

US History

Social & Political History of the 1920s

Learning Target:

I can examine the issue of prohibition and the effects it had on society with men like Al Capone and organized crime.

8. Prohibition and Organized Crime

Prohibition –

- Progressives had long called for a ban on alcohol to combat crime, family violence, and poverty
- Many also supported it during WWI as a wartime measure

The Eighteenth Amendment –

- Prohibited the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages
- Ratified in January 1919

Volstead Act –

- Passed in October 1919 to enforce the amendment

Enforcement –

- Some regions prohibition was strictly enforced and consumption declined
- In cities and other areas prohibition was unpopular and ignored

Speakeasies and Bootlegging –

- Americans frequented speakeasies or bars where liquor was sold illegally
- Many also make their own liquor or purchased bootlegged alcohol brought in from Canada and Mexico
- Bootlegging became one of the decade's most profitable businesses leading to the development of organized crime in many cities like Chicago

The Development of Organized Crime –

- Due to the profit potential of bootlegging many wanted a piece of the pie
- Al Capone ruled Chicago's bootlegging scene along with his mob

Saint Valentine's Day Massacre –

- The peak of the Chicago prohibition gang wars
- Capone's gang publicly massacred seven members of a rival gang

Elliot Ness and the Untouchables –

- Hired by the Federal Prohibition Bureau to regain control in places like Chicago
- Did not ignore bootlegging like many corrupt city police
- Nicknamed the untouchables because of their honesty
- Ended Capone's reign in 1931 for income tax evasion

Positives and Negatives of Prohibition –

Positives –

-Alcoholism and alcohol related deaths declined

Negatives –

-Led to a widespread breakdown of the law

-Turned otherwise law abiding Americans into lawbreakers

Twenty-First Amendment –

-Repealed the eighteenth amendment and prohibition in 1933