

During the mid-1800's, alcoholism, family violence, and saloon-based political corruption led to the Temperance Movement: a call for banning alcohol. Organizations like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and Anti-Saloon League were part of the Progressive Movement and they felt that society would be improved if alcohol was no longer in it.

Some business leaders like John D. Rockefeller and Henry Ford agreed and saw drinking as a drag on the economy. Drunken workers and absentee workers were not good for American business. First, individual states took action and by the time America entered World War I in 1917, 26 states had voted themselves dry.

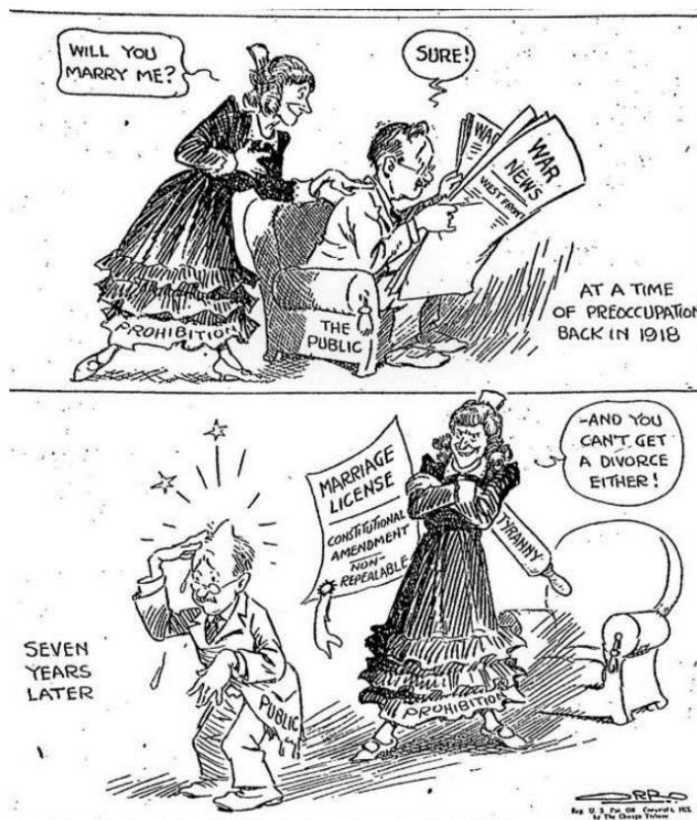
When America entered the war, many Americans believed that it was unpatriotic to spend money on beer, wine, and whiskey when the nation needed all its resources to fight in Europe. Others went further. Germany was the main enemy in the war and many of America's largest breweries (Pabst, Blatz, Schlitz, Budweiser) had German names, making them an easy target.

In December 1917, the House of Representatives approved the 18th Amendment to prohibit the manufacture, transportation and sale of alcoholic beverages by a vote of 282 to 128. The next day, the Senate did the same 47 to 8. Over the next year, three-quarters of the states ratified, and in early 1920, the 18th Amendment went into effect. America would become officially dry.

Once the 18th Amendment passed Congress, it was necessary to create legislation to carry it out. This took the form of the famous Volstead Act. The Act defined a drink as intoxicating

if it contained more than 1% alcohol. This made beer and wine illegal, which came as a surprise to many. Workers who supported the 18th Amendment had been assured that it would apply only to hard liquor like whiskey, vodka, or gin. When wine and beer were outlawed there was immediate criticism. In fact, President Woodrow Wilson vetoed the Volstead Act because he thought it was too strict. Congress overrode the veto, however, not wanting to appear soft to their dry supporters.

In 1922, nearly 80% were in general support of Prohibition according to polls. However, 10 years later, those numbers were turned upside-down. In 1932, three out of every four Americans wanted a repeal. Members of Congress read the polls. In 1933, by a large majority, both the Senate and the House voted to repeal the 18th Amendment.



1. List two organizations of the Temperance Movement.
2. Why did some business leaders support the Temperance Movement?
3. Why did some believe drinking alcohol was unpatriotic during WWI?
4. Why were some surprised by the Volstead Act's definition of intoxicating drinks?
5. How did the support for Prohibition change between 1922 and 1932?

