

Fundamentalism vs. Modernity: Prohibition

Context: Saloons were closed, bottles were smashed, and kegs were split wide open. When the states ratified the **EIGHTEENTH AMENDMENT** in 1919, the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages was outlawed. In fairness, there were advantages to prohibition. Social scientists are certain that actual consumption of alcohol actually decreased during the decade. Estimates indicate that during the first few years of prohibition, alcohol consumption declined to a mere third of its prewar level. Soon, however, a climate of lawlessness swept the nation, as Americans everywhere began to partake in illegal drink. The group that profited most from the illegal market was Organized Crime. City crime bosses such as Al Capone of Chicago sold their products to willing buyers and even intimidated unwilling customers to purchase their illicit wares.

Directions: As a class, we will analyze the text of the 18th amendment and discuss how political factors reshape and change American society. Each group will be assigned one document and be tasked with answering the accompanying guiding questions. We will then discuss the similarities and differences which exist between each document as a whole class.

For homework, you will respond to the prompt on p. 6 of this document.

The 18th Amendment to the United States Constitution

Source: United States Constitution

Context: The US Senate passed the 18th Amendment on December 18, 1917. It was ratified on January 16, 1919, after 36 states approved it. The 18th Amendment, and the enforcement laws accompanying it, established Prohibition of alcohol in the United States. Several states already had Prohibition laws before this amendment. It was eventually repealed by the 21st Amendment on December 5, 1933. It is the only amendment that has ever been completely repealed.

Section 1. After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale, transportation, importation or exportation of intoxicating liquors in the United States and all its territory is hereby prohibited.

Section 2. The Congress and the States shall both have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Section 3. This article shall have no power unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislatures of the States, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission to the States by the Congress

Guiding Questions:

1. What is your first reaction to the 18th amendment?
2. Do you think this amendment could be passed today? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think some Americans in 1918 might have wanted this amendment?



Document 1 – Prohibition and Health

Source: Statement read at the Eighth Annual Meeting of the National Temperance Council, Washington D.C., September 20, 1920. The National Temperance Council was created in 1913 to work for Prohibition.

Alcohol poisons and kills; Abstinence and Prohibition save lives and safeguard health.

Dr. S.S. Goldwater, formerly Health Commissioner of New York City, stated the decision of science, the final opinion of our nation after a hundred years of education upon the subject of alcohol.

“It is believed that less consumption of alcohol by the community would mean less tuberculosis, less poverty, less dependency, less pressure on our hospitals, asylums and jails.”

“Alcohol hurts the tone of the muscles and lessens the product of laborers; it worsens the skill and endurance of artists; it hurts memory, increases industrial accidents, causes diseases of the heart, liver, stomach and kidney, increases the death rate from pneumonia and lessens the body’s natural immunity to disease.”

Justice Harlan speaking for the United States Supreme Court, said:

“We cannot shut out of view the fact that public health and public safety may be harmed by the general use of alcohol.”

Document 2 - “Hooch Murder” Bill (Modified)

New York Times

ANTI-SALOON HEAD AIMS TO REACH THOSE WHOSE DRINKS CAUSE DEATH.

William H. Anderson, State Superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League, announced in a statement yesterday that the organization would sponsor a measure at the upcoming State Legislature. The measure would be known as the “Hooch Murder” bill. It says a person can be tried for murder, and punished accordingly, if they are suspected of selling alcohol that resulted in the death of the person drinking it. Commenting on the measure, Mr. Anderson said:

“This bill is intended for whoever it may hit, but it is especially directed at the immoral foreigner, usually an alien, who had largely stopped killing with a knife from hate or with a gun for hire, and has gone into the preparation and thoughtless selling of poison for profit.”

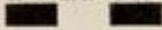
Source: “Hooch Murder Bill Drafted by Anderson,” The New York Times, November 14, 1922

ALCOHOLISM AND DEGENERACY

61 Children in 10 Very Temperate Families
5 Died in Infancy



2 Had St. Vitus Dance



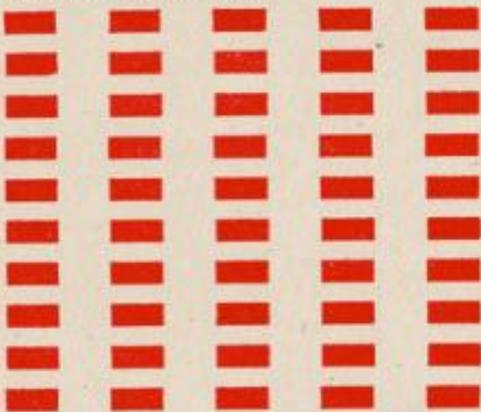
2 Were Backward, not Idiotic



2 were Deformed



50 were Normal



Temperate Parents Had { Defective Children 18%
Normal Children 82%

57 Children in 10 Intemperate Families
25 Died in Infancy



1 Had St. Vitus Dance – Idiotic



6 Were Idiotic



5 Were Deformed



5 Were Dwarfed



5 Were Epileptic



10 Were Normal



Alcoholic Parents Had { Defective Children 82.5%
Normal Children 17.5%

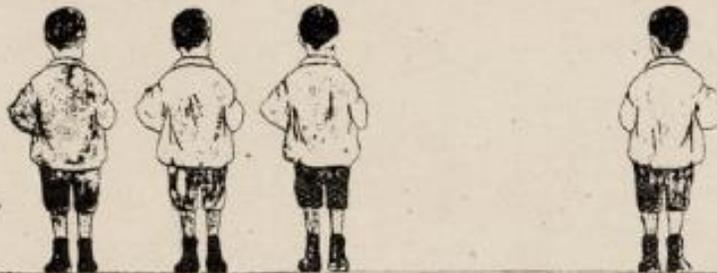
Demme: The Influence of Alcohol on the Child. Investigations in Berne, Switzerland, 1878-1889. Families lived in same section and were similarly situated except as regards intemperance.

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CHILDREN IN MISERY PARENTS' DRINK TO BLAME IN AT LEAST THREE CASES OUT OF EVERY FOUR

Handled by the Chicago Juvenile Protective Association



75% DUE TO ALCOHOL

*The Child's
Birthrights
are* To be Well Born
To be Well Cared for
To be Well Trained
DRINK SPOILS ALL THREE

Statistics compiled by Gertrude H. Brittan, Supt. Chicago Juvenile Protective Assn.,
from 1,739 cases of Adult Delinquency, Jan. 1-June 30, 1910.

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NO. 15

Document 1 – Guiding Questions

1. Sourcing: When was this document written? Was this before or after the passage of the 18th Amendment?
2. Sourcing: Why might the National Temperance Council have met in 1920 (after the passage of the 18th Amendment)? What do you predict they will say?
3. Close Reading: What does the National Temperance Council claim is caused by alcohol?
4. Do you find these claims convincing? Do you think people at the time found these claims convincing? Explain your answer with details and evidence.

Document 2 – Guiding Questions

1. Sourcing: When was this document written? Was this before or after the passage of the 18th Amendment?
2. Close Reading: What is the “Hooch Murder Bill”?
3. Context: Based on this document, who is the Anti-Saloon League blaming for the sale of alcohol during Prohibition? Why do you think they singled this group?

Documents 3 and 4 – Guiding Questions

1. Sourcing: When was this document written? Was this before or after the passage of the 18th Amendment?
2. Sourcing: Who published these posters? What was their perspective?

3. Close Reading: According to these posters, what are two reasons why Prohibition is a good idea?

4. Close Reading: Look at the words used in Document C. These were considered “scientific” categories. What does that tell you about science at this time?

5. Context: Using both posters, explain some of the beliefs about children that were common in the early 20th century. Do you think these beliefs are silly or reasonable? Explain.

Homework: People who supported Prohibition thought it would solve a lot of society’s problems. Use the documents to write an eight sentence paragraph explaining what problems pro-temperance organizations saw in society and why they thought Prohibition would solve those problems. Conclude your paragraph with whether or not you agree with the perspective. Your paragraph **MUST** include textual evidence from a minimum of two of the documents.