laws forbade the presence of unescorted women in drinking places; others only forbade women to drink standing at the bar....* (Keller, 1976, p. 20).

Keller found only two areas of common ground for post-prohibition alcohol control: restricting access to alcohol to adults and taxing alcohol to generate government revenue. Harry Levine, in his study of post-repeal alcohol controls, suggests that the most significant change during this period was the shift to a large number of sites where alcohol could be sold and consumed. Off-site consumption of alcohol, particularly in the home, continued to increase in the post-repeal period (Levine, 1985).

After the repeal of prohibition, the continuing role of the federal government in alcohol control was defined by the legislature in the Federal Alcohol Administration Act of 1935. This law placed federal responsibility for alcohol control within what later became the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms of the Department of Treasury. The new bureau licensed importers, manufacturers, and wholesalers of alcohol; enforced laws governing the manufacture and sale of illegal alcohol; and regulated the labeling and advertising of alcoholic products (Mendelson and Mello, 1985).

### **Prohibition: A Re-evaluation**

The popular conception of alcohol prohibition in America between 1919 and 1933 is that this experiment in social engineering was a complete failure. This cultural perception has been challenged by modern historians, whose more detailed examination of the prohibition years suggests a more complex story. None of the experts would disagree that alcohol prohibition created a flourishing criminal subculture, set up new patterns of criminal violence, provided a breeding ground for public corruption, and contributed to a number of accidental deaths from contaminated alcohol. All of these points are as true for alcohol prohibition then as they are for other drug prohibitions today. We have also noted that during prohibition there were changes in patterns of the people who consumed alcohol, the places it was consumed, and the circumstances surrounding consumption. But in a more objective evaluation of prohibition, two questions dominate: 1) Was per-capita alcohol consumption reduced during prohibition? and 2) Did alcohol-related problems decline during prohibition?

John Burnham (1968) has provided a provocative re-analysis of prohibition's effectiveness, and Ernest Kurtz has called the positive effects of prohibition the "best kept secret in American history." Let's explore why these historians are challenging the traditional wisdom about what prohibition was able to achieve.

First, did Americans as a whole reduce their alcohol intake during prohibition? The answer is a definite yes. Citizens upheld the prohibition of alcohol to a much greater extent than people currently believe. Alcohol use dropped during the 1920s, particularly during the early years of prohibition. Gusfield's (1963) analysis of drinking data during prohibition suggested that alcohol consumption dropped between 30 and 50%, and that it remained at a low level even after the repeal of prohibition. Lender and Martin's (1982) analysis of annual per-capita alcohol consumption reveals a drop from 2.60 gallons in 1910 to 0.97 gallons in 1934, and that drinking levels had still not reached pre-prohibition levels (1.56 gallons per person) by 1940. Although the people, places, and circumstances of alcohol consumption occurred did change during

prohibition, it appears that the overall volume of alcohol consumed significantly declined during this period. After repeal, per-capita alcohol consumption rose, but at a very slow rate--from one gallon in 1934 to 1.5 gallons in 1941 (Lender & Martin, 1982). This rise continued until after the second World War, declined slightly in the 1950s, then rose again beginning in the early 1960s (Buchanon, 1992). This suggests that the decline in overall alcohol consumption not only continued during prohibition, but also produced a reduction in use that lasted for an extended number of years after repeal.

The second question is whether or not alcohol-related problems declined during prohibition. There is substantial evidence of decreases in liver cirrhosis deaths, alcohol-related admissions to psychiatric facilities, alcohol-related admission to specialty alcoholism treatment facilities, and alcohol-related arrests during the prohibition years—particularly the early years. John Burnham's (1968) investigations also underscore the important contribution prohibition made to the elimination of the saloon as a vice-breeding social institution. Even in populations whose use was believed to be rising, the actual number of problems related to alcohol seemed to decline. For example, in spite of wide public perception of increased drinking by women during prohibition, Norman Jolliffe reported that the actual number of admissions of alcoholic women to Bellevue Hospital fell by almost 50% during prohibition (cited in Roizen, 1991).

Although these gains were sustained through most of the 1920s, most of the alcohol-related problem indicators began to rise again by 1928-1930—the period in which overall support for and enforcement of prohibition seems to have dropped sharply. In its early years prohibition reduced both alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems. These reductions were sustained for years after America's brief experiment with prohibition officially came to an end. In the end, alcohol prohibition fell, not because of a changing public view of alcohol, but because America decided it could no longer afford the problems created by prohibition. Prohibition failed, not because it failed to reduce alcoholism and alcohol-related problems, but because the lack of cultural consensus and compliance raised fears that this disregard of national law would weaken the stability of the state. Repeal did not return alcohol to its "Good Creature of God" status. (It would take a new conception of alcohol problems and years of subsequent alcohol industry advertising to do that.) Repeal did declare that the economic and social costs of prohibition—the crime, violence, corruption, deaths, and debilitation produced by "bad" alcohol, and the increased economic burden from lost alcohol tax revenues—outweighed the perceived harmfulness of the drug.

### **Alcohol Prohibition and Alcoholism**

It seems that there were fewer new cases of alcoholism, and that the overall prevalence of alcoholism declined during alcohol prohibition. Perhaps even some of those with serious drinking problems may actually have drunk less during the prohibition years. But there is no doubt that, for others, prohibition did nothing to check the progression of their alcoholism. A unique fellowship of recovering alcoholics was formed just four years after the repeal of prohibition. Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) was born on the heels of the both repeal of prohibition and the Great Depression. All of the early members of A.A. had developed or sustained their alcoholism during the years of America's Noble Experiment with the legal prohibition of alcohol.



## **Alcohol Prohibition, the Popularization of Other Drugs, and Other Prohibition Movements**

Drug prohibition movements brought increased municipal, state, and federal control of opium, morphine, heroin, and cocaine, as well as brief experiments with anti-tobacco laws. These movements overlapped considerably with the movement to prohibit the sale of alcohol. We see figures such as Colonel Hobson and organizations such as the WCTU playing prominent roles across these movements. It was during the first three decades of the 20th century that these movements had their highest degree of interaction and shared goals and methods. As federal drug control came into effect in 1914 and the Eighteenth Amendment was passed in 1919, reformists turned their attention to tobacco.

Anti-tobacco agitation increased during the first two decades of the 20th century. Although it was not able to achieve tobacco prohibition, the anti-tobacco lobby was able to influence the passage of local, state, and federal legislation designed to bring tobacco under some degree of control. In the late 1890s, reformers such as the WCTU-trained Lucy Page Gaston launched highly visible anti-tobacco campaigns. Gaston organized the Chicago Anti-Cigarette League in 1899 and the National Anti-Cigarette League in 1903. Sustained anti-tobacco agitation may actually have influenced a decline in cigarette smoking in the late 1890s. Anti-tobacco forces even launched a bid for the Presidency. In 1920 Lucy Gaston sought the Republican nomination for President, on a campaign platform that included the complete prohibition of tobacco (Wagner, 1971; Sobel, 1978). A generation of young women in the 1920s and 1930s were raised with the slogan, “We don’t smoke, and we don’t chew, and we don’t go with boys who do!”

The anti-tobacco forces generated a body of anti-drug literature with familiar themes. The first of these themes was the proposition that tobacco leads to alcoholism and drug addiction. Hygiene texts of the day, such as the 1889 text authored by Dr. Joel Steele, proclaimed that “Tobacco causes thirst and depression that only too often and naturally lead to the use of liquor” (Steele, 1889, p. 218). Charles Towns, the noted addiction expert, drew an even more elaborate connection in a popular magazine article:

*The relation of tobacco, especially in the form of cigarettes, and alcohol and opium is a close one....Morphine is the legitimate consequence of alcohol, and alcohol is the legitimate consequence of tobacco. Cigarettes, drink, opium is the logical and regular series (Towns, 1912).*

Another theme in the anti-tobacco campaign was the charge that tobacco causes crime and insanity. Anti-tobacco texts of the 1920s quoted a New York City Magistrate who claimed that 99% of the boys who appeared before him for criminal acts had “fingers disfigured by yellow cigarette stains” (Kellogg, 1922, p. 132). Popular magazines claimed that more than half of “the insane” were born to smokers and that the process of insanity was accelerated when the children themselves became smokers (Ray, 1972, p. 100). Smoking was also linked with suicide. The publisher of a popular 1916 anti-tobacco text entitled *The Brown God and His White Imps* reported that two of his employees who smoked cigarettes committed suicide when they became despondent over their addiction to tobacco—a fate that he claimed befell many smokers (Frech and Higley, 1916, pp. 60-61).

The health themes in the early anti-tobacco campaigns are surprising by today’s standards because they did not focus on cancer, respiratory disease, or heart disease. They focused instead on: 1) female infertility that supposedly occurred when the “foolish consumption of cigarettes has impregnated the sexual organs with smoke and nicotine,” keeping them inflamed and unable to perform their natural function (conception); and 2) the early deaths of children (Ashley, 1975, p. 14-15). As late as 1930, some physicians were claiming that “60% of all babies born to mothers who are habitual smokers die before they are two years old” (Quoted in Sinclair, 1962, p. 180). Between 1895 and 1925, state and local legislation was passed that made it illegal for women and people under age 16 to smoke in public, that prohibited the use of coupons as a cigarette sales gimmick, and that—in some states—prohibited the sale of cigarettes in any form. These efforts were supported by early 20th-century animal studies that linked tobacco to cancer (Wagner, 1971). By 1927, however, most anti-tobacco measures had been repealed and the anti-tobacco movement was on its deathbed.

The fledgling anti-tobacco sentiment had been overwhelmed and defeated by five things: 1) the rise of a new tobacco product (the cigarette), 2) new cigarette manufacturing technology (the Bonsack machine), 3) a tobacco trade war that thrust tobacco companies into aggressive advertising campaigns, 4) the organization of a strong tobacco lobby (the Allied Tobacco League), and 5) the widespread popularity of the cigarette during and following World War I (cigarette production rose from 36 billion to 54 billion cigarettes during the first two years of the war). These factors collectively paved the way for the wide dissemination of a cheap, socially acceptable tobacco product.

For a brief period in the 1920s, it appeared that America was going to force a consistent policy of prohibition of the major intoxicants, but this changed with the repeal of alcohol prohibition and the declining influence of anti-tobacco forces. The years after the end of alcohol

prohibition saw the beginning of popular distinctions between good drugs and evil drugs. The drugs that were within the experience of the majority of Americans were considered good; the drugs that tended to be used primarily by minority and fringe groups were defined as evil. Alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine became more and more thoroughly integrated into the very fabric of American life. Cocaine, opium, and heroin (and later, marijuana and the hallucinogens) continued to be defined as evil—physically, emotionally, and morally devastating to the individual, and unquestionably destructive to the culture. This definition of certain chemicals as innately good or evil continued to grow between 1933 and the 1960s, when a generation of adult Americans struggled to explain to their own children the culturally inherited distinction between good drugs (alcohol) and evil drugs (marijuana).

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