

“Exiled by Prohibition”: Americans Abroad and Outsiders at Home

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Abstract

A large confluence of forces was responsible for the passage of the eighteenth amendment, and the consequences that Prohibition had on American society were wide-reaching. This study focuses on the sentiment that Prohibition would help force alcohol-consuming immigrants, especially Jews and Catholics, to become more “American,” and how instead of acculturating these new arrivals, the banning of liquor pushed many immigrants further outside of the mainstream. The experiences of these immigrants are contrasted with native-born Americans, often working as professionals in the alcohol industries, who chose to flee the United States rather than live under Prohibition. Special attention is paid to Harry Craddock, a New York bartender who relocated to London and came to international prominence with *The Savoy Cocktail Book* in 1930, who refused to return to America even after Prohibition’s repeal. While Prohibition had been designed to be inclusive and helpful for those who were deemed “outside” of American culture, ultimately it acted as a tool of exclusion for immigrants and native-born Americans alike.

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The Prohibition of alcohol in the United States has an established social image. Dating back to its implementation in 1920, there has been a sense of levity surrounding the Eighteenth Amendment and its accompanying legislation, the Volstead Act. This levity is present in many areas, but is perhaps best demonstrated by the image of young people taking to clandestine Speakeasies to dance the Charleston and flaunt the ban on liquor. Prohibition has been viewed as an object of ridicule in American culture, a failed experiment which was corrected in time, but not before inspiring a mythology of opulent parties and reigning gangsters. Although this image has been present in literature and popular culture for nearly a century, from the writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald up until today, it neglects some of the more serious consequences that the anti-alcohol movement had on the country. This paper looks at the negative impact of Prohibition on two segments of the population: recent immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, and American bartenders. More generally, this is a study of how a law that was meant to strengthen the U.S., and make it more inclusive, ultimately turned many of its residents into outsiders.

When considering these negative effects of Prohibition, it is important to look at the motivations for the amendment’s passage in the first place. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, myriad groups came together to lobby for the act, including Evangelical Christians, the women’s suffrage movement, organized labor, and the Ku Klux Klan.¹ These groups held widely disparate views and often disagreed on many of their core issues, but the banning of alcohol proved to be a strong enough common denominator that they could cooperate for the years leading up to ratification in 1919. Joining them in their push to outlaw alcohol was a group of social reformers advocating for what was deemed “Americanization.” This Americanization movement was expanding rapidly in the first decades of the twentieth century, and while it was not synonymous with the anti-alcohol crusade, the two campaigns overlapped in many of their aims. Taking a closer look at how Americanization came into being, and why its leaders supported a ban on alcohol, provides a unique perspective on how Prohibition was a well-meaning but misguided movement that harmed many of the people it intended to help.

Like Prohibition, Americanization was a political movement meant to alter social behavior. Writing in 1919, Emory S. Bogardus defined Americanization as “the educational process of unifying both native-born and foreign-born Americans in perfect support of the principles of liberty, union, democracy, and brotherhood” (11). This campaign to create a uniform American identity was the result of several changes occurring at the start of the twentieth century, most notably the entrance of the U.S. into World War I in 1917. The declaration of war against Germany and its allies meant that the U.S. was ready to assert itself on a global stage for the first time, causing some within the society to question if the country were ready to take that step. Charles A. Brooks, in his book *Christian Americanization*, stated that “[t]he war arrested our attention and focused it upon the vital question of national unity” (4). Americanists like Brooks feared that immigrants coming to the U.S. “were untouched by the wholesome American influences and were still as foreign as the day they landed,” and that their continuation of customs from their homeland represented “weak spots in [America’s] national life which have been brought to light by the war” (5). The concern was that if America lacked a uniform national identity, and the loyalty of its newest citizens could be questioned, global rivals might perceive the country as vulnerable. For this reason, the leaders in the Americanization movement focused their efforts on the issue of immigration reform, with a specific aim to alter the behaviors of the country’s newest arrivals. When considering immigration at this time, and how it came to be connected to Prohibition, it is crucial to note two drastic shifts that were taking place in the decades immediately preceding the war: the countries from which immigrants were arriving, and the parts of the U.S. in which they were settling.

Throughout the nineteenth century, most people migrating to the U.S. came from Northern and Western Europe, especially Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia. This trend began to wane, however, and by the start of twentieth century these groups were replaced by large numbers of people from Southern and Eastern Europe, including Italy, Poland, and Russia. (see table 1). Between 1890 and 1920 alone, the number of people of Italian birth living in the U.S. grew from approximately 180,000 to over 1.6 million. Residents born in Russia saw similar growth, rising from 180,000 to over 1.4 million people. Native-born white Protestants saw this shift in immigration as a threat, with their dominance in

population now being challenged by Catholics and Jews from Southern and Eastern Europe (Timberlake, 116). This fear of losing power was occasionally manifested in the language of racism or nativism, as exhibited by Alfred P. Schultz's 1908 text, *Race or Mongrel*. In the work, Schultz wrote that the new wave of immigration "cannot be without consequences," continuing that "in general physique, [these immigrants are] very much inferior to the immigration of thirty years ago... The history of the races now coming proves beyond doubt their mental inferiority to the races that immigrated before the advent of Slavs and Latins" (254). Quotes like this demonstrate the feeling of the time that these newer immigrants were somehow more "foreign" and less "fit" than their Northern and Western European predecessors, and that something needed to be done to fix this perceived problem. Social reformers offered several solutions, with Americanization being regarded as a more "benevolent" option (Stephenson, 235).

Table 1
Population of the U.S. by Country or Region of Birth, 1890 to 1920

	1920	1910	1900	1890
Germany	1,686,108	2,311,237	2,663,418	2,784,894
Great Britain	1,135,489	1,221,283	1,167,623	1,251,402
Ireland	1,037,234	1,352,251	1,615,459	1,871,509
Italy	1,610,113	1,343,125	484,027	182,580
Poland	1,139,979	937,884	383,407	147,440
Russia	1,400,495	1,184,412	423,726	182,644

Source: United States. Census Bureau. "Region and Country or Area of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population, with Geographic Detail Shown in Decennial Census Publications of 1930 or Earlier: 1850 to 1930 and 1960 to 1990." *Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 1999. Web.

Table 2
Urban and Rural population of the U.S., 1890 to 1920

	1920	1910	1900	1890
Total Population	106,021,537	92,228,496	76,212,168	62,979,766
Urban Population	54,253,282	42,064,001	30,214,832	22,106,265
Rural Population	51,768,255	50,164,495	45,997,336	40,873,501

Source: United States. Census Bureau. "Urban and Rural Populations: 1790 to 1990." *1990 Census of Population and Housing*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 1993. Web.

The second shift in immigration, dealing with where people were settling, added to the concerns of the Americanists. From the first colonists through the immigrants of the nineteenth century, the U.S. was primarily an agrarian society; immigrants would move to rural areas, work the land, and eventually join the American culture. By the start of the twentieth century, however, that pattern began to change, as more immigrants settled in cities. This development caused the population of urban areas to surge, and by 1920 the majority of people in the U.S. were living in cities, not the countryside (see table 2). Within these cities, immigrants gathered in ethnic enclaves where they continued practicing the customs of their native countries and had little interaction with the larger society. Historian James Timberlake notes that

Progressives of the time felt that “the perpetuation of alien ways was an obstacle to speedy assimilation and a menace to American ideals and institutions” (117). Instead of learning English, for example, the Jewish community on the Lower East Side of Manhattan spoke Yiddish in their day-to-day conversations, a fact which upset reformers in the Americanization movement. Charles Brooks wrote that “Americanization means the extension of our ideals, of the American spirit, and of our language to every quarter and every community, until there shall remain no foreign colonies untouched by the full currents of our American life” (8-9). The concern of Americanization was that these immigrants, even years after arriving, remained outsiders within their new home, and that actions would need to be taken to help bring them into the culture.

While the people of Southern and Eastern Europe brought a variety of customs and traditions with them to the U.S., reformers in the Americanization movement found their use of alcohol especially “foreign,” which is how the Americanists came to support Prohibition (Timberlake 117-20). There were multiple reasons for why alcohol was considered alien or otherwise “un-American” at this time, but religion likely played the largest part. Unlike Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism both involve the sacramental use of wine, which caused the people of Southern and Eastern Europe to be viewed with a degree of suspicion by the Protestant majority in the U.S. Adding to these suspicions was the centuries-old Jewish involvement with producing and selling wine and liquor, which formed a dividing line with native-born Protestants who did not share such traditions (Davis 6-8). In his multi-volume anti-Semitic text *The International Jew*, Henry Ford stated that in the U.S., “the liquor business was almost exclusively in the hands of the Jews,” (10) and Americanist Charles Brooks linked “the free use of liquor” with “the European Sabbath,” adding that neither suited American tastes (17). In this misguided context, Prohibition was meant to be a force for good, something which would prevent immigrants from practicing their alien ways and help bring them into American society (Timberlake 116-118; Hofstadter 286-289).

Despite these intentions to make Prohibition a tool of inclusion, however, the law ended up doing the opposite. When it took effect in January, 1920, the Volstead Act showed that outlawing a group’s behaviors will not force them into the mainstream; instead, they will continue their behaviors as criminals and find themselves even further outside the culture. Adding to the complications of Prohibition were the actions of law enforcement, who applied the law unevenly and often singled-out immigrants for arrest. This 1926 passage from the diary of Israel Chanin, a young Jewish immigrant from Lithuania, demonstrates how this kind of enforcement could be damaging:

If one is destined to have fears and troubles, they come right in through the door... more often than happiness. Since it is almost Passover, father made wine from grapes, as usual. Our surrounding neighbors aren’t overly friendly to us, and they reported us. When mother was alone in the store, the door opened and a dozen [police] detectives came in with a [search] warrant in hand, and they looked all over the house, turned out every corner, threw everything around, and confiscated the small amount of wine and some of last year’s mead. [...] This caused me a great loss. The fountain pen, which I have had for several years and which was not just an ordinary one, was taken by these guardians of the law. Perhaps it was my fault, because I had put it on the table, as always, not expecting these pleasant guests. (403)

This passage highlights several of the problems present during Prohibition. First, Chanin acknowledges that his family’s neighbors were not “overly friendly,” and reported their Passover wine to the police. Based on the circumstances, it seems likely that it is not another Jewish family living next door, and the police were called as a means of punishing or intimidating the Chanins. Secondly, the theft of the fountain pen by the police shows how law enforcement, under the guise of enforcing Prohibition, could harass minority families in their own homes. The last line, in which Chanin sarcastically refers to the thieving police as “pleasant guests,” shows how isolated he felt from those in positions of authority. If the intention of the Prohibition was to make families like the Chanins more American, enforcement like this was successful only in pushing them further outside of society. A similar example of Prohibition forcing an immigrant outside comes from the autobiography of Constantine Maria Panunzio, who emigrated from Italy to a community which had banned liquor ahead of the rest of the country. Unaware that alcohol was illegal, Panunzio took a job working for an American, selling bottles of beer on the side of the road. This passage explains his feelings of despair after learning that his employer was a bootlegger, and that Panunzio himself had been breaking the law:

I began to suspect every one with whom I came in contact and to doubt whether there was such a thing as right or justice. Here I had worked for nearly a year in an attempt to earn sixty or seventy dollars to return home, and I had been deceived at every turn, and those whom I trusted had proved to be traitors. I had made sacrifices; I had been subjected to humiliation, to reach a worthy goal, only to be taken advantage of, only to find myself penniless, and what was infinitely worse, to be forced into a life of lawlessness. Those who would understand the so-called waves of crime and lawlessness among the non-English speaking groups in this country, need to know something of experiences such as these. Then and then only will they comprehend why helpless human beings, facing injustice and treachery, become reckless; while society hurls them into dungeons as outcasts or criminals. Now that it is all over, I am thankful for these experiences, for they have taught me to know and understand the struggles of humanity, especially of the "foreigner" in this country. (129-30)

This quote, like Chanin's, is helpful in that it specifically addresses the feeling of being an outcast in America, and how those feelings were increased by Prohibition. Panunzio offers a defense of his actions, stating that people were not coming to the U.S. to be criminals, but rather were forced into those actions by their circumstances. In Chanin's case, his family was making Passover wine like they had always done; the only difference now was that they were subject to police harassment. Panunzio was preyed upon by his American employer, who used desperate immigrants to violate the law on his behalf. Regardless of these explanations, there was a growing perception at this time that it was foreigners, especially Italians, who were prone to criminality. Despite its patent inaccuracy, this stigma spread across the culture and has persisted for decades, lasting well beyond the end of Prohibition. Writing in 1925, just five years after the Volstead Act took effect, John Mariano wrote *The Italian Immigrant and Our Courts*, in which he sought to dispel notions of the lawless Italian. Conducting a study of arrest records in New York City, Mariano found no evidence that Italians, or any other immigrant group for that matter, were disproportionately involved in crimes. "Let us dismiss from our minds once and for all time," Mariano wrote, "the erroneous idea that our Italian immigrants are inherently criminal and fill our jails" (17). In spite of the efforts of Mariano and others, however, the image of the Italian gangster only increased through Prohibition, marking Italians and other immigrants of the time as people operating not only outside of the culture, but outside of the law.

In this way, the goal of using Prohibition to help Americanize immigrants and welcome them into the culture was ineffective and ultimately damaging. Immigrant groups were singled out for enforcement, and by practicing customs that had been in their cultures for centuries, they were made into criminals. At the same time, though, it was not just immigrants who were made into outsiders by Prohibition. There were plenty of native-born, Protestant Americans for whom liquor was part of their culture, and the law had its own effects on them. The fact of the matter is that alcohol has a long history in the U.S.,² and there were hundreds of thousands of Americans who were legally involved in the liquor trade leading up to the Eighteenth Amendment. These brewers, distillers, distributors, and servers were dependent on alcohol for their income, and Prohibition put their livelihood at risk. For the purposes of this study, only bartenders are addressed, but their story is just one example of a larger workforce challenge. Faced with realities of the Volstead Act, the people who made their living serving alcohol were left with three options; they could either find a new line of work that did not involve liquor, continue serving liquor and risk arrest by Prohibition Agents, or leave the U.S. and practice their trade in a country where liquor was still legal. It is difficult to know how many people chose each of these three options, but there are examples of all three being followed.

And it was a significant portion of the workforce that was involved with serving liquor prior to Prohibition. The Census of 1910, which was the last decennial Census before ratification in 1919, provides extensive occupation statistics that demonstrate the reach of the bartending profession. In the year of that Census, approximately 170,000 people, 99% of whom were men, listed their occupation as either "bartender" or "saloon keeper." To put that number in context, the same Census counted approximately 151,000 physicians, 118,000 clergymen, and 115,000 lawyers and judges (see table 3). Bartending was a wide-reaching trade, with men working in nearly every city and town, and the Volstead Act would have had an impact on each of those communities. This workforce was also connected, with its members organizing into the Bartenders' International League of America. The labor union was active in

its work at the start of the twentieth century, regularly publishing an official journal, *The Mixer and Server*. As a testament to the scope of the union, each issue of *The Mixer and Server* contained the names of the hundreds of men who had applied for membership that month, joining local chapters that stretched across the country (“Applications” 5-12).

Table 3
Population Engaged in Occupations, Census Year 1910

	Total	Men	Women
Bartenders	101,234	100,984	250
Saloon Keepers	68,215	66,724	1,491
Physicians and Surgeons	151,132	142,117	9,015
Clergymen	118,018	117,333	685
Lawyers, Judges, and Justices	114,704	114,146	558

Source: United States. Census Bureau. “Table 182: Population 10 Years of Age and Upward Engaged in Gainful Occupations, Census Years 1900 and 1910: By Sex, by States, and by geographic divisions.” *1918 Statistical Abstract of the United States*. 41st Ed. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 1919. Web.

Another indicator of the influence of bartenders at this time was the level of respect and celebrity that some enjoyed. While most in the field only served their local community, there were a few who achieved national prominence working behind the bars of luxury hotels and restaurants in several cities, including Harry Craddock. Craddock first worked in Chicago, joining the union local in March of 1903 (“Applications” 7), before moving to New York City and enjoying a degree of fame at the Holland House in the last decade before Prohibition. After the Volstead Act, however, Craddock had little interest in staying in the U.S. and risking arrest for serving liquor, so he made the decision to leave the country for London in 1920. Working at the Savoy Hotel, one of the world’s premier hotels at the time, he became head of their “American Bar,” inventing and refining hundreds of cocktails which he served to American and European high society. In 1926, as his fame grew, Craddock wrote an open letter to his friends and former customers in New York, updating them on his situation. As a testament to his continued celebrity in the U.S., the *New York Times* responded by publishing an article about Craddock that included excerpts from his letter. While the story is light in tone, it includes a quote from the bartender stating that he had been “exiled by prohibition.” The article goes on to note that he was evidently homesick for New York, and that he and other bartenders like him “were ready to come back when wanted” (“Exiled Bartender Writes Friends Here” 16). It is language like this which shows the reach of Prohibition into the working lives of bartenders. Craddock and others who served liquor held the sentiment that they were no longer welcome in the U.S., and could only practice their trade as outsiders. Considering that Prohibition had tried, and failed, to help assimilate immigrants into American society, it becomes more interesting to note that the law also turned American citizens into expatriates.

The culmination of Craddock’s success outside the U.S. came in 1930, with the publication of his *Savoy Cocktail Book*. Designed to be a definitive collection of cocktail recipes and the anecdotes surrounding their creation, the book proved to be so popular it was even published in America by Richard R. Smith, two years before the repeal of Prohibition (“At Least, These Books are Different” 16). Within the text, Craddock took the opportunity to voice his opinions on the law of the U.S., writing that “[t]hose who know too little either do not admit their lack of knowledge and make an enemy of alcohol by abusing it, or are so terrified of it that they regard it as being something supernatural and satanic and utterly anathema” (8). He also included a section of the book dedicated to “Cocktails suitable for a Prohibition country,” meant for “those countries where they make the best of Prohibition, and where the ingredients for making

them are obtainable without much difficulty” (184-5); this section goes on to list recipes which call for such ingredients as “Hooch Whisky.” Statements and jokes like these reveal that Craddock shared some sense of levity regarding Prohibition, but also that he felt that the law had excluded him. Other than *The Savoy Cocktail Book* and a few other details, the facts of Craddock’s life are hard to decipher. He is regarded as a “legend” of bartending and is often credited in the text of subsequent cocktail books, but many of the stories about him are likely apocryphal, passed down from one bartender to the next.³ What is known is that he was a U.S. citizen and a unionized tradesman, someone who was on the inside of American society, and the Eighteenth Amendment was enough to convince him to leave the U.S. And while his success may have been exceptional, his story of leaving the country because of Prohibition was not unique. Craddock himself acknowledged there were other bartenders like him, and there were “American Bars” in other European cities, each serving the cocktails which were illegal in their country of origin.

Still, crossing the Atlantic was a long way to travel for American bartenders, and many more relocated to Mexico during Prohibition than went to Europe. Border towns like Tijuana boomed during this time, established as pleasure havens for American tourists in search of liquor and gambling.⁴ These establishments sought to employ bartenders from the U.S. as well, though the setting was quite different from the glamour Craddock encountered at the Savoy. This March, 1929 article from *Time* provides a description of the bleak conditions that prevailed in some establishments:

Behind the bars of Tiajuana stand the remnants of a disappearing race—the U.S. bartender. Many a man among them will tell heart-breaking tales of better days when he served drinks at the Waldorf in Manhattan, at Boston’s Parker House or at Coffee Dan’s in San Francisco. Their skill confirms their stories and strong men weep gently into their old-fashioned whiskey cocktails to think such souls are passing.

These bartenders comprise the ranking industry. For Tiajuana, exotic as it may sound to the dry and fevered U.S. fancy, is nothing but a couple of dirty streets of barrooms. It is almost epic in its drabness. One bar stretches an entire block and announces itself as ‘The Longest Bar in the World.’ Some have mechanical music; some musicians. Most places have small clearings for dancing. All smell. (“Al Hippodromo” 46)

Considering that conditions like these were present, it is not surprising that many bartenders continued to serve liquor in the U.S. and risk arrest, rather than face the “epic... drabness” of places like Tijuana. Indeed, the Bartenders’ International League of America continued to operate in the U.S. throughout Prohibition, holding its annual meeting for 1929 in Kansas City. Addressing the delegates, union president Edward Flore decried Prohibition for having “so severely hurt” the U.S., and the convention served as the backdrop for the union finally dropping the term “Bartender” from its title, now being branded as the “Beverage Dispensers’ International League of America.” Even with the name change, union members likely continued serving alcohol illegally, and *Time* noted in its coverage of the meeting that these “beverage dispensers” saw a dramatic wage increase during Prohibition (“Beverage Dispensers” 11). Much like the immigrants who continued practicing their customs despite the efforts of Americanization, these bartenders were not stopped by the Volstead Act, even if it meant working outside of the law. The end result of this move was that bartending, a profession which had formerly been considered respectable, saw its reputation badly damaged during this time (Hollinger and Swartz 28-9).

In the end, Prohibition proved to be highly ineffective and unpopular, leading to its repeal in 1933. As early as 1930, Charles Merz noted that while the movement “had begun as the golden dream of thousands of devoted men and women,” it ultimately “precipitated a struggle which was to test the political wisdom of the American Republic” (304). His was an outlook widely shared after a decade of Volstead, with reformers across the country recognizing that the law was too costly to continue. The push for Americanization likewise suffered. Writing critically of that movement in 1926, George M. Stephenson noted that “Americanization is not a thing to be learned like the multiplication table; it is a growth” (237). He went on to state that while certain laws and policies had meant “to lighten the burdens of immigrants,” they had also wrought “suspicion, hatred, and jealousy” (237).

The history of Prohibition in the U.S., and its connection to Americanization, demonstrates that political solutions to perceived social problems do not always create the desired effect, and sometimes produce the opposite. These experiences of Southern and Eastern European immigrants, as well as American bartenders, are part of a larger narrative of exclusion, one in which a law that was meant to help assimilate immigrants and create a uniform American identity instead created deeper divisions and

pushed residents further outside of the culture. For some, Prohibition was a temporary exile, and repeal meant a return to the previous state of affairs. For others, however, the consequences of Prohibition lasted much longer. The stigma of criminality that attached itself to the immigrants of this time persisted for decades, and in some ways still has not ended. Tens of thousands of bartenders likewise came to face a society that now viewed their profession as suspect or ignoble in a way that it had not been before the law. As new policies are developed in an attempt to change behavior and include people in a "mainstream society," the individuals drafting those policies should remain mindful that, despite their best intentions, outlawing a behavior often causes more harm than good.

Notes

¹ For a comprehensive history of Prohibition in the U.S., including the unique motivations of different groups arguing for its passage, see Daniel Okrent. *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, New York: Scribner, 2010.

² See W.J. Rorabaugh *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*. New York: Oxford U.P., 1979. Although the text focuses on alcohol use in the early years of the U.S., it connects that period with the anti-alcohol movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

³ These texts are for entertainment and often lack citations for their source material. For example, see Anistatia R. Miller and Jared Brown. *Shaken Not Stirred: A Celebration of the Martini*, New York: William Morrow, 2013. The authors claim that Craddock was British and moved to the U.S. as a young man, though this contradicts newspaper articles of the period which describe Craddock as having been born in Chicago. See "Craddock, Savoy Bartender, has Passport Troubles" *New York Times* 16 Dec. 1930: 33. Web.

⁴ For a history of Tijuana during this time, see Paul J. Vanderwood. *Satan's Playground: Mobsters and Movie Stars at America's Greatest Gaming Resort*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

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