
Race in America's First War on Drugs

The campaign against alcohol that resulted in the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is America's best-known war on drugs, but it was not without precedent. The consumption of drugs was an issue even in the colonial period, when alcohol use by Indians, slaves, servants, and other social inferiors was considered a problem serious enough to merit legislation. The irony is that whites in this period were very heavy drinkers by contemporary standards. They consumed rum, beer, wine, hard cider, and whisky, all in large amounts. While some Puritan congregations considered alcoholism within their own community a problem, drinking per se was not particularly frowned on. What the colonials feared was the inebriation of their social inferiors, who might become dangerously out of control. Colonial laws restricting alcohol sales to Indians and other subordinated groups were not particularly effective, but they show how drugs, laws, and concerns about maintaining social hierarchies are connected (see, e.g., McWilliams, in press).

The nationwide Prohibition campaign and the contemporary war on drugs offer further evidence that anxieties about race and class hierarchies underlie the criminalization of drug use. Drinking and drug use became issues when immigration, urbanization, and the growth of industrial society shook up old hierarchies and began to transform American society. This chapter shows how racism and ethnic prejudices bolstered the case for criminalization in the Prohibition era. Although not always acknowledged in histories of the Prohibition movement, the role of racism is easy to see in the evolution of the anti-alcohol campaign. The moral entrepreneurs who led the criminalization campaign against alcohol, like those who led the campaign against crack and other drugs, found race a powerful tool in justifying drastic action.

In standard accounts of Prohibition, the emphasis is on the failure of the new law to change ingrained behavior and the consequences of that failure. This chapter looks in the opposite direction, at the creative effort that led to Prohibition. How did people convince themselves that alcohol use should be made a crime? The coming-to-be of Prohibition was a grass-roots movement of monumental proportions, the largest anti-drug campaign in U.S. history to arise out of popular sentiment, rather than from the government's own manipulation of public opinion. Government's role in the Prohibition movement was to respond, somewhat reluctantly at first, to pressure from the Anti-Saloon League and other activist organizations, rather than to promote its own agenda. Most public officials had not yet realized the potential for self-aggrandizement offered by a war on drugs.

The effort to control alcohol spanned a century and dominated local, state, and national campaigns for four decades. It was a decisive factor in three presidential elections, engaging every sector of society in debate about the dangers of alcohol. Prohibition changed American drinking habits. Prohibition also changed the relationship between states and the federal government, revealing the potential for a national drug policy and marking the beginning of federal encroachment into local law-enforcement concerns. The enactment of a federal Prohibition amendment was a huge victory for Progressives and for religious and other organizations determined to play a role in politics. Prohibition is also an object lesson in the power of moralistic argument in American politics.

Racial stereotypes figured prominently in this national effort, as it had in the Puritan-era anti-alcohol campaigns. In the South, the image was the menacing drunken Negro male and his inherent propensity to alcoholic excess. In the West, it was the drunken Indian. In the North, the racialized rallying point was the working-class immigrant who had no desire to assimilate. The use of race to push Prohibition was obvious and fundamental to the entire effort. The practical ramifications were devastating for Black citizens in the South. Blacks were falsely charged with being uniformly "wet"; this misrepresentation provided momentum to forces determined to take away the right of southern Blacks to vote. By the turn of the century, southern whites had changed their state constitutions to disenfranchise Blacks and poor whites. Northern Prohibitionists generally accepted this development without complaint in order to get the South to join their anti-alcohol campaign.

In the way it portrayed race, Prohibition was clearly a movement of a different age. The racial and ethnic images were flamboyant in publications of all

types, including national circulation magazines, scholarly journals, and the *New York Times*. There was no compunction about drawing on the crudest stereotypes of degeneracy in subordinated populations. Significant physical and mental differences were taken for granted. Blacks were assumed to be both mentally and morally inferior. The separatist proclivities of immigrants were assumed from their failure to speak English. Patronizing assumptions about white superiority and fears of “infection” by nonwhite elements were openly deployed to justify criminal controls. Native-born whites of the middling classes were encouraged to see themselves as bearers of the burden of alcohol prohibition for the sake of weaker souls in their midst.

This chapter begins with an overview of the movement from temperance to Prohibition. Subsequent sections look at how the effort developed, first in the North and then in the southern states. There were obvious changes in the racial tenor of the campaign as it progressed. Anti-alcohol advocates were at first eager to recruit members, and therefore welcomed everyone. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, as the movement focused less on volunteerism and more on punitive legal measures, activists more frequently deployed racist arguments. Racism and ethnic stereotyping gave energy to the campaign for criminal controls.

The Remarkable Fact of Prohibition

Temperance—the idea that the drinking of alcoholic beverages damages individuals, families, and society—was a matter of conviction among many people nearly a century before Prohibition took effect. In the 1820s and 1830s, Protestant ministers around the nation were actively promoting temperance in their sermons. The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), founded in 1874 in the Reconstruction South by Christian evangelicals, helped to organize already existing temperance sentiment among women. There were also secular groups dedicated to reforming American drinking habits. The dominant spirit of the early movement was benevolent reformism, which concentrated on persuading drinkers to embrace abstinence, or at least moderation, in order to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

Reform efforts nevertheless had a coercive element, and this side of the movement grew as many drinkers proved resistant to the call for abstinence. The message was both moralistic and perfectionistic, appealing to some of the same sentiments that grounded the anti-slavery movement, with which temperance became associated in the 1850s. By 1856, eight states had passed

some form of legislation to limit the sale of alcohol. Most of these laws left the liquor question to localities. Some towns and small cities opted for stringent regulation of dram shops, rather than an outright ban on the sale of liquor. Experimentation and debate were the rule in this period, with some towns prohibiting all sales of alcoholic beverages for a few years, and then repealing the most onerous restrictions a few years later.

In the North, the movement became more coercive near the end of the nineteenth century, fueled partly by dissemination of scientific findings suggesting that alcohol was quite harmful to the human body, and partly by fear of the burgeoning immigrant classes then crowding into the slums of American cities and showing an interest in unionization. The new immigrants tended to be of peasant stock from eastern and central Europe, and they were growing in number, to nearly 1 million per year in 1900. In addition, uneducated Blacks were arriving from the rural South.

Some Prohibition advocates brought these two concerns together, suggesting that the industrializing environment was growing too competitive to tolerate alcohol use by the flood of new immigrants (Patton 1891, 706). Social workers focused on the corrupting power of the liquor industry and on the saloon as the breeder of poverty, prostitution, vice, and crime. Embedded in this critique was discomfort about the impact of the Irish, Germans, Italians, and other newcomers on American political traditions:

The saloon fosters an un-American spirit among the foreign-born population of our country. The influx of foreigners into our urban centers, many of whom have liquor habits, is a menace to good government. . . . [T]he foreign-born population is largely under the social and political control of the saloon. If the cities keep up their rapid growth, they will soon have the balance of political power in the nation and become the storm centers of political life. The hope of perpetuating our liberties is to help the foreigners correct any demoralizing custom, and through self-restraint assimilate American ideals. (Barker, *The Saloon Problem*, quoted in Timberlake 1963, 118)

Bars and saloons became a rallying point for reform in 1895 with the formation of the Anti-Saloon League, one of the nation's first single-interest groups. Refusing to align itself with any party, the League focused on individual candidates, supporting anyone who was anti-alcohol, including reformed alcoholics. At first, it concentrated on state-level Prohibition, but soon the League began to press for an amendment to the Constitution that would prohibit the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages.

The Temperance Movement in the South

The fear of immigrants that animated the anti-alcohol campaign in the North was largely absent in the South. There the perceived menace was drinking by the indigenous poor, especially Blacks. The images were often lurid:

The primitive Negro field hand, a web of strong, sudden impulses, good and bad, comes into town or settlement on Saturday afternoon and pays his fifty cents for a pint of Mr. Levy's gin. He absorbs not only its toxic heat, but absorbs also the suggestions, subtly conveyed, that it contains aphrodisiacs. He sits in the road or in the alley at the height of his debauch, looking at that obscene picture of a white woman on the label, drinking in the invitation which it carries. And then comes—opportunity. There follows the hideous episode of the rope or the stake. (Irwin 1908, 28)

As in the North, the political effort began with pressure for local option legislation, but eventuated in strong southern support for a national amendment. In the short period between the summer of 1907 and early 1909, for example, six southern states adopted Prohibitionist legislation, outlawing the sale of alcohol and its manufacture for sale. Historian Dewey Grantham estimates that “the movement to prohibit the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages may well have been the most dynamic and passionately supported ‘reform’ in the South during the Progressive era” (1983, 160). Supporters preached that Prohibition would help end political corruption and would bring the South into the modern era through government's re-assertion of traditional values of respect for family and community. The argument was that alcohol “retards the highest development of the individual, and the prosperity of the community. The ablest and most far-sighted leaders of Southern opinion have come to the realization of this truth. . . . The South needs for its development capital and intelligent and diversified labor. It cannot attract either if industry is made irregular and life and property insecure through the multiplication of doggeries and dives” (Foxcraft 1908, 632). The movement gained support from the fact that it did not seek to end home brewing or personal consumption of alcohol, traditions that were long established among wealthy and rural classes in the South. It was commerce in alcohol and drinking in public that was under attack.

Evangelicals, numerous in the South, were an important part of this movement. They had long disdained alcohol as the root of many social problems, and they were becoming more willing to advocate for legislation that would advance their views. Their advocacy of morals legislation, Ted Ownby suggests, “showed that evangelicals were coming to terms with a larger world

by trying to conquer it. No longer satisfied to separate themselves from the sinful excesses of non-evangelical behavior, they now tried to stamp out many sins altogether” (1990, 208). As the movement developed, those attracted were not just the religiously devout, but also social justice advocates and business interests (Grantham 1983, 161). The legal reform agenda was broader than alcohol. It included proposals to eliminate gambling, prostitution, prizefights, and even spitting and swearing. The regulation of business and public services was also part of this reformist effort (Pegram 1997, 59). As Reverend John White wrote in 1908:

The intelligent people of the South are looking upon Prohibition, not as a temperance reform, but as statesmanship—a public policy, favorable to religion, favorable to education, favorable to industry, favorable to the coming generation, and as a necessity of Southern conditions in particular, and as an ideal of social obligation to the broad general good. (135)

America’s emergence into World War I spurred the national Prohibition movement in both the North and South. Anti-German sentiment was high, and it was noted that a large proportion of the breweries and saloons in the United States were owned and operated by Germans or German Americans. It also seemed unpatriotic to make alcohol when the nation was rationing itself to send grain shipments to Europe (Slosson 1935, 106). The adoption of Prohibition began to be regarded as part of the war effort (Warburton 1932, 42). The determined efforts of Protestant clergymen and women’s groups were paying off. The availability of alcohol was beginning to seem like a serious social problem that demanded a national response. But the idea of national Prohibition also tapped the growing confidence in the reform capacities of government that was characteristic of the Progressive era. Not all Progressives favored Prohibition, but most of them did.

The Coming of Prohibition

These forces created a confluence of circumstances favorable to Prohibition. A new wave of state laws took effect around 1906, just before the Anti-Saloon League began campaigning for a national amendment. At that point, the momentum began to swing toward national Prohibition. By 1914, fourteen states had approved Prohibition, and many others had allowed localities to go dry by local option. Three-fourths of the area of the United States had outlawed saloons, and the South had almost entirely gone dry. In many areas, only the large cities and mill towns remained wet. Chicago,

for example, had more saloons than all the states in the South combined (Slosson 1935, 105).

Advocates of national Prohibition confronted scattered opposition. Clarence Darrow argued in a 1909 speech that working people needed protection from industrial machinery and mining hazards a lot more than they needed Prohibition (quoted in Monahan 1909, 89–91). Labor leaders described the movement in hostile terms: “All this temperance legislation proceeds on the theory that those who patronize saloons or who take a drink are weak or irresponsible or need a guardian” (Monahan 1909, 87–88). But most politicians, including Al Smith, who later made repeal a central plank in his 1928 bid for president, did not oppose the Eighteenth Amendment at this time. Those who provided the ethnic grist for the Prohibition campaign and those offended by it had no effective avenues for complaint:

Only brewers, distillers, and other commercial interests made strenuous efforts to block the reform. Individuals and groups offended by the challenge to their ethnic cultural traditions or by the limitation of their right to choose what to drink objected to the national liquor ban, but they lacked the channels and agents to give their protest focus and strength. (Kyvig 2000, 5)

At this point, the campaign for the Eighteenth Amendment was moving “like a whirlwind” (Kyvig 2000, 5). The Senate and the House of Representatives approved the constitutional proposal in 1917, and within five years, forty-four states had ratified the amendment, which prohibited “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. . . .” This was arguably the most important legislation the Progressive era produced.

Enforcing Prohibition

Once adopted, Prohibition seemed impregnable, regardless of the opposition it aroused (Pegram 1998, 166). Most observers, Kyvig notes, assumed that liquor would quickly disappear from the American scene: “The possibility that a constitutional mandate would be ignored simply did not occur to them” (2000, 20; and see 53–54). Prohibition had strong bipartisan support in the House and Senate. The amendment had been adopted by large majorities in most states, and history itself seemed to suggest its invincibility: No amendment to the Constitution had ever been rescinded.

Both political parties were deferential to the single-issue Prohibitionists, although the Republicans, as the party in power, became associated with the law's enforcement. Democrats in Congress were of somewhat mixed minds about their support because many of them had ties to unions and ethnic groups opposed to the policy. But the strong public sentiment in favor of Prohibition made them reluctant to push for repeal.

From the outset, however, there was resistance to Prohibition at the local level, particularly in places where immigrant populations were large and politically organized. New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts responded to the federal government's first enforcement statute, the 1919 Volstead Act, with state laws permitting the production and sale of low-alcohol beer and light wines (Pegram 1998, 151). Although these laws were later overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court, a consistent supporter of national Prohibition legislation, state-level defiance was a sign of problems to come. Many immigrants continued to make beer and wine as they had in the past. Constantine Panunzio, a sociologist who studied the reaction to Prohibition among immigrants, observed that ethnic and working-class groups remained steadfast in their opposition to Prohibition:

The first broad fact to be recorded is that the foreign born of all European nationalities at no time conformed to Prohibition. There were groups, consisting mainly of Protestants and some reformers, who conformed. . . . But generally speaking, the foreign born of European extraction or culture, as well as many of their American-born children, did not adhere to the movement. (1934, 120)

Support for Prohibition soon began to wane among urban professionals, a traditionally abstemious sector of the population. Spurred on by the prosperous 1920s, a secular consumer culture was emerging: "Whereas saloons had offended middle-class sensibilities before Prohibition, Prohibition-era speakeasies furnished enjoyment and a hint of illegal adventure to the self-indulgent new middle class of the 1920s" (Pegram 1998, 168, 177). Women, to the chagrin of Prohibitionists, were among those participating. In the past, women had been the mainstay of the movement, both in the churches and in somewhat more secular organizations, most famously, the WCTU.

Despite these defections, the political commitment to the idea of national Prohibition remained strong throughout the 1920s. Members of Congress spoke eloquently in favor of Prohibition, and those who opposed the policy lost elections. It became increasingly obvious, however, that the political commitment was more rhetorical than pragmatic. Congress appropriated

only \$6 to \$10 million per year between 1921 and 1926 for enforcement (Pegram 1998, 159). The actual need, one federal official estimated, was closer to \$300 million per year (Warburton 1932, 44–45).

Prohibitionists complained that the funds committed to enforcement were inadequate at every level. Most of the states passed “baby Volstead” acts, some of which were very severe, but they spent little money to enforce them. The states had spent a total of only \$550,000 by 1923; in 1927, twenty-eight states allocated no funds at all for the purpose (Pegram 1998, 159). Convictions under the Volstead Act never exceeded 60,000 per year, and acquittals were frequent, reaching 20,000 in 1928, for example (Pegram 1998, 159). As Warburton notes: “It was truthfully remarked that the dries had the law and the wets had the liquor” (1932, 45).¹

The consumption of alcohol probably did decline during Prohibition, though it is difficult to know because the practice went underground. It is clear, for example, that the market for illegal drink was huge and growing during the 1920s. Home brewing and distilling had become major sources of alcohol for consumers in cities. Weak and corrupt enforcement efforts ensured that there were plenty of people in the business of selling alcohol to Americans determined to drink it. In urban areas, they tended to be young, white, ethnic entrepreneurs willing to run and sell liquor with the support of criminal gangs. Prohibition had spawned an ethnic vice industry.²

Temperance as a Symbolic Crusade

The real prize in the struggle over Prohibition, sociologist Joseph Gusfield suggests, was the amendment itself, not an actual revolution in drinking habits. Effective enforcement was never the point. The consumption of alcohol—like gambling, political corruption, and illicit sex—can be expected to continue because people enjoy doing it. The tendency toward nonenforcement does not make these laws unimportant or insignificant, however. Prohibition served the important purpose of differentiating groups and assigning status. It marked the supremacy of small-town and rural middle-class, white Protestant morality over the norms of the foreign-born, the Catholics, the Jews, and the Blacks—groups who were believed to have another approach to alcohol. Most important, these groups threatened the old order by their growing numbers and their growing economic significance in industrial society (1986, 6).

Conflicts over status and rank are real conflicts, even though we do not always recognize them as such, Gusfield argues:

A political model that ignores symbolic action in politics would exclude an important category of governmental action. It is a major way in which conflicts in the social order are institutionalized as political issues. Groups form around such issues, symbols are given specific meaning, and opposing forces have some arena in which to test their power and bring about compromise and accommodation, if possible. This is precisely what the issues of Prohibition and Temperance have enabled the status groups involved as Wets and Drys to accomplish. (1986, 182)

Temperance, Gusfield concludes, was about which status group would be dominant in the new century, with alcohol consumption marking the difference among the groups: "Drinking (and abstinence) has been one of the significant consumption habits distinguishing one subculture from another. It has been one of the major characteristics through which Americans have defined their own cultural commitments" (Gusfield 1986, 3; and see 5–6, 23, 29–30). This point was also evident to some critical observers of the time:

How many Roman Catholics are Prohibitionists? How many Jews, the most temperate race on earth, are to be found in the ranks of Prohibition? Or Lutherans? Or German Protestants generally? What is the proportion of Episcopalians to that of Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians, and the like, in the active Prohibition army? The answer to these questions will, I venture to say, prove conclusively the assertion that the fight for Prohibition is synonymous with the fight of a certain religious sect, or group of religious sects, for the supremacy of its ideas. (Andreae 1915, 12)

Prohibitionists were also unself-conscious about using racial rhetoric to argue for the cause. The Anti-Saloon League, a leader in the drive for Prohibition, was clear in its white supremacist stance: "The Anglo-Saxon stock is the best improved, hardiest and fittest—if we are to preserve this nation and the Anglo-Saxon type, we must abolish saloons" (quoted in Gusfield 1986, 100). The rhetoric grew even more extreme later as it became clear that Prohibition was a failing campaign:

The political influence which appoints grafting agents, protects bootleggers, and corrupts courts, finds a powerful support in our alien population. Our experience during the war disclosed conditions that otherwise we might not have realized for another generation. We discovered among us what are practically colonies of foreign peoples who are not assimilated and have no desire to become assimilated. We found five millions of foreign birth who cannot read, write, nor speak the English language.

If naturalized . . . they will call themselves, not Americans, but German-Americans, Irish-Americans, Italian-Americans, Greek-Americans, Polish-Americans, or whatever other prefix may denote the nationality to which they cling. . . . These insoluble lumps of unassimilated and unas-similable peoples are “wet” by heredity and habit. They come from wine-drinking nations and, ignorant of our language and laws, they see no reason why as citizens of what they understand is a “free country” they should not manufacture, sell, and use the liquor to which they are accus-tomed. They vote as racial groups and seek to impose their racial views on Congress and state legislatures. (Oakley 1923, 127–28)

This vengeful analysis came not from a fringe element in the movement, but from a mainstream figure, Imogen Oakley, an officer in the General Federation of Women's Clubs. The WCTU, an organization of upper-class, educated women, was similar in deeming liquor as alien and un-American, a despicable “foreign influence.” Along with other organizations in the movement, the WCTU became a supporter of legislation to drastically limit immigration. It was joined by the Ku Klux Klan, a strong advocate of Prohibition and immigration control.

Even members of the clergy promoted Prohibition by cultivating fear of foreigners and prejudice against Jews and Catholics. The most prominent and notorious among them, Methodist Bishop James Cannon, was an activist in the Anti-Saloon League and influential figure in Washington. Cannon campaigned tirelessly against the presidential bid of Catholic Al Smith, a supporter of repeal, and he did not hesitate to reveal his anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic views: “Governor Smith wants the Italians, the Sicilians, the Poles and the Russian Jews. That kind has given us a stomachache. We have been unable to assimilate such people in our national life, so we shut the door to them. But Smith says, ‘give me that kind of people.’ He wants the kind of dirty people that you find today on the sidewalks of New York” (quoted in Dabney 1949, 188).

The tendency to draw on anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic epithets to characterize the opposition continued, even after repeal of Prohibition. For example, Ernest Gordon, in his pro-Prohibition book, *The Wrecking of the Eighteenth Amendment*, describes “the debacle” of repeal with reference to “Mr. Celler, a Jewish representative from Brooklyn” and “his Russian Jewish colleague, Mr. Dickstein” (1943, 202).

Anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic rhetoric also played well in the southern states. But whites there were much more preoccupied with maintaining the system of white supremacy than with conflicts over immigrant influence.

Lacking large industrial cities, the South was not a magnet for foreign immigration in this period. Maintaining white control in states with large populations of citizens who had once been slaves, however, was a major challenge. It should not be surprising that racism played an important role in the Prohibition movement in the former Confederacy and, less directly, in the North as well.

Anti-Black Racism: Unacknowledged Bulwark of the Prohibitionist Cause

Alcohol, many Prohibition-era whites assumed, demoralized and debauched Black men, reducing their efficiency as workers and fueling the secret lust they allegedly harbored for white women. Barrooms were thought to create the potential for serious racial conflict because they encouraged uninhibited behavior among the poorer classes of both racial groups. To some extent, the concern was paternalistic. Many dry leaders were convinced that Prohibition would prove morally and economically beneficial to Blacks. Reverend John White, for example, pronounced Prohibition “the opportunity to emphasize our recognition of the South’s responsibility for the negro’s moral welfare. Anglo-Saxon supremacy should thus be exercised in consideration of our kindly concern about his development in our midst” (1908, 141). This idea attracted even some Black leaders, most notably Booker T. Washington, who characterized Prohibition as a “moral movement” that would benefit both races (Walton and Taylor 1971, 247; Grantham 1983, 176). Washington’s position suggests the complexity of the issue for African Americans, who sought to participate in the national dialogue, but who were handicapped by the limitations of white racism and by their marginalized status. Ultimately, they were unable to resist the tendency for whites to objectify them in the rush to legislate.

Preston Slosson describes the overwhelming support that eventually developed in favor of Prohibition in the southern states and its connection with racial issues:

The attitude of the South is unmistakable. Nearly the whole section was dry by state law before the federal amendment was proposed, and the Southern states, in spite of traditional state-rights scruples, were among the first to approve the Eighteenth Amendment and the staunchest in supporting it against later attack. In part this may be explained by the predominantly rural character of the South, as the great cities were always the centers of opposition to prohibitory laws; in part also by the absence of European immigrant colonies to whom wine and beer were as

much a matter of course, as milk and water. But undoubtedly the major factor was the widespread conviction that to the Negro, as to the Indian, alcohol was a perilous incitement to crimes of violence. (1935, 108; see also 253)

The struggle over Prohibition in the South thus involved the kinds of middle-class concerns over competing visions of the coming era that Gusfield found in the North, but also a race and social control element that tended to unite southern whites of all walks in life against their nonwhite fellow citizens. Racial antagonism energized Prohibitionism in the South, as ethnic and class antagonism fueled Prohibitionist fervor in the North.

The question of how to develop a unified Prohibition movement was complicated by the Civil War and postwar strains in the relationship between the North and South. White southerners firmly rejected the postwar effort of northern Prohibitionists, many with roots in the anti-slavery movement, to develop a racially integrated anti-alcohol movement. The ultimate solution to the “problem” of Black participation in the political debate over Prohibition was disenfranchisement in the South and passive acceptance of this development in the North.

Alcohol as a “Negro Problem”

In the 1700s, even before the temperance movement had a name, there were concerns among whites about drinking by Blacks (see, e.g., Walton and Taylor 1971). Liquor was widely available because the South’s agricultural economy made it easy to produce brandy and other forms of alcohol. In Alabama, James Sellers notes, “nearly every well-regulated plantation and farm had its own distillery and a considerable quantity must have been produced” (1943, 27). Plantations and farms sold what they did not drink. Alcohol was also part of the slavery system, used by masters to reward their slaves and to increase output. The habit of consuming alcohol had been part of the African societies from which the slaves came, so it was easy to assimilate it into the system (Lusane 1991, 28–29). Slaves were also part of the alcohol distribution network. They were often sent to buy alcohol for their masters, but they were also allowed to buy it to drink themselves and for resale to other slaves (Pearson and Hendricks 1967, 26–27).

Many whites were uncomfortable with this arrangement, regarding Blacks as too irresponsible to be trusted with regulating their own alcohol consumption. A subtext in the elaborate chivalry of the period was the fear that white women would be violated by Black men. Alcohol was believed

to elevate the risk, a perspective that was reflected in early state liquor laws. Virginia's regulations date from 1705, when all liquor traffic with slaves was forbidden without the master's consent (Pearson and Hendricks 1967, 25–26). The Alabama territory began regulating alcohol sales to slaves and to Indians in the 1760s (Sellers 1943, 3–4, 11–12). Tennessee passed a similar law in 1779 (Walton 1970).

Free Blacks were also considered a problem because they sometimes sold liquor to slaves. An 1822 Alabama law made it illegal for “any free Negro or mulatto, either directly or indirectly, to retail any kind of spirituous liquors within this state” (quoted in Sellers 1943, 29). These concerns grew stronger after the Nat Turner rebellion in 1831, when fear of slave uprisings led to a new round of liquor legislation covering both slaves and free Blacks. An 1832 Alabama law forbid liquor sales at any public meeting and fined masters who allowed these purchases knowing that their slaves would resell (Sellers 1943, 29; Pearson and Hendricks 1967, 27). During this period Tennessee first regulated, then eventually forbade, liquor sales to free Blacks (Walton 1970). But prosecutions were rare before the Civil War. Pearson and Hendricks sum up the public mood, which regarded alcohol consumption by Blacks as regrettable, but common, despite the law: “Even more objectionable than permitting on-premise drinking was selling to slaves. This was done extensively, as is shown by numerous petitions, laws, newspaper reports, proposals in lodges, and private correspondence which speak against the practice” (1967, 116–17).

Yet increasingly alcohol was also beginning to be seen by some southerners as a menace in its own right. The temperance movement was making inroads on the region's traditional tolerance for heavy drinking. A temperance society in Northern Neck, Virginia, for example, described drunkenness as a “prevalent, loathsome, and pernicious vice” that “brings thousands prematurely to the grave; fills the land with widows, and orphans; reduces multitudes of amiable families to poverty and wretchedness; populates our poor-houses, prisons, and penitentiaries; and tends to the subversion of all order, and the universal prostration of morals in society” (reprinted in Pearson and Hendricks 1967, 308).

Racial Separatism and the Temperance Movement in the South

The prewar temperance movement in the South, as in the North, focused more on amelioration than on coercion through legislation. The appeal was mostly to the religiously observant middle classes, who joined in significant numbers. The movement directed itself to both races. Records indicate

that slaves and free Blacks undertook abstinence in significant numbers. In Petersburg, Virginia, for example, approximately three hundred African Americans were among the one thousand people who reportedly took the pledge in 1843 (Pearson and Hendricks 1967, 93). Temperance societies also focused on children and students, many of whom signed pledges.

There was no inclination, however, to reconsider the fundamental relationship between the races. White southerners had no patience for arguments linking the condition of alcohol addiction to the institution of slavery. This put northern organizations in a difficult position. They were under pressure from abolitionists to take more account of the interest of Blacks in temperance and to include the abolition of slavery as part of their platform. Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison excoriated the temperance movement for its failure to argue for abolition of slavery and for cooperating with slaveholders in promoting abstinence (Walton and Taylor 1971). But when northern-based temperance societies did include an abolitionist plank in their campaigns, their southern supporters protested bitterly and then dropped their association with the national movement (Pearson and Hendricks 1967, 88–89).

After the Civil War freed the slaves and Reconstruction provided Black males with the franchise, the alcohol issue became more complex. Restrictions on Black purchases and consumption of alcohol were repealed in the wave of Reconstruction-era reforms. Alcohol became more generally available in most states. In Virginia, for example, tipping houses once again became legal. Restrictions on licenses to sell alcohol were removed. Pearson and Hendricks describe a trend toward democracy in drinking that permitted alcohol consumption by the South's newly enfranchised Black citizens:

In the cities one's opportunity to select resulted in Negro barrooms. But in the country, where three-fourths of these institutions were, the Negro came in perhaps by a separate door but drank from an end of the same counter as the whites. If he was impolite or failed to "know his place" the bartender threw him out. Whether from lack of inclination or of time or of money the numerous plantation Negroes were apt to come only on Saturdays when they would loll around and perhaps take home a bottle. . . . Ladies sometimes complained that the stores and the streets were unpleasant for them and later there was widespread terror of drunken Negroes in rural areas. These things were incidental—the customers did not object. The barroom was a man's institution in a man's world. (1967, 164–65)

Yet the temperance issue remained controversial and divisive, both among Blacks and whites. Both Prohibitionists and anti-Prohibitionists

campaigned for the Black vote (Walton 1970, 730). Although whites often claimed that Blacks always voted wet, organizational records show that many Blacks had joined temperance societies and taken the abstinence pledge. Records show that at least one African American man was a speaker at a state temperance convention in Tennessee, and there were mixed rallies and committees on both sides of the issue in other border states (Walton 1970, 731). Booker T. Washington encouraged Blacks to create their own temperance societies, which they did in significant numbers (Walton and Taylor 1971, 247).

Outside the South, the temperance movement in the Reconstruction period began more openly to acknowledge Black interest in the cause. When northern lodges in the United Order of True Reformers were established in 1874, some of them admitted African Americans. In the South, however, white members of the organization segregated themselves in separate lodges and dominated the local movement (Walton and Taylor 1971, 160–61). The same happened with the Good Templars, whose national headquarters decided in 1866 that skin color should not determine membership. Southern whites first attempted to set up separate lodges, but when the national organization ordered racial integration, the southern units quit and founded their own society, resolving that “we will submit to no action by any parties, whether individuals or Lodges, which interferes with, or disturbs the social relations of the white and colored races” (Sellers 1943, 46–49).

Temperance-minded southern whites had little confidence in the capacity of even temperance-oriented Blacks to manage liquor or in their organizational skills and dependability. Most significantly, they feared that Black participation in the crusade would dissuade whites from joining the movement. Black volunteers were often turned away by white temperance organizations, including churches (Sellers 1943, 240, 282). Disagreement with the prevailing policy of racial apartheid was risky. When Baptist minister John R. Moffett, a lifelong temperance advocate, gave a sermon in his Danville, Virginia, church condemning white supremacy as contrary to God’s plan in 1891, whites were outraged. Political leaders declared he should be hanged. Soon afterwards he was shot dead in the street by a bartender who was never prosecuted (Pearson and Hendricks 1967, 217–18).

Racial Scapegoating to Promote Prohibition

Anti-Black attitudes were hardening in this period, and media images of drunken Blacks helped to fuel the growing racist sentiment. The press and politicians circulated stories of Blacks freely indulging in alcohol and of

racial mixing in saloons, creating a sense of urgency among whites to make drastic changes. The Progressive movement, with its emphasis on government as the route to social betterment, was part of this development. Sellers describes the connection between southern white uneasiness about Reconstruction, Progressivism, and the anti-alcohol movement:

Men glimpsed new possibilities of government action and control. And in the social upheaval caused by the sudden freeing of the Negroes a greater urgency than ever before was added to the cause. Fear of the drunken black man spurred the temperance people to take more vigorous measures to promote Prohibition. Here was a problem which must be solved for public safety as well as for public morality. The saloon, where blacks and whites mingled and where crime was bred, must go. (1943, 51; see also 96)

Race riots in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898 and in Atlanta in 1906 also frightened the white political establishment. The riots were blamed, in part, on excessive drinking in saloons, which had allegedly caused the mobs to lose control, setting Blacks and poor whites against each other. More fundamentally, the riots were seen as evidence of a breakdown in social order brought about by the North's ill-founded theory of racial equality. Some politicians called for the reassertion of white supremacy and for repeal of the Civil War amendments. Historian Charles Crowe draws on the political discourse of the day to describe the frenzied 1905–6 campaign for the governorship of Georgia in which images of Black sexual license and white chivalry dominated the debate:

If the black man as sexual criminal illustrated ultimate evil, “the most precious flower of Southern womanhood” before “defilement” represented the highest good. Leaders reminded Georgians that society existed, first of all, to protect “the imperious beauty, the immaculate virtue of Caucasian women,” the “most beautiful and purest women . . . in all of history.” (1968, 249)

The Prohibition movement was similar in drawing on racist imagery about Black sexual predation in order to gain support. Consider, for example, the way Prohibition advocate John Temple Graves described the coming of Prohibition to Georgia:

No one thing outside of religion, however, has had so telling an influence upon this movement as the effect of bad liquor upon lawless Negroes. The rural South has passed, within the last five years, through a reign of

terror from this source. Upon the Southern farms every man has left his home for work with apprehension in the morning and thanked God when he returned from his fields at the evening to find all well with the women of his home. The Atlanta riot, terrible and lamentable as it was, was an abnormal outburst of apprehension over the appalling increase of the crime of crimes that was casting a shadow over every Southern home in suburb and small city and on the farms. And the idea became lodged in the Southern mind that the brutal impulse behind these fiendish assaults was fired and inspired by the rotten whiskey and the viler cocaine and other drugs which were dispensed to the Negro race. (1908, 88–89)

Many southern whites became convinced that the route to racial calm and general improvement of conditions was through strong restrictions on the consumption of alcoholic beverages (Pegram 1998, 126–27). The biggest impediment to this reform, they believed, was the Black vote. Whites who favored temperance complained that they were forced to choose between racial solidarity, which usually required voting Democratic and wet, and voting their views. In the words of an observer sympathetic to the white southern position:

The smallest split in the ranks of the party might mean the end of white control. To permit the discussion and division so essential to democracy and progress and to bring an end to the necessity for fraud, many leaders of the Democratic party in Virginia as elsewhere in the South decided that disfranchisement of the Negro was necessary.” (Pearson and Hendricks 1967, 227n; see also 230; Grantham 1983, 164)

Temperance Becomes an Argument for Disenfranchisement of Black Citizens

The most respectable segments of white southern society began to argue for disenfranchisement of Black voters in the post-Reconstruction period. Protestant churches preached the necessity for “the purification” of suffrage, while political candidates criticized each other for any softness on the issue of white supremacy. Politicians who had once courted the Black vote were at pains to distance themselves from their previous position, advocating complete political disenfranchisement and strict segregation of the races in all social situations “to “improve race relations” (Crowe 1968, 245). The racial undertone was threatening, with threats of retaliatory violence and talk of colonization and deportation coming from respected spokespersons, such as Prohibitionist John Temple Graves (Crowe 1968, 253). Temperance

was an important part of this discussion. Whites saw the Black vote as a serious threat to their best reformist impulses: "When it became evident that white factions would compete with one another for the Negro vote, and thus frequently give the Negro the balance of power, it was time for the complete disenfranchisement of the Negro, the Fifteenth Amendment to the contrary notwithstanding" (Franklin and Moss 1988, 235).

The legal changes the southern states adopted to effectuate disenfranchisement were carefully crafted in apparently race-neutral terms to avoid critical review by the Supreme Court. Typical features were poll taxes, exclusion of voters convicted of certain crimes, and exclusion of the illiterate and those who could not interpret constitutional provisions. Mississippi was the first state to write these changes into its constitution in 1890. The handful of Black delegates at the state constitutional convention objected strongly, but they were outvoted, with only two whites joining them in opposition to disenfranchisement (see generally Dittmer 1977). The movement to take away the Black vote soon became a stampede, despite some objections from organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and from scholars and journalists sympathetic to the suffering of southern Blacks (e.g., Baker 1904/1973). By 1910 Black men and some poor, landless whites had been disenfranchised, not just in Mississippi, but also in North and South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, Virginia, Georgia, and Oklahoma (Baker 1904/1973, 237). White southerners were, in general, proud of this accomplishment, regarding it as a "purification" of the electoral system (Crowe 1968).

The Prohibitionist cause had given the disenfranchisement movement a principle on which to stand. As Reverend John White explained, Blacks are "child-people" requiring protection from "the perils of liberty." Disenfranchisement allowed whites to act responsibly, shaping law to protect Blacks from their own animal instincts: "This idea of the negro is more pronounced in the Prohibition movement. It stands out more nobly. The saloon was the ravager of the negro people. It plundered them at all points, robbed them of their wages, fed their animalism, and was, as everyone knows, a debauching agent let loose by law upon them" (1908, 136; and see Pegram 1997, 75). A. J. McKelway, famous for his campaigns against child labor, described the coming of Prohibition to Georgia in these terms:

The United States Government has protected that other weaker race, the Indian, from the operations of the liquor traffic. The United States and Great Britain have combined to protect the Pacific Islanders. It will hardly be disputed that the Negro needs the same protection. And the

white people of the South have resolved to protect him. . . . The disenfranchisement of Negroes is the heart of the movement in Georgia and throughout the South for the Prohibition of the liquor traffic. (1907, 949)

The southern press uniformly treated disenfranchisement as a Progressive reform, based on the need to control the easy availability of alcohol. In the words of an editorial in the *Alabama Baptist* in 1908: “The stronghold of the whiskey power in the state has been eliminated by the disfranchisement of the Negro, and others like him” (quoted in Sellers 1943, 101). The press also conceptualized the problem in terms of the morally stronger (white) protecting the morally weaker (Black, Indian, and foreign-born) races from the evils of alcohol and the menace and violence of the “liquor-crazed Black.” A sense of the mood of the times can be gained by noting the popularity of D. W. Griffith’s incendiary white supremacist film, *Birth of a Nation*, which mined the theme of dependent Negroes made crazy, irresponsible, and dangerous by drink. The 1915 film drew large audiences and a presidential endorsement of its accuracy, as well as published denunciations from the NAACP and W. E. B. Du Bois for its racism.

The White South Embraces Prohibition and Disenfranchisement

With a few years, the South had generally gone dry. The law was relatively successful in some states. In Virginia, regulators set up rules for enforcement and an inspection system. Prosecutions and convictions were frequent, particularly against Blacks (Pearson and Hendricks 1967, 296–97). Wealthy whites avoided prosecution by using private stocks and by relying on a legal exemption permitting property owners to consume one quart of alcohol per month.

As the bootlegging industry gained ground and speakeasies began to attract a middle-class white clientele in the 1920s, however, the pattern of enforcement changed somewhat, and more whites were charged with liquor-law violations. In Alabama, the number of white women arrested for drunkenness and driving while drunk became a cause for comment in the newspapers, which noted that about half of those arrested were middle-aged females, and that “the entire group was not confined to the lower class of women by any means” (Sellers 1943, 255). The arrest and conviction of whites eventually weakened the South’s resolve and spurred calls for repeal.

As this brief history suggests, Prohibitionists in the North and the South differed in the precise fears they cultivated to promote their cause, but moral entrepreneurs on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line were alike in

giving urgency to the movement by cultivating contemporary fears of social disorder, particularly along racial and ethnic lines. This logic, as Ted Ownby points out, applied equally well to immigrants and southern Blacks:

Prohibitionists always associated drinking with a loss of self-control, a concern that was becoming ever stronger in the post-bellum South. Just as many Prohibitionists outside the region were concerned with the drinking behavior of the great numbers of recent non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants, white Southern Prohibitionists were troubled and often frightened by the drinking behavior of Blacks. (1990, 172; and see 193, 208–9)

Similarly, where Indians were numerous, as in Oklahoma, the specter of their drunkenness provided a rallying point for reform (Franklin 1971, 13).

The willingness of northern Prohibitionists to accept the South's disenfranchisement of its Black voters is a significant part of this story. Activists were aware that white southerners were using their cause to justify disenfranchisement. The northern press was critical as it covered the issue. Yet there was no strong white constituency supporting the political cause of southern Blacks in this period. Many whites at least passively supported racial segregation, viewing Blacks as social and intellectual inferiors. Black votes were courted pragmatically, but there was little support for the important causes, like a federal anti-lynching bill, despite the obvious need for one. It should not be surprising that the response of the northern-based Anti-Saloon League to the disenfranchisement movement in the South was to go along, shaping its message to white southern values. The organization worked with political machines and reformist southern churches, "crafting racist arguments that dovetailed with the formal resurgence of white supremacy in the early twentieth century" (Pegram 1997, 60). A few leaders were uncomfortable with "the local practice of race relations," but they were criticized by others, who urged the necessity of adapting to the local political environment (Pegram 1997, 63).

The solution of the WCTU was to stay on message about alcohol as a women's issue, but to give the organization's white southerners implicit license to discriminate against their African American colleagues. The stance is striking in light of the otherwise forward-looking character of this organization, one of the first to engage women in political reform. The WCTU was determined to include both Black and white members—it did not want to be categorized as racist domestically or abroad (Tyrrell 1991, 101; Mattingly 1998, 75). But it nevertheless took note of the color line. Chapters tended to be segregated by race, and the organization shied away from attacking white supremacy. Ida B. Wells, for example, sharply criticized the leadership

for its failure to take a strong stand on lynching (Bordin 1990, 82–83; Tyrell 1991, 185; see especially Mattingly 1998, chap. 4). Toward the end of the century, the WCTU began to support a platform that favored women's vote at the expense of the voting rights of Black and immigrant men. Alison Parker reports that in 1895, "the national WCTU officially supported educational requirements for voting, a plan explicitly aimed at restricting voting by immigrants and, in the post-Reconstruction South, Blacks" (1997, 187). The organization also tolerated virulent racism in its literature. Parker describes a featured story in the *Crusader* in 1913 in which a corrupt Black politician protected a Black bootlegger; the two were in league to ruin the town until an honest young white man testified against them (1997, 183–85).

The End of Prohibition

The nationalization of Prohibition may have been the key to its ultimate demise. Prohibitionists believed that they had won such a sweeping victory that compromises with adversaries were unnecessary. They refused, for example, to consider low-alcohol beverages as an exception to the Volstead Act or an end to dual federal/state prosecution, even as enforcement became more and more problematic. Resistance to Prohibition seemed to make national leaders more firmly committed to Prohibition than ever (see, e.g., Asbury 1950, 318). The dries were also encouraged by their success in the 1928 congressional elections. Congress raised the maximum punishment for first-time offenders of the Volstead Act to five years in prison and \$10,000 in fines. Critics complained that the law would punish small-time offenders with the same severity as major bootleggers (Pegram 1998, 180).

Herbert Hoover also considered his sweeping 1928 election victory as a mandate in favor of Prohibition. He embraced it as "a great social and economic experiment, noble in motive and far-reaching in purpose," authorizing the construction of six additional federal prisons, including Alcatraz, to hold those convicted of alcohol offenses. By 1930, Pegram reports, more than one-third of federal inmates, 12,332 people, were Volstead Act offenders (1998, 168–69). Prohibition was taking on some of the characteristics of the contemporary war on drugs, with the most active and determined effort flowing from the nation's capital, rather than from any particular region or state. There seemed no limit to what the federal government was willing to invest to enforce the ban on alcohol.

The number of dissenting voices was growing, however. Widespread disregard for Prohibition laws gave an indication of public attitudes and, just as importantly, created alarm that mobilized some civic leaders to begin to

fight for repeal. Economic concerns also influenced this campaign. Business interests were anxious to have the liquor industry share in the national tax burden (Warburton 1932, 46). Single-issue groups emerged to push for repeal, much as an earlier generation of groups had pushed for Prohibition. The leadership of these new pro-legalization groups tended to be prosperous and well educated, suggesting that a significant reconfiguration of those for and against Prohibition had occurred in the period between adoption of the Eighteenth Amendment and the period just before its repeal. Some of the prominent figures who had once been associated with Prohibition actually switched sides as they realized the social costs.

By the late 1920s, many major organizations were going on record as favoring repeal. In 1927, the American Legion voted for repeal, and in 1930, the American Bar Association adopted a repeal resolution by an overwhelming margin. The Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform, founded by Pauline Sabin, the socially prominent and politically well-connected wife of a New York banker, was formed in this period. In 1929, it had 17 members; by 1932, there were 1,326,862. The activism of so many women in favor of repeal shocked the dries, who had taken female support for Prohibition for granted (Asbury 1950, 313–15).

With the advent of the Depression, the argument for taxing revenue from liquor gained ground, and so did concern about the widespread disregard of the law and the violence associated with bootlegging. Americans were spending about \$5 billion per year on alcohol (around \$54 billion in contemporary dollars), 5 percent of the gross national product (Schlosser 2003, 5). Even die-hard Prohibitionists were becoming discouraged. Pegram describes this shift in mood:

From its origins in the nineteenth century, temperance reform had developed as a forward-looking optimistic social movement. Its proponents had been modernizers, those who look forward to social, economic, and moral improvement. That image became badly tarnished in the 1920s as Prohibition came to be labeled the creaky obsession of puritanical moralists, rural busybodies, and religious bigots. (1998, 169–70)

As David Kyvig, a leading analyst of the repeal period, concludes: “Progressive hopes for social uplift through banishment of intoxicants were dashed, leaving national Prohibition with too few advocates to fend off attack” (2000, xvii).

What finally defeated Prohibition was not the success of the bootlegging industry in evading the law, however, but the economic depression that gripped the nation in the 1930s. The economic crisis forced America

to abandon for a time its focus on status issues in order to concentrate on economic concerns. Franklin Roosevelt, somewhat reluctantly at first, ran on the platform of repeal in 1932. By that time, the Republican Party, over Herbert Hoover's objections, had drastically softened its position, but it still came short of recommending repeal. The issue, even on the eve of the Depression, dominated the 1932 elections. A few wet Republicans were elected, despite the 1932 Democratic landslide. Eleven states held referendums on Prohibition issues, and the wets won all of them, many by decisive margins.

Politicians treated the 1932 election as a mandate, so repeal, in the end, was easy. The congressional resolution to void the Eighteenth Amendment took three days, and the states required less than a year to ratify the Twenty-first Amendment. Twenty-one million Americans voted on the issue in statewide referenda, with 72.9 percent favoring repeal (Kyvig 2000, 178). This huge proportion of the electorate was much larger than the proportion that used alcoholic beverages either before or after Prohibition, suggesting that many voted out of concern that outlawing alcohol had done more harm than good (see Kyvig 2000, 197). The control of alcoholic beverages, which had for so long been a national obsession, quickly faded from public concern.

Conclusion

Those who advocate an end to the current war on drugs often cite Prohibition as an example of how the high costs and ultimate futility of criminalizing drug use can lead to policy change. This chapter argues that the advent of Prohibition also deserves critical attention. Native-born prejudice against immigrants and African Americans constituted an important, perhaps essential, feature of the campaign to criminalize alcohol. The ugliness of anti-immigrant prejudice has virtually been forgotten with the assimilation of once-marginalized groups—Italian Americans, Irish Americans, German Americans, Russian Americans, Greek Americans, Catholics, and Jews. This cultural amnesia is unfortunate because the racialized arguments to punish “problem drinkers” have their parallel in the contemporary campaign against crack cocaine and other drugs. Keeping the parallels in mind might encourage Americans to recognize the economic basis of drug use and drug selling, which could help to defuse the emotionalism, negativism, and fear-mongering that animates current arguments for a punitive approach to drug control.

Then, as now, advocates of criminalization have found it useful to portray drug users as dangerous and contemptible, a threat to the implicitly white,

middle-class social fabric. The underlying messages of both campaigns are remarkably similar in suggesting that already marginalized groups are extremely dangerous under the influence of drugs. Then, as now, the mainstream press uncritically amplified these ideas, even when disenfranchisement of Black citizens was clearly at stake. Then, as now, the argument was that criminal controls are necessary to protect the nation's essential virtues against undesirable outsiders and to steer the drug user toward a more righteous path. Both the contemporary war on drugs and Prohibition targeted African Americans. In both cases Blacks lost precious rights of citizenship.

There are also parallels in how race and ethnicity, as markers of social and economic marginalization, have figured into the enforcement of these laws. Corruption and a tendency to concentrate enforcement efforts on the most vulnerable citizens were hallmarks of Prohibition, as they are of the contemporary war on drugs. Criminalization of alcohol, as of more contemporary drugs, focused on production, distribution, and sales of the drug, not on consumption, a pattern that tends to protect middle- and upper-class users from arrest. Those who took the risks to sell illicit drugs during Prohibition were often young, white ethnics shut out of other employment opportunities, a pattern that has its parallel in today's drug market, where African Americans and Latinos often play this role. The street-level sellers, runners, and mules who take the biggest risks, are, of course, the easiest and most frequent targets for arrest and prosecution.

These patterns are clear in a study that historian Edward Behr undertook of court records from 1920 to 1933. His analysis shows that enforcement of Prohibition was directed toward the poor, the barely literate, and recent immigrants. With few exceptions, the wealthy were virtually immune from prosecution; some benefited from their own involvement in bootlegging contracts (1997, 241). Businesses frequently paid off the police to stay open. Violence and death were also part of Prohibition, as they are of today's war on drugs. Behr estimates that by 1927, alcohol poisoning had been responsible for at least 50,000 deaths (1997, 221).³

Another connection is in the images that Prohibition advocates deployed, which have staying power. The negative stereotypes about African Americans that propelled Prohibition in the South and facilitated disenfranchisement are still in circulation today. William Unrau suggests that the same is true of the stigmatization of American Indians that once justified alcohol control on reservations: "It is worth remembering that national Prohibition applied only to Indians in the nineteenth century, and here, perhaps, may be found a key for understanding the origins and full flowering of the 'drunken Indian/sober white' stereotype that continues to this day" (1996, 122–23).

The Prohibition story also taught politicians important lessons about staying in office with tough, racially coded, words about intoxicating substances. Drug users could be blamed for society's fundamental social problems, and the federal government could use public anxieties to become more important in people's lives. This lesson, current experience suggests, has been well learned. All three branches of the federal government support the war on drugs, as they did Prohibition in an earlier day. The institutional legacy is that the federal presence in local drug-control efforts has become a permanent part of our political economy. Government has learned not just to harvest public anxieties about drugs, but also to manufacture them.