Bronx Engineering and Technology Academy (βETA)
99 Terrace View Avenue, Bronx, New York 10463
Phone: (718)563-6678
Karalyne Sperling, Principal

Mr. Ott - U.S. History

Name: _____ **Date:** _____ **Due:** _____

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Prohibition

Period: 1920s

At midnight, January 16, 1920, the United States went dry; breweries, distilleries, and saloons were forced to close their doors.

Led by the Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the dry forces had triumphed by linking Prohibition to a variety of Progressive era social causes. Proponents of Prohibition included many women reformers who were concerned about alcohol's link to wife beating and child abuse and industrialists, such as Henry Ford, who were concerned about the impact of drinking on labor productivity. Advocates of Prohibition argued that outlawing drinking would eliminate corruption, end machine politics, and help Americanize immigrants.

Even before the 18th Amendment was ratified, about 65 percent of the country had already banned alcohol. In 1916, seven states adopted anti-liquor laws, bringing the number of states to 19 that prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. America's entry into World War I made Prohibition seem patriotic since many breweries were owned by German Americans. Wayne Wheeler, lobbyist for the Anti-Saloon League, urged the federal government to investigate "a number of breweries around the country which are owned in part by alien enemies." In December 1917, Congress passed the 18th Amendment. A month later, President Woodrow Wilson instituted partial prohibition to conserve grain for the war effort. Beer was limited to 2.75 percent alcohol content and production was held to 70 percent of the previous year's production. In September, the president issued a ban on the wartime production of beer.

National Prohibition was defended as a war measure. The amendment's proponents argued that grain should be made into bread for fighting men and not for making liquor. Anti-German sentiment aided Prohibition's approval. The Anti-Saloon League called Milwaukee's brewers "the worst of all our German enemies," and dubbed their beer "Kaiser brew."

Unsuccessfully, the brewing industry argued that taxes on liquor were paying more for the war effort than were liberty bonds. Yet even after Prohibition was enacted, many ethnic Americans viewed beer or wine drinking as an integral part of their culture, not as a vice.

The wording of the 18th Amendment banned the manufacture and sale (but not the possession, consumption, or transportation) of "intoxicating liquors." Many brewers hoped that the ban would not apply to beer and wine. But Congress was controlled by the drys, who advocated a complete ban on alcohol. A year after the ratification, Congress enacted the Volstead Act, which defined intoxicating beverages as anything with more than 0.5 percent alcohol. This meant that beer and wine, as well as whiskey and gin, were barred from being legally sold.

Advocates did not believe it would be necessary to establish a large administrative apparatus to enforce the law. The federal government never had more than 2,500 agents enforcing the law. A few states did try to help out. Indiana banned the sale of cocktail shakers and hip flasks; Vermont required drunks to identify the source of their alcohol. The original Congressional appropriation for enforcement was $5 million; several years later, the government estimated enforcement would cost $300 million.

Enforcing the law proved almost impossible. Smuggling and bootlegging were widespread. Two New York agents, Izzie Einstein and Mo Smith, relied on disguises while staging their raids--once posing as man and wife. Their efforts were halted, however, after a raid on New York City's 21 trapped some of the city's leading citizens. In New York, 7,000 arrests for liquor law violations resulted in 17 convictions.

Enforcement of Prohibition was originally assigned to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS); hence, the enforcement agents who destroyed moonshine stills were called “revenuers.” In 1930, enforcement transferred to the Justice Department. After Prohibition, tax collection on liquor was returned to the IRS, which was also charged with the registration of machine guns and sawed-off shotguns and the enforcement of taxes on tobacco. These responsibilities were transferred in 1972 to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms.

Prohibition failed because it was unenforceable. By 1925, half a dozen states, including New York, passed laws banning local police from investigating violations. Prohibition had little support in the cities of the Northeast and Midwest.

Prohibition did briefly pay some public health dividends. The death rate from alcoholism was cut by 80 percent by 1921 from pre-war levels, while alcohol-related crime dropped markedly. Nevertheless, seven years after Prohibition went into effect, the total deaths from adulterated liquor reached approximately 50,000, and there were many more cases of blindness and paralysis. According to one story, a potential buyer who sent a liquor sample to a laboratory for analysis was shocked when a chemist replied: "Your horse has diabetes."

Prohibition quickly produced bootleggers, speakeasies, moonshine, bathtub gin, and rum runners smuggling supplies of alcohol across state lines. In 1927, there were an estimated 30,000 illegal speakeasies--twice the number of legal bars before Prohibition. Many people made beer and wine at home. It was relatively easy finding a doctor to sign a prescription for medicinal whiskey sold at drugstores.

In 1919, a year before Prohibition went into effect, Cleveland had 1,200 legal bars. By 1923, the city had an estimated 3,000 illegal speakeasies, along with 10,000 stills. An estimated 30,000 city residents sold liquor during Prohibition, and another 100,000

made home brew or bathtub gin for themselves and friends.

Prohibition also fostered corruption and contempt for law and law enforcement among large segments of the population. Harry Daughtery, attorney general under Warren Harding, accepted bribes from bootleggers. George Remus, a Cincinnati bootlegger, had a thousand salesmen on his payroll, many of them police officers. He estimated that half his receipts went as bribes. Al Capone's Chicago organization reportedly took in $60 million in 1927 and had half the city's police on its payroll.

Popular culture glamorized bootleggers like Chicago's Capone. These symbols served as the model for the central characters in such films as *Little Caesar* and *Scarface*. In rural areas, moonshiners became folk heroes. The fashion of the flapper, dancing the Charleston in a short skirt, was incomplete without a hip flask.

Prohibition created a huge consumer market unmet by legitimate means. Organized crime filled that vacuum left by the closure of the legal alcohol industry. Homicides increased in many cities, partly as a result of gang wars, but also because of an increase in drunkenness.

Prohibition devastated the nation's brewing industry. St. Louis had 22 breweries before Prohibition. Only nine reopened after Prohibition ended in 1933. Anheiser-Busch made it through Prohibition by making ice cream, near beer, corn syrup, ginger ale, root beer, yeast, malt extract, refrigerated cabinets, and automobile and truck bodies.

The jobs and tax revenue that a legal liquor industry would generate looked attractive as the country entered the Great Depression. During his presidential campaign in 1932, New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt, who never hid his fondness for martinis, called for Prohibition's repeal.

The noble experiment ended at 3:32 p.m., December 5, 1933, when Utah became the 36th state to ratify the 21st Amendment, repealing Prohibition. By then, even some proponents admitted that the 18th Amendment resulted in "evil consequences." The Rev. Sam Small, an evangelist and temperance advocate, said that Prohibition had created "an orgy of lawlessness and official corruption." John D. Rockefeller, a teetotaler, observed in 1932, "drinking has generally increased, the speakeasy has replaced the saloon; a vast army of lawbreakers has been recruited and financed on a colossal scale."

Even today, debate about the impact of Prohibition rages. Critics argue that the amendment failed to eliminate drinking, made drinking more popular among the young, spawned organized crime and disrespect for the law, encouraged solitary drinking, and led beer drinkers to hard liquor and cocktails. One wit joked that "Prohibition succeeded in replacing good beer with bad gin." The lesson these critics derive: it is counterproductive to try to legislate morality.

Opponents argue that alcohol consumption declined dramatically during Prohibition--by 30 to 50 percent. Deaths from cirrhosis of the liver for men fell from 29.5 per 100,000 in 1911 to 10.7 per 100,000 in 1929.

Was Prohibition a "noble experiment" or a misguided effort to use government to shape morality? Even today, the answer is not entirely clear. Alcohol remains a serious cause of death, disability, and domestic abuse. It was not until the 1960s that

alcohol consumption levels returned to their pre-Prohibition levels. Today, alcohol is linked each year to more than 23,000 motor vehicle deaths and to more than half the nation's homicides, and is closely linked to domestic violence.

Questions:

1. What is Prohibition?

2. What groups were responsibile for the temperance or prohibition movement?

3. What is the 18th amendment? What was banned?

4. How much of the country banned alcohol before the 18th amendment went into effect?

5. What were some of the effects of prohibition? On the government? On the people?

6. What were people who made alcohol called?

7. How did the Congress restricted alcohol further? What law did they enact? What did it do?

8. What does it mean to "repeal"?

9. Who proposed an end to prohibition?

10. When did it end? How?