



BEGINNER PROHIBITION

Content contributed by Anne Drummond, Imperial Beverage



Material contained in this document applies to multiple course levels. Reference your syllabus to determine specific areas of study.

The prohibition of alcohol, in most circles offered the simple moniker “prohibition”, is the legal act of prohibiting the manufacture, transportation, distribution and sale of alcoholic beverages. In most cases, the term refers to periods in the histories of countries during which the prohibition of alcohol was enforced.

HISTORY

Several incidents of prohibition have occurred worldwide. These included Prince Edward Island (Canada), Faroe Islands (Denmark), Russia and Soviet Union, Iceland, Norway, Hungary and Finland. In the United States, prohibition was enforced from 1920 to 1933.

After several years in the United States, prohibition became a general failure, as bootlegging became widespread and organized crime took control of the distribution of alcohol. Distilleries and breweries in Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean flourished as their products were either consumed by visiting Americans or illegally exported to the US. Chicago became notorious as a haven for prohibition dodgers during the 1920’s.

After the American Revolution, drinking was on the rise and the government was at a loss to stop outlawed behaviors resulting from overconsumption. Additionally, the Temperance movement, which blamed alcohol for the ills of society, offered a zealous attack on alcohol as the scapegoat. Saloons, a social haven for men who lived in the still untamed West, were viewed by many, especially women, as debaucherous.

At the onset of the 20th century, Temperance unions existed in every state. By 1916, over half of US states had statutes that prohibited the sale and manufacture of alcohol. In 1919, the 18th Amendment to the US constitution, prohibiting the manufacture, distribution, and sale of alcohol was ratified, and went into effect January 16, 1920.

In October of 1919, the Volstead Act went into effect. This act, which closed loopholes that existed in the previous amendment, stated that “beer, wine, or other intoxicating malt or vinous liquors” meant any beverage that was more than .5% alcohol by volume. The Act also stated that owning any item designed to manufacture alcohol was illegal and it set specific fines and jail sentences for violating Prohibition.

Almost immediately after the ratification of the 18th Amendment, organizations formed to repeal it. The anti-prohibition movement grew in strength as the 1920’s progressed.

On December 5, 1933, the 21st Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified, making alcohol legal once again. This was the first and to date, the only time in United States history that an Amendment has been repealed.

