

# Prohibition

## The Noble Experiment, or The Blow at Personal Liberty?

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Group Drama

## Process Paper

Living near Newport, Kentucky and Cincinnati, Ohio we have always been exposed to the rich brewing histories of these cities. That led us to the topic of Prohibition, which greatly affected the area in which we live. The more we began to research Prohibition, the more interesting it became until we finally decided to make it our History Day topic.

First we took a trip to the Cincinnati Public Library gathering books, magazines, and newspaper articles about Prohibition. We also found many helpful websites on the subject. Then, we took a trip to the Anti-Saloon League Museum in Westerville, Ohio. There, we interviewed a historian, Beth Weinhardt, who helped us accumulate many primary resources, including posters and flyers from the time period. Next, we interviewed a history teacher, Mr. Mac Cooley, in Newport, Kentucky. He is a Prohibition expert and gives tours focused on the time of Prohibition in northern Kentucky. Mr. Cooley introduced us to George Remus, a notorious, local bootlegger who became a character in our drama. Our most important sources were the newspaper articles that we found in the public library, which gave us information about Wayne Wheeler, Al Capone and George Remus. After the State competition we continued our research and interviewed Professor Dick Gruber of Xavier University about the relevance of our topic today.

We started our drama by showing the two sides of the debate, those who advocated "The Noble Experiment" and those who felt Prohibition was a "Blow at Personal Liberty." Then a newsboy enters, selling the daily paper in Newport, Kentucky, in 1920, on the day Prohibition became a law. A German Cincinnati

becomes angry about the news; he feels that Prohibition will destroy the area's rich brewing industry. Wayne Wheeler, maybe the most famous Prohibitionist of all time, debates the value of prohibition with the German brewer. Scene 2 begins in Chicago, Illinois, in 1925, with Max as an undercover cop working as a bartender in a speakeasy. This lets us introduce Al Capone and George Remus, major characters in bootlegging, showing one of the failures brought on by Prohibition. Back in Newport, Kentucky, in 1934, after the repeal of Prohibition, a blackjack dealer, and a customer, debate the successes and failures of Prohibition.

Prohibition was one of the most debated issues in American history. It led to numerous failures, consequences and some successes for the people and organizations involved. The passing of the 18th Amendment itself was a diplomatic act. Prohibition, the banning of the use and processing of alcohol, was repealed by the ratification of the 21st Amendment. That failure demonstrated the impossibility of legislating what people may drink. Prohibition relates to the modern scene with the current debate about legalizing certain drugs. The government couldn't restrict alcohol. Can they restrict drugs? Prohibition's debated history, legacy and debate live on in current Americans' lives, and very much fit the theme of Debate and Diplomacy in History: Successes, Failures, and Consequences.

496 words

# Bibliography

## Primary Sources

### Documents:

Cockburn, Clad. "Prohibition." Eyewitness to America. Ed. David Colbert. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

*Clad Cockburn wrote this article about his interview with the notorious Al Capone. He learned of Al Capone's opinions on his own crimes. It was made clear that Capone seemed neither excited nor agitated about what he and his men had done. They also went into the topic of "the American System," and Capone gave a long lecture about how he wasn't a radical or an anarchist and praised ideas like freedom, enterprise and pioneering. "This American system of ours, call it Americanism, call it Capitalism, call it what you like, gives each and every one of us a great opportunity if we only seize it with both hands and make the most of it." We used this quote by Al Capone in our drama.*

The Constitution of the United States of America as Amended. "Amendment XVIII and Amendment XXI." Washington: United States Printing Office, 1976.

*This document gave us the official wording of the eighteenth and twenty-first Amendments to the United States Constitution. Amendment XVIII, proposed December 18, 1917, is the Prohibition Amendment. It states "After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited." It was ratified January 16, 1919. Amendment XXI was proposed on February 20, 1933. This is the amendment that repealed the 18th Amendment. It states, "The eighteenth article of amendment to the Constitution of the United States is hereby repealed."*

Morand, Paul. "Prohibition." Eyewitness to America. Ed. David Colbert. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

*In this article, Paul Morand wrote about his experiences visiting speakeasies in Manhattan. He described the many locations where they were hidden, such as inside a florist shop, behind undertakers' coffins and even underground, entered through a telephone box He stated that all classes of society used speakeasies during the time, not just the lower class. In the height of Prohibition over 20,000 speakeasies existed in New York alone.*

“Volstead Act.” Owned by History Central. Friday, January 14, 2011

<http://www.historycentral.com/Documents/Volstead.html>.

*This site offered the exact wording of the Volstead Act which was the law to enforce Prohibition. There were twenty-three sections. There were sections on Justice, on Manufacture, on Alcohol Permits, on Medicinal Purposes, and on Factory Processing of Alcohol.*

White, William Allen. “Wets Versus Drys.” American Issues, Vol.II: since 1865. A Primary Source Reader in United States History. Ed. Irwin Unger. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999.

*This was a short excerpt on Wet versus Dry. This author spoke about the debate during Prohibition, not before it. The Wets wanted Prohibition to end because they thought it was a blow at personal liberty, and was the main reason for organized and unorganized crime. The Drys thought that the prohibition of alcohol was a noble experiment, and should be continued.*

### **Newspapers:**

Archibold, Randal C. “Mexico Watching as California Votes on Easing Pot Law.” The New York Times quoted in the Cincinnati Enquirer, October 18, 2010: p. A3.

*This article described the debate about legalizing marijuana in California. This is a current debate, which is very important to California. In one of the paragraphs, the author compared this issue to the issue of Prohibition. He thought that legalizing marijuana would stop some of the organized and unorganized crime in California and Mexico, and put more people to work. This article helped us to incorporate modern debates on marijuana in our drama. We consider this a primary source since it shows the relevance of the debate today.*

“Strives for 5% Beer, Representative Vare Will Ask Congress to Amend Dry Act.” Associated Press New York Times February 11, 1920, p. 7.

*This article was about a representative, Mr. Vare, who said he would try to vote against Prohibition. He also thought that he could convince Congress to nullify the 18th Amendment.*

“U.S. Is Voted Dry.” Associated Press. January 16, 1919.

*This is an article from the time the 18th Amendment was passed. We used it in the first scene in our drama as an historical newspaper.*

“Washington Diplomats Cease Importing Wine; Embarrassed by Thirst of American Friend.” Associated Press, New York Times February 21, 1920, p. 1.

*This article told a story about some wine that was being imported illegally. The traffic of wine ceased, but many people were embarrassed by how high the demand was for alcohol.*

## Magazines:

“Doctors Wish to Prescribe Alcohol.” Literary Digest 7 May 1921: 20-21.

*The Volstead Act legalized the sale of alcohol for medicinal purposes.*

Low, Maurie A. “America and Prohibition a Complete History.” Living Age Jan-Mar 1920: 134-135.

*This article stated that Prohibition was essentially a joke when it started. The first city to actually go dry was Portland, Maine, in 1851. Twenty-one years later, the Prohibition Party felt they were powerful enough to make a mark in politics. When their presidential candidate received only 5,600 votes out of 6,456,000, the Prohibition Party was humiliated. At that time no one thought America would go dry.*

MacDonald, A.B. “Can We Trust the Brewers?” Ladies Home Journal. May 9, 1924.

*This article was about a meeting between delegates from forty different organizations throughout America trying to bring back the sale of alcohol. It told about the many uprisings in large American cities like Philadelphia and St. Louis. These uprisings were caused by angry protestors trying to stop federal agents as they confiscated the contents of breweries in their towns as ordered by law. The delegates discussed what they wanted from Congress: simply a slight lift on the percentage of alcohol allowed in drinks, which at the time was only 0.5%. They wanted to be able to have at least 3% alcoholic beverages. One of their main arguments was that thousands of people were losing their jobs due to the collapse of the industry, but this fact was not fully acknowledged until the early '30s as Prohibition was losing its momentum. It is conclusive that the efforts of this meeting were unsuccessful considering that the Eighteenth Amendment wasn't repealed until nine years later. However, their points may have contributed somewhat to the movement toward nullification.*

Taft, William Howard. “Is Prohibition a Blow at Personal Liberty?” Ladies Home Journal, 1919.

*Although William Howard Taft wasn't President during the time of Prohibition, he gave great viewpoints and comments on it. He believed it was “a blow at personal liberty” that disrespected the American culture. He campaigned furiously against Prohibition and he wasn't afraid to show his position. We used Mr. Taft's statement in our title and in one of our background signs.*

Wheeler, Wayne B. “Law and Order.” Outlook Jan-Apr 1920: 146-147. Cincinnati Public Library, magazine room.

*This reference gave us a vision of how a main prohibitionist, Wayne Wheeler, reacted to Prohibition's enforcing. He mentions how he felt Prohibition was patriotic and was a smart and reasonable law.*

## **Pamphlets and Flyers:**

“Daily Drinking Impaired Memory.” Copyright, 1913 by Scientific Temperance Federation: Boston, Massachusetts. American Issue Publishing Company: Westerville, Ohio. Collection of the Anti-Saloon League Museum, Westerville, Ohio.

*This was one of the handouts printed and distributed by the Anti-Saloon League during Prohibition. It explained how alcoholics have a harder time memorizing and focusing on work. This was a flyer handed out before the 18th Amendment was passed to help support the cause of prohibitionists.*

“Drink Cuts Into Support of the Family.” Copyright, 1913 by Scientific Temperance Federation:

Boston, Massachusetts. American Issue Publishing Company: Westerville, Ohio. Collection of the Anti-Saloon League Museum, Westerville, Ohio.

*This flyer claimed that 69% of men who couldn't support their families were drunkards. It was another handout printed by the Anti-Saloon League.*

“The Titanic Carried Down 1503 People.” Copyright, 1913 by Scientific Temperance Federation: Boston, Massachusetts. American Issue Publishing Company: Westerville, Ohio. Collection of the Anti-Saloon League Museum, Westerville, Ohio.

*This flyer compared the negative effects of alcohol to the Titanic sinking, explaining that every eight days 1503 people were killed by problems directly resulting from alcohol consumption.*

“Wanted-100 Boys for New Customers.” Copyright, Illinois Saloon. Collection of the Anti-Saloon League Museum, Westerville, Ohio.

*This was a flyer we found at the Anti-Saloon League. This article claimed that young boys were going to saloons and rapidly dying. This was yet another way the Anti-Saloon League demonstrated the “evils of alcohol.”*

## **Map:**

“The Advance of Prohibition.” Copyright, 1916 by American Publishing Co. Westerville, Ohio.

*This is a map which shows the advance of Prohibition across the nation. A few states had already gone dry, and the Anti-Saloon League was trying to convince more to join them.*

## **Letter:**

“W. Franklin to the Keeley Institute.” December 3, 1913. Letters of the Century, New York, New York, The Dial Press, 1999.

*This is a letter written by W. Franklin, president of the Kentucky Distillers Co. It was written before Prohibition, but the Anti-Saloon League found it and passed it out to show the evils of alcohol. It was written to the head of an Alcoholic Sanatorium telling him that the distillery's customers were their*

future patients. Mr Franklin was trying to sell a copy of the list of his customers to the sanatorium.

## Secondary Sources

### Books:

Behr, Edward. Prohibition the 13 Years That Changed America. London: BBC, 1997. Print.

*Two chapters in this book provided great information about George Remus' trial. George Remus was born in Germany and moved to Chicago in his early childhood. When he grew up, he owned his uncle's pharmacy. He wanted to get a better job, so he became a lawyer. He defended people mainly against Prohibition, so he constantly read through the Volstead Act. George Remus found a loophole in the Volstead Act: that alcohol could be used for medicinal purposes. Since he was a pharmacist, he started buying all kinds of drug stores and selling alcohol. Remus eventually moved to Cincinnati, Ohio where he bought several drug stores and started selling alcohol in those stores as well. The liquor was imported illegally; he paid people to import the wine for him so he wouldn't be caught doing it. Remus made millions of dollars in a few years, and married his secretary, Imogene. They lived a happy life, until eventually Remus was thrown in jail for bootlegging. While he was in jail, his wife Imogene had an affair with the prohibition agent who put Remus in jail. Imogene didn't want Remus to find out about this affair. While George was in jail, Imogene put out a \$15,000 reward for her husband's dead body. When Remus got out of jail, no one had enough courage to hunt him down. He still loved Imogene dearly, and he decided if he couldn't have her, no one could. On October 6, 1927 Remus and Imogene were in a high speed car chase in Cincinnati. In Eden Park, Remus caught up to his wife, pulled out a gun, and shot her. Remus went to court, where he chose to defend himself, since he was a lawyer. The Judge was William Howard Taft's son, Charles. Remus claimed he was temporarily insane. One witness testified that Imogene had hired him to kill Remus. This was the key piece of evidence in the case, and Remus was found not guilty. He went to an insane asylum for a few months and lived the rest of his life peacefully in Northern Kentucky. We featured George Remus in our drama.*

Caraway, Robin. Newport: The Sin City Years. Chicago, IL: Arcadia Publishing, 2010.

*This book contained photographs and an explanation about how Prohibition affected Newport, Kentucky. It explained that the George Wiedemann*

*Brewing Company, one of the largest beer and whiskey producing businesses in Newport, left 300 employees and 200 field agents unemployed after the 18th Amendment was passed. The company was forced to sell alcohol only for medicinal and industrial purposes. After this, the book described how the pharmacist George Remus (nicknamed "King of the Bootleggers") quickly became one of the company's biggest customers. Remus began his own illegal trade of alcohol in the Tri-State area (Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana). The book mentioned many people who made their own homemade alcohol during the prohibition era, and how the black market flourished during this time. It also went into further detail about major events that took place in Newport which impacted the illegal alcohol trade. Newport is just across the river from Cincinnati, Ohio.*

Hintz, Martin. Farewell, John Barleycorn: Prohibition in the United States Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 1996. Print.

*This book was an overview of Prohibition from the time of the pilgrims all the way through America's Revolution and Civil War, then to the real time when America was completely dry. This history ended in the 1930s, providing a great overview of Prohibition.*

Lieurance, Suzanne. The Prohibition Era in American History. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow, 2003. Print.

*In the last chapters, this book gave really good information about how Prohibition ended. We learned that in 1926, Wayne Wheeler died, and that was the beginning of events leading to the repeal of the 18th Amendment. We also learned that the Women's Christian Temperance Union changed into an organization for the repeal of Prohibition.*

Silberstein, Iola Hessler. Cincinnati, Then and Now. Cincinnati, Ohio: Voters Service Education Fund of the League of Women Voters of the Cincinnati Area, 1982. Print.

*This book was another source about Germans and Prohibition in Cincinnati. In Cincinnati, Germans made up 17% of the population, and Germans who labored in the alcohol industry in Germany loved the Ohio River, because it resembled the vineyards back home. By 1840, Cincinnati's German heritage had become so large that city ordinances were printed in German and English. Germans were completely devastated when Prohibition became a law.*

Stephens, Sarah. Cincinnati's Brewing History. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2010. Print.

*This book described Cincinnati's brewing history. We learned that Cincinnati was called "The Queen City of Beer," and in the 1940s it was the fourteenth largest brewer in the nation.*

The WPA Guide to Cincinnati. Cincinnati: The Cincinnati Historical Society, 1987.

*This book gave us several articles on topics surrounding Prohibition. There was a story about Carrie Nation coming to Vine Street in Cincinnati. When asked why she did not try to destroy some of the many saloons there, she stated, "I would have dropped from exhaustion before I had gone a block." This Guide also included a story about the saloons the night Prohibition went into effect, and the mass panicked sale of alcohol that came before Prohibition was enforced. The last article was about George Remus, the bootlegger who was Cincinnati's claim to fame during the Prohibition Era, one of America's most notorious millionaires, and a character in our drama.*

## **Interviews:**

Cooley, Mac. Personal Interview. High school History Teacher. December 7, 2010.

*Mr. Cooley is a high school teacher who specializes in American history. He also gives history tours of Newport and Cincinnati based on themes such as gangsters, Civil War, and Prohibition. During our interview with him we discussed the downfall of Cincinnati's economy during Prohibition due to the closed breweries, as well as the effect of gangsters and bootleggers who later swarmed the area. Mr. Cooley went into great detail about a famous man named George Remus who lived in Cincinnati and was nicknamed "King of the Bootleggers." Aside from talking about events during Prohibition, Mr. Cooley spoke about what happened to bootleggers and mobsters once the 18th Amendment was repealed, explaining the rise of casinos and illegal gambling. One of the best things about this interview was how Mr. Cooley talked about the local scene during Prohibition. We found this very helpful in creating our drama.*

Fairfield, Dr. John. email interview, May 16, 2011.

*Dr. Fairfield, a professor at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, responded to our request about the relationship of Prohibition to the current drug scene. He responded that, "Certainly the social costs of alcohol abuse increased - crime, public drunkenness, bad liquor. Prohibition also spread contempt for the law and for the state. . . I think both debates then and now, tend to focus on narrow issues instead of on the broader issues that generate substance abuse."*

Mechley, Braden, personal interview, February 10, 2011.

*Danny's uncle, Dr. Mechley, a classics teacher, is very much involved with the theater program at Saint Xavier High School in Cincinnati. He came to look over our script and gave us many good ideas and suggestions about how to perform our drama and he coached us on our accents. He helped us very much.*

Weinhardt, Beth, personal interview, October 15, 2010.

*Mrs. Weinhardt is a historian at the Anti-Saloon League History Museum in Westerville, Ohio. She suggested some names to research and gave us a*

*really good history of the Anti-Saloon League. She also provided us with some posters and flyers from the Prohibition Era.*

### **Museum Visit:**

Anti-Saloon League Museum, Westerville, Ohio 126 South State St. Westerville, Ohio 43081, visited October 12, 2010.

*We interviewed Mrs. Weinhardt and received copies of old posters and artifacts from this museum. It helped us learn more about the debate between Prohibitionists and "Wets." We used in our drama the flyers on Prohibition that she gave us.*

### **Reference Books:**

Davidson, James West. The American Nation, Civil War to the Present. Glenview, Illinois: Prentice Hall, 2003.

*This book helped us place our topic in historical context. We learned that World War I had just ended, and it was the Jazz Age. The economy was booming in this time period as well.*

Giglierno, Geoffrey J., Deborah Ann Overmyer, and Frederic L. Propas. The Bicentennial Guide to Greater Cincinnati: a portrait of two hundred years. Cincinnati, Ohio: Cincinnati Historical Society, 1988. Print.

*This book shows how much Prohibition affected the Germans of Cincinnati. The Germans played a huge role in Cincinnati; they had already established churches, orphanages, and German language institutes all over the city. As was said in the book "Three fifths of the beer brewed in Cincinnati was consumed locally. Around 1900 when the national per capita average was just over 16 gallons, Cincinnatians imbibed 58 gallons per capita." Surprisingly enough, when Prohibition hit, the Germans didn't break the law that much, although there were some exceptions. Wiedemann Brewing Company was accused of illegally making 1.5 million gallons of illegal beer. Prohibition pretty much wrecked Cincinnati's rich brewing industry, and the Germans took most of the burden.*

### **Websites:**

"Al Capone." Angelfire. <<http://www.angelfire.com/co/pscst/capone.html>> 11Oct. 2010.

*This article summarized the life of Alphonse Capone, one of America's most notorious gangsters who became a bootlegger when the 18th Amendment was passed. It explained how Capone (also known as Al Capone or Scarface) left school at sixth grade after a string of violent acts and became a member of the street gang led by Johnny Torrio and Lucky Luciano. To escape being arrested for a murder he committed, Capone escaped to Chicago where he and Torrio began to take over the alcohol industry.*

"Newport and Its Gangster History." Cincy Focus. March 31, 2010.  
[www.cincyfocus.com/2010'03/newport-and-its-gangster-history](http://www.cincyfocus.com/2010'03/newport-and-its-gangster-history).  
*From the 1930s to the 1960s, Newport, Kentucky turned into one of the "hottest" places for people to have a good time. Newport gained its reputation during prohibition. Businesses such as restaurants and cafes that had served alcohol legally now either had to lose profits or offer the illegal drinks in back rooms or "speakeasies" although in Newport they were called "tiger blinds." This article mentions some infamous persons who became legends in the shady history of Newport such as George Remus. Remus is a character in our drama.*

"Prohibition - Ohio History Central - A product of the Ohio Historical Society."  
Ohio History Central - An Online Encyclopedia of Ohio History – Ohio Historical Society. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Oct. 2010.  
<<http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=544>>.  
*We learned about Prohibition in Ohio in this article. It mentioned how women were the main anti-alcohol people. Women were upset with their husbands for spending too much money on alcohol. It helped us incorporate local news into our topic. Some people mentioned were John D. Rockefeller, Rudy Baker, and Wayne Wheeler.*

"Prohibition People and Terms - ProhibitionRepeal.com." *ProhibitionRepeal.com Home*. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Oct. 2010.  
<<http://www.prohibitionrepeal.com/history/people.asp>>.  
*This was a great article about different terms and people. Did you know the term "whale" meant "heavy drinker?" We used some of these terms and people as a guideline to narrowing down our topic. It also included the debate between men and women about Prohibition.*

Rosenberg, Jennifer "Prohibition" 20th Century History 11 Oct 2010  
<http://history1900s.about.com/od/1920s/p/prohibition.htm>.  
*This website was a great introduction to Prohibition. It included many important things, like the dates (1920-1933), the basics of Prohibition (a law prohibiting alcohol), and some of the places where it was most debated and life changing such as Chicago. It also included really good information about the debate between the gangsters (the people who smuggled beer illegally) and the anti saloons (prohibitors of alcohol).*

"Speakeasies." Hononegah High School. 6 Oct. 2010.  
<<http://alliance.ed.uiuc.edu.edu/cdrom/hononegah/prohibition/prohibition.htm>>.

*This article focused more on the aspects of organized crime that were a result of Prohibition. This was ironic considering that one of the main reasons for Prohibition, the article states, was to reduce violence caused by alcohol consumption.*

“1920’s Prohibition.” [1920-30.com](http://www.192030.com) Oct.2010. <http://www.192030.com/prohibition?>>.

*This article contained a basic summary of the conflicts and debates about Prohibition such as prohibitionist movements and laws passed to enforce it. It also included interesting information about how the system was corrupted; for instance, the law stated that ships three miles off American coastlines were able to stock alcohol. That was an easy way for bootleggers to gain access to their product.*