

Why was prohibition introduced?

In 1919 Congress (the American parliament) passed a law which banned the making and selling of alcohol anywhere in the USA. This was known as **prohibition**. The prohibition of alcohol lasted until 1933, but why was it introduced in the first place?

1 It already existed

Some states already had prohibition laws in place. The law passed by Congress simply made the ban on alcohol nation-wide.

2 Moral reasons

Many people were against the sale of alcohol and said that alcohol caused problems such as violence, poverty, sexual immorality and crime. They said that if alcohol was banned the USA would be a healthier and more moral country in which to live.

3 Campaigners

Many groups campaigned to get alcohol banned.

- The **Anti-Saloon League of America**, founded in 1893, put pressure on politicians to ban alcohol. Politicians listened to what the League said because they did not want to lose votes. The League had a lot of influence and people voted 'dry' politicians (who supported prohibition) into Congress. The most support for prohibition came from people living in rural areas. Prohibition showed the division in beliefs between rural areas and cities. One prohibition campaigner said: 'The USA can only be saved by using the pure morals of the country to flush out the cesspools of cities, and so save our country from pollution.'
- Churches supported the League and said that a ban on alcohol would improve people's behaviour.

SOURCE 1

Daddy's in There---



And Our Shoes and Stockings and Clothes and Food Are in There, Too, and They'll Never Come Out.
—Chicago American

WANTED--A FATHER; A LITTLE BOY'S PLEA
WILLIAM JOHNSON

An Anti-Saloon League poster.

4 The First World War

People of German descent owned many of the breweries in the USA. When the USA joined the First World War in 1917, there was a lot of anti-German feeling amongst Americans. They forced breweries to close down, saying that the grain used to make alcohol was needed to feed the USA's allies in Europe.

Extension Materials

Momentum for Prohibition had been building up before the USA entered the First World War in 1917. From that point forward, the Prohibition campaign gathered pace. Female reformers had argued for some time that there were clear links between consumption of alcohol, and wife-beating and child abuse. Henry Ford and other industrialists were concerned that drinking reduced efficiency and output at work. Many religious groups saw alcohol as the root of sin and evil and were keen to support Prohibition. It was felt that Prohibition would support and strengthen the traditional values of the American people, who were God-fearing, hard-working, family-oriented and thrifty. Moreover, it would encourage immigrants to follow these values.

America's participation in the war created many problems around the issue of Prohibition. Many brewers were of German origin, and when the USA declared war on Germany, the Temperance Movement and the Anti-Saloon League saw prohibiting the sale of alcohol as a patriotic issue. Their followers viewed the sale and consumption of alcohol as a betrayal of the USA.

As anti-German feeling grew in the USA, beer was given the nickname 'the Kaiser's brew' (the Kaiser was the German emperor).

In September 1918 President Woodrow Wilson banned beer production until the war ended. There was little opposition to this move – there were not even any organised bodies to counter the arguments of the Prohibition lobby. The Prohibition Amendment, which stopped the 'manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors' was ratified in Congress in January 1919 and was scheduled to come into effect one year later. The amendment did not outlaw buying or drinking alcohol, nor did it define the term 'intoxicating liquors'. In 1920 Congress passed the Volstead Act, which defined 'intoxicating liquors' as anything containing more than 0.5 per cent

alcohol. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) became responsible for enforcing Prohibition.

Source A: Part of a song, written in 1903, called 'When the Prohibs Win the Day'

*There'll be plenty of food for eating,
There'll be plenty of clothes for wear,
There'll be gladness in ev'ry meeting,
There'll be praise to outmeasure prayer,
There'll be toys each day for baby,
And then Papa at home will stay,
And a heaven on earth will the bright home be,
When the Prohibs win the day.*

Source B: From an Anti-Saloon League pamphlet, 1918

The American's patriotic duty is to abolish the un-American, pro-German, crime-producing, food-wasting, youth-corrupting, home-wrecking, treasonable liquor traffic.

Prohibition – did the Americans make a mistake?

Why was prohibition introduced?

In the nineteenth century, in rural areas of the USA there was a very strong 'temperance' movement. Members of temperance movements agreed not to drink alcohol and also campaigned to get others to give up alcohol. Most members of these movements were devout Christians who saw what damage alcohol did to family life. They wanted to stop that damage.

In the nineteenth century the two main movements were the Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (see Sources 55 and 56).

SOURCE 55

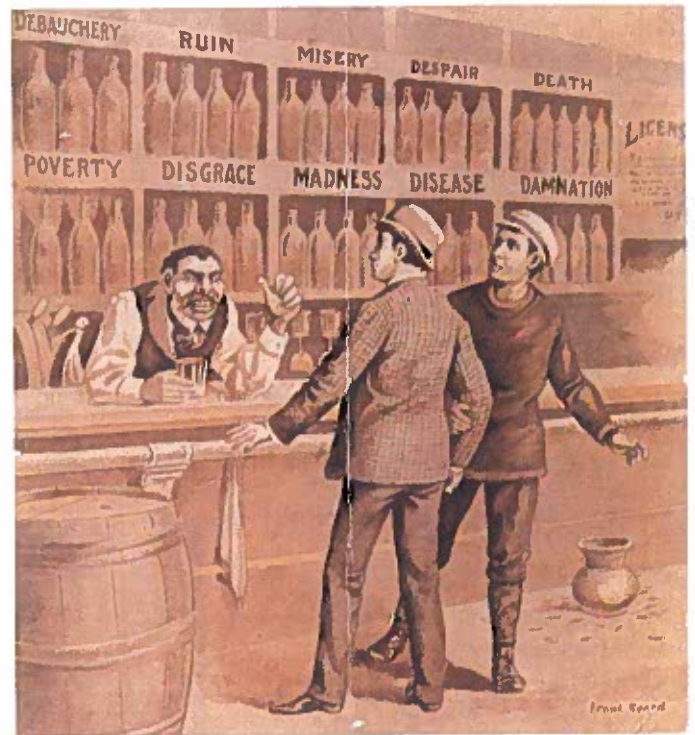
Daddy's in There---



And Our Shirts and Stockings and Clothes and Food Are in There, Too, and They'll Never Come Out.

A poster issued by the Anti Saloon League in 1915.

SOURCE 56



A poster issued by the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

SOURCE 57

Our nation can only be saved by turning the pure stream of country sentiment and township morals to flush out the cesspools of cities and so save civilisation from pollution.

A temperance campaigner speaking in 1917.

The temperance movements were so strong in some of the rural areas that they persuaded their state governments to prohibit the sale of alcohol within the state. Through the early twentieth century the campaign gathered pace. It became a national campaign to prohibit (ban) alcohol throughout the country. It acquired some very powerful supporters. Leading industrialists backed the movement, believing that workers would be more reliable if they did not drink. Politicians backed it because it got them votes in rural areas. By 1916, 21 states had banned saloons.

Supporters of prohibition became known as 'dries'. The dries brought some powerful arguments to their case. They claimed that '3000 infants are smothered yearly in bed, by drunken parents.' The USA's entry into the First World War in 1917 boosted the dries. Drinkers were accused of being unpatriotic cowards. Most of the big breweries were run by German immigrants who were portrayed as the enemy. Drink was linked to other evils as well. After the Russian Revolution, the dries claimed that Bolshevism thrived on drink and that alcohol led to lawlessness in the cities, particularly in immigrant communities. Saloons were seen as dens of vice that destroyed family life. The campaign became one of country values against city values.

In 1917 the movement had enough states on its side to propose the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution. This 'prohibited the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors'. It became law in January 1920 and is known as the Volstead Act.

Prohibition and Gangsters

- Prohibition was introduced by the Volstead Act, which became the Eighteenth Amendment to the US Constitution.
- This banned the production, transporting and sale of alcoholic liquor. It did not, however, ban its consumption, as this would have infringed the Constitution.
- The campaign against alcohol began before the First World War.
- The Saloon was described as the Poor Man's Club.
- Many small towns and women's organisations campaigned against alcohol. Politicians agreed with them to get their votes.
- They blamed alcohol for breaking up families, causing unemployment, ill health and suffering for women and children. The Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union supported Prohibition.
- During the First World War, prohibition received increased support because it was believed that it would aid the war effort.
- Brewing in the USA was traditionally run by German immigrants. Campaigners claimed that it would be patriotic to close down their industry.
- By 1919, thirteen states had already banned alcohol.

Source A: A pro-Prohibition cartoon published in 1917

Daddy's in There---



And Our Shoes and Stockings and Clothes and Food Are in There, Too, and They'll Never Come Out. —Charles Zimmerman

Task

What can you learn from Source A about US attitudes to alcohol?

→ (A) - Comprehension → supported inferences
1 paragraph.
5 minutes.

A4 (a) Target: Source comprehension and interpretation (A03)

Level	Descriptor	Mark
0	No rewardable material	0
Level 1	Student offers a piece of information from the source eg The source shows a boy holding the hand of a girl.	(1)
Level 2	One or more unsupported inferences eg The source suggests that the children had suffered because of their fathers' drinking habits...	(2)
Level 3	One or more supported inferences eg The source suggests that children had suffered because their of fathers' drinking habits as the children look poor and the caption says 'our shoes and stockings and clothes and food are in there'...	(3)

(A) Source A is a poster from the Anti-Saloon League. It shows a pair of children standing outside a saloon. They are under-fed and poorly dressed, and are looking in on their father in the saloon. The inference of this is that their suffering and poverty are caused by their father's drinking. As the caption states "Daddy's in there - And so our shoes and stockings and clothes and food". Thus he is spending money his family needs on alcohol.

Description
↓
Inference
↓
Supported