

The Prohibition Era

The Prohibition era lasted from 1920 through 1933, and was an attempt to legislate morality. It took a Constitutional amendment to enact it, and another one to repeal it. The attempt to decrease the "evils" of alcohol actually created more - and new - types of crime.

Temperance movements had swept through portions of the United States throughout the 19th century, but it was [World War I](#) that provided the first opportunity for the anti-alcohol movement to enact a national ban on alcohol. Anti-alcohol sentiment in Congress led to legislation known as the Lever Food and Fuel Control Act of 1917, which regulated food, fuel, and other commodities that might be needed for the war effort. It was argued that the grains needed to distill alcohol were needed as food and were in short supply because of the needs of the war. This effectively shut down the country's breweries and distilleries temporarily.

A permanent ban on the sale, transportation, importing, and exporting of alcoholic beverages was enacted by passage of the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution by Congress in December, 1917. It took just over one year for the Amendment to be ratified by the states. Prior to the national ban, individual states had passed local bans, and by 1916, 26 of the 48 states banned alcohol. Proponents of the so called "noble experiment" claimed that the nation's health would improve dramatically without alcohol, and that crime would drop. It was also claimed that other industries, like dairy, would prosper as other types of beverages increased in popularity to fill the void left by the absence of alcohol. Juvenile delinquency was also supposed to be virtually eliminated, and the average workers productivity was also supposed to increase, leading to an increase in economic prosperity for the nation.

While the ratification process for the 18th Amendment continued, Congress passed the Wartime Prohibition Act on November 18, 1918, even though the Armistice ending the war had just been signed on November 8. This legislation banned the sale of beer and alcoholic beverages having an alcohol content greater than 2.75%. The Act took effect on June 30, 1919. The 18th Amendment was ratified in January, 1919, and would take effect on January 17, 1920.

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