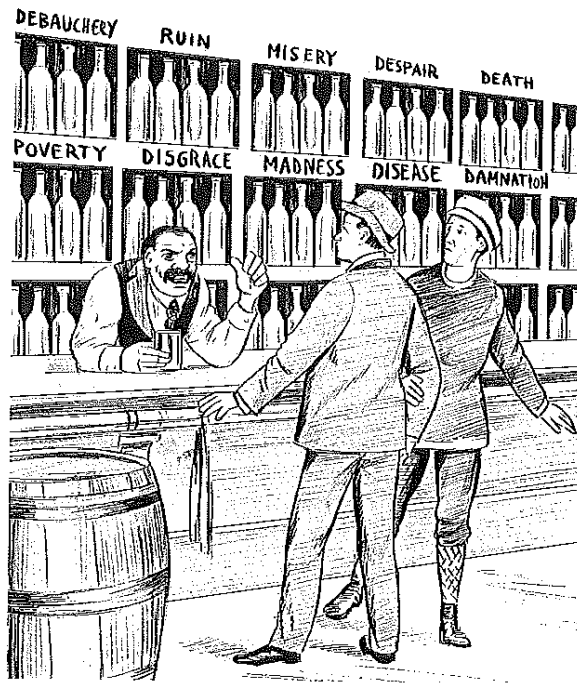


Reasons for Prohibition

In January 1920, the USA introduced Prohibition – the making or selling or transporting of alcoholic drink in the USA became illegal. This was due to several reasons.



The Temperance Movement

This movement was against the drinking of alcohol. It developed in the 19th century and was supported by many religious groups, especially in the South and Midwest. One example was the Anti-Saloon League, set up in 1893. They had supporters elected to Congress and highlighted the evils of drink.

Social reasons

Those who opposed alcohol argued that it caused a variety of social problems such as violence, crime and poverty. It also brought increased absence from work. If alcohol was banned, they believed that the USA would be a healthier and more hard-working place in which to live.

Existing prohibition

By 1918, alcohol was banned in 18 states. Thirteen of these states were totally 'dry' by 1919. The majority of other states had also introduced some kind of control on the sale of alcohol.

The First World War

Many of the USA's brewers were of German origin. When the USA joined the war in 1917, there was a lot of anti-German feeling, and campaigners were able to argue that it would be patriotic to close the brewers down.

The effects of Prohibition

Prohibition did not stop the sale or consumption of alcohol. Drinking became secretive and more expensive but it continued.

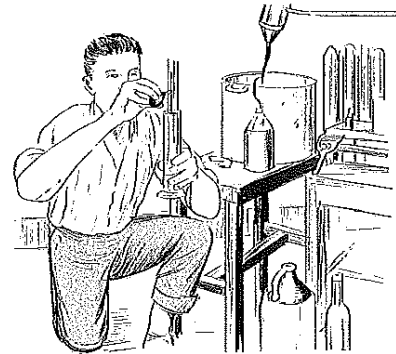
Bootleggers and smugglers

'Bootleggers' were smugglers who brought illegal liquor from abroad – rum from the West Indies and whisky from Canada. They organised themselves into gangs to transport the goods. These gangs became rich and powerful.



Illegal liquor

Many people began to visit a 'speakeasy' – a basement bar. By the late 1920s, most alcohol was made at home in illegal 'stills'. It was known as 'moonshine'. This home-made alcohol was often deadly and caused serious poisoning or blindness. In 1930, 282 122 illegal stills were seized.



Stopping the trade

To stop the trade, the Prohibition Bureau employed only 2000 agents for the whole of the USA. These agents were badly paid and often took bribes. One in 12 agents was sacked for taking bribes. The choice for many agents was either taking a bribe, or being beaten up or murdered by gangsters.



Gangsters

There were huge profits to be made from alcohol. Rival gangs in cities fought to supply the speakeasies with illegal alcohol, hijacking each other's booze supplies and murdering opponents. Police were bribed to ignore these activities. Between 1926 and 1927, there were 130 gangland murders in Chicago alone. No one was convicted. The most famous gangland leader was Al Capone.



Prohibition was finally ended in 1933 by President Roosevelt.

Prohibition and Organised Crime

In January 1920 it became illegal to manufacture, distribute or sell alcohol. This was Prohibition.

In 1920 America tried to turn Teetotal

- 1) Pressure for Prohibition had built up over a long time. Some states were "dry" by 1917.
- 2) Temperance movements had been campaigning for Prohibition since the 19th century — they were popular in rural areas, and were often Christian. They claimed alcohol led to violence, immoral behaviour, and the breakdown of family life.
- 3) The middle class often blamed alcohol for disorder among immigrants and the working class. Businessmen blamed alcohol for making workers unreliable.
- 4) The First World War (which the USA joined in 1917) resulted in more support for Prohibition. Many breweries were owned by German immigrants — and the USA was fighting Germany.
- 5) Opposition to Prohibition was mainly in urban areas — especially cities in the northern states.

Saloons were closed down. Buying alcohol illegally was expensive, which caused consumption to decrease — especially among the poor. The US authorities recruited over 1500 agents (later increased to 2800+) to enforce the law.

Organised Crime 'took over' the distribution of alcohol

Hijackers:

Stole smuggled alcohol



Bootleggers:

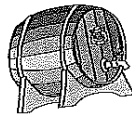
Sold on redistilled industrial alcohol

Prohibition Crime

Speakeasies:

Illegal drinking clubs sprang up with secret passwords at the door

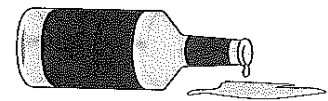
Millions of dollars were made trading in illegal alcohol. Prohibition saw a massive rise in organised crime as rival gangs fought for control of the business.



Moonshiners:
Made their own liquor

Rum-runners:

Smuggled alcohol from Europe, the West Indies, Canada and Mexico



In Chicago 1926-29, gang warfare led to almost 1300 murders. Al Capone was a gang leader:



Al Capone worked for Johnny Torrio, a leading Chicago Gangster.

Taking over from Torrio in 1925, the ruthless Capone was making \$60m a year from alcohol and \$45m from gambling, dance halls and race tracks.

He used a private army to intimidate voters and fight rival gangs. In 1929, 7 members of a rival gang were machine-gunned in the St Valentine's Day Massacre.

Capone was sentenced to 11 years in prison for tax evasion in 1931. In poor health, he retired to his Florida mansion and died in 1947.

Prohibition finally ended in 1933

Enforcing Prohibition proved impossible. There was public demand for alcohol. Many people were willing to break the law — especially in the cities. Also Prohibition led to corruption — some policemen and judges took bribes or became involved in the liquor trade themselves.

Prohibition — a tee-total disaster...

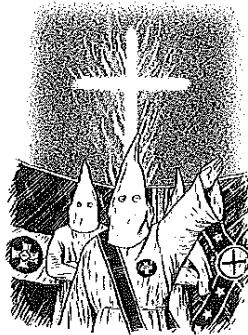
Prohibition failed because demand for alcohol continued. Criminals quickly moved in to supply people with illegal liquor, making huge profits and developing sophisticated criminal networks.

Black Americans in the 1920s

Few black people benefited from the boom. Many were badly treated and worse off than ever.

Ku Klux Klan

This organisation terrorised black Americans in the south. The members of the organisation dressed in white robes and wore pointed hoods to hide their identity. They wanted to defend white superiority against black people. Torture and violence were used against black people. Victims were beaten, whipped, tarred and feathered or lynched, after which many were put to death without a trial. Their homes were set on fire and their property destroyed. In many cases, the members of the Klan were not punished by the police.



Jim Crow laws

For many years, many southern states had been passing laws against black Americans.

These were known as the 'Jim Crow' laws after a song of the 19th century which said black people were childlike and inferior. These laws introduced the segregation or separation of black people from white people in schools, parks, hospitals, swimming pools, public toilets, restaurants, libraries and even in cemeteries. The best public places were for white people only, the worst, especially schools, were for black people. Black people also had to use separate buses and trains.



Employment

Most black people lived in the southern states of the USA where they were either labourers or sharecroppers – they paid a share of their crops to the landowners. Three-quarters of a million black farm labourers lost their jobs during the 1920s. Many moved northwards to find work in the cities. By 1930, one-quarter of black Americans lived in the north. Here they found work but were given the lowest paid, unskilled jobs. Car factories only hired black people in small numbers.

Living conditions

Many black people lived in very poor housing, often overcrowded tenement buildings. In 1919, there were race riots in many cities. The cities of the north were segregated, with black Americans forced to live in ghettos such as Harlem in New York. Richard Wright, a black American, describes being poor: 'Hunger had always been more or less at my elbow but now I began to wake up at night to find hunger standing at my bedside. I could feel hunger nudging my ribs and twisting my guts until they ached.'

Other groups that suffered during the 1920s

Farmers

Many farmers found that life was difficult during the 1920s. In 1924 alone, 600 000 farmers lost their land. By 1929, millions of farmworkers were unemployed. This was because:

- ▶ The demand from Europe fell as European farmers started to produce again after the First World War.
- ▶ American farmers produced too much, causing a fall in prices.
- ▶ With lower prices, many farmers could not make enough to pay their mortgages.



In 1919, farmers had earned \$22 billion. By 1928, this had fallen to \$13 billion.



New immigrants

New immigrants from all over Europe faced discrimination. They were frequently given the lowest-paid jobs and poor living conditions. They often worked in the building industry, where wages only went up 4% in the 1920s. The unemployment rate among new immigrants remained very high. There were ghettos for immigrants where violence and crime were high. Many Americans distrusted these immigrants. Two such immigrants, Sacco and Vanzetti, were arrested in 1920, accused of murdering two guards during a robbery. Even

though there were over a hundred witnesses who said they had seen the men elsewhere during the crime, the two men were found guilty and eventually executed in 1927.

Native American Indians

In 1924, a law was passed that all Indians born in the USA were full American citizens. However, the white authorities tried to destroy the traditional Indian way of life. Indian traditions, such as the Sun Dance, boys having long hair and the wearing of Indian clothes, were banned. Indian children were forced to go to boarding schools where they could not speak their native language. Any who did were beaten up. Whole tribes were forced to accept Christianity. Children from the same tribe were kept apart to destroy the idea of tribal customs and identity.

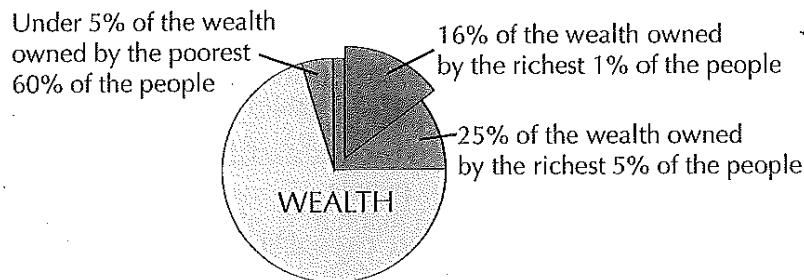


Poverty in the 1920s

While there was a boom for many Americans, for others life remained a struggle.

There was still Poverty

Wealth wasn't distributed evenly — there was a big gap between rich and poor in the USA.



Some poverty was in Urban Areas

- 1) Monopolies (where a whole industry is owned or controlled by one company or alliance) kept prices high and wages low, by stopping competition for customers and workers.
- 2) Many African Americans had moved from the South to the northern states to work in war industries. They were often restricted by prejudice and poverty to living in poor districts.
- 3) Some urban poverty was produced by the pressure of numbers — many people moved to cities because of rural hardship.

"Old" industries Suffered

- 1) The coal industry did badly. Coal mining suffered from competition with oil. Cars and trucks began to take over from the railways, which were a major user of coal.
- 2) About 10% less coal was mined in 1929 than in 1919. More efficient mining technology also caused workers to be laid off, and those that remained saw their wages decrease. The mining towns suffered acute hardship.
- 3) In 1920 the wartime cotton boom collapsed. In 1921 the boll weevil — a beetle that feeds off cotton plants — destroyed 30% of the crop. In the mid-1920s the opposite problem, overproduction, caused prices to plunge.

Problems in Agriculture led to Rural Poverty

- 1) Farmers had prospered during the war. But during the 1920s, they grew more food than was needed. Overproduction led to falling prices and so to falling profits.
- 2) Taxes, mortgages and wages were rising, further reducing farmers' profits.
- 3) Foreign competition increased during the 1920s. European agriculture recovered from the war, while Canada, Russia, Argentina and Australia also competed on the world market.
- 4) The Republican government didn't believe in direct help to farmers. When Congress passed the McNary-Haugen bill, to allow the government to buy up farmers' crops, President Coolidge vetoed it twice — he thought it would encourage more overproduction.
- 5) For the first time ever, the American farm population began to shrink.

The Jazz Age wasn't all Bentleys and champagne...

There are always winners and losers — the 1920s were no different. It's important to remember that some people struggled through what are often thought of as the 'good times'.

Intolerance in the 1920s

Some groups in 1920s America suffered discrimination and persecution.

Prejudice against Immigrants led to the Red Scare

- 1) There was prejudice against newer immigrant groups and worries about communist agitators entering the country. In 1919 there was a series of bombings across the country, which the authorities used to whip up a 'Red Scare'. They deported over 4000 people, mainly Russians.
- 2) During the Red Scare, two Italian anarchists called Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were convicted of murder and robbery. There were protests by people who argued it was a miscarriage of justice, and that the judge was prejudiced. But they were executed in 1927.

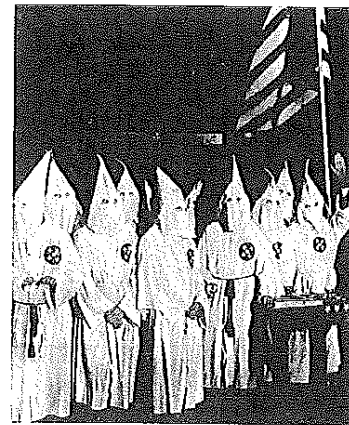


Systems were Introduced to Limit Immigration

- From 1917 immigrants had to pass a 'literacy test' to enter.
- A quota system was introduced in 1921. This was replaced in 1924 by the National Origins Act which strictly limited immigration. This act discriminated against immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, and Asia.

The racist Ku Klux Klan (KKK) Expanded

- 1) First formed in the 1860s, the Ku Klux Klan gained new popularity in the early 1920s.
- 2) The KKK was a white supremacist organisation based in the Southern states of the USA.
- 3) They opposed African Americans being given more rights. They were also prejudiced against immigrants, Jewish people and Catholics. They used intimidation and violence.
- 4) KKK membership had grown to around 4 million by 1925.
- 5) In 1925, there was a scandal involving Indiana KKK leader D.C. Stephenson (he was convicted of kidnapping and second-degree murder). The organisation lost much support, and never regained such significant cultural and political power.



KKK members wore distinctive hoods and robes

Mansell./ Contributor /
Time & Life Pictures / Getty Images

There was an ugly, violent side to American society...

Remember — there were many groups who were discriminated against in 1920s USA.

Intolerance in the 1920s

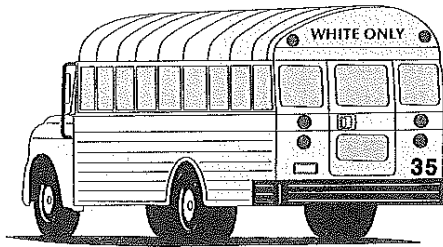
The persecution wasn't just carried out by racist groups such as the KKK — it was backed up by the law.

Some Laws were Racist

- 1) The 'Jim Crow Laws' was a collective name for laws that discriminated against African Americans. These were more common in the Southern States of the USA.

DRINKING FOUNTAIN
WHITE ONLY

- 2) Some laws made it difficult for African Americans to vote. For example, it was law in some states that voters had to show that their grandfathers had voted — this excluded many African Americans whose ancestors were slaves with no voting rights (slavery was only abolished in America in 1865).



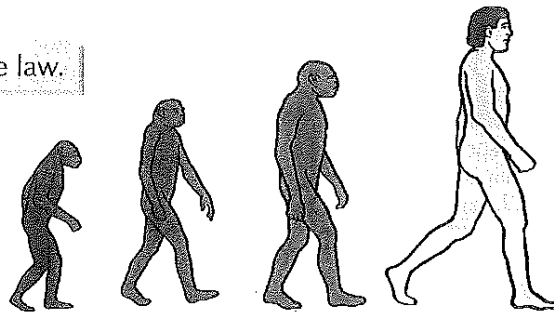
- 3) Some laws forced white and African-American people to use separate facilities, e.g. different schools, transport, parks, cafes and theatres. This was called segregation. Although the facilities were supposed to be "separate but equal", the ones provided for African Americans were usually much worse.

There was Prejudice against some Scientific Ideas

- 1) In 1925, a teacher called John Scopes was arrested for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution — which was against Tennessee state law.

- 2) He'd deliberately chosen to take a stand against the law.

- 3) The 'Monkey Trial' became headline news. On appeal, Scopes's defence argued the law broke US Constitutional Amendments on free speech and separation of church and state.



- 4) Scopes was found guilty — but his lawyers had succeeded in making the law look very foolish.

They fought the law — and the law won...

If you were being persecuted in the USA today, you'd expect the law to be on your side, but in the 1920s it was a different story.