

## Prohibition – 18th Amendment

- \* Groups and reasons for prohibiting alcohol:
  - o Anti-Saloon League and Women's Christian Temperance Union
  - o believed drinking was a sin
  - o drinking made husbands abuse and/or abandon wives and families
  - o drinking caused laziness and unemployment
  - o drinking caused crime
  - o drinking led to unhealthy people
  - o drinking associated with recent immigrant groups (Irish, Southern and Eastern Europeans) – disregarded drinking traditions of British, French, and Germans
  - o by 1918 29 states had amendments to state constitutions prohibiting alcohol
- \* Very few spoke against it because would be seen as a “drunkard” or “sinful”
  - o passed Senate with little debate in only 13 hours
  - o passed House of Rep. with debate only taking one day
  - o states ratified in quickly – passed Congress in 1917 and was ratified by January of 1919
  - o 18 Amendment prohibited the "manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors."
- \* Volsted Act of 1919 defined an intoxicating beverage as one that contained one-half of one percent of alcohol by volume. Did not stop illegal activity, but made it more clear on definition of alcohol.
- \* At first, most Americans outwardly agreed with prohibition, but they soon became tired of it and openly disobeyed the law
  - o hip flask, “bootleg” (hiding in boot)
  - o speakeasies in almost every community of any size – illegal or home made alcohol
- \* Crime – gangs used new wartime weapons (machine guns, grenades, cars) to make enforcement more difficult
  - o gangs competed in deadly efforts to control the sale and transportation of illegal alcohol
  - o Al Capone of Chicago most famous but only one of many
  - o Gangsters invested their profits in many “legitimate” businesses such as restaurants, flower shops, bakeries, etc. to “launder” their money
- \* Did it work?
  - o Many said yes – lower divorce rates, fewer accidents, and lower poverty
  - o Many said no – senseless attempt to enforce what was impossible to stop
  - o Those who wanted prohibition could say they had it and feel morally good, those who wanted to drink could do so
- \* Repeal: Because so difficult to enforce (expensive and creating an atmosphere of lawlessness) repealed Eighteenth Amendment by the adoption of the Twenty-first Amendment. The new amendment went into effect in December, 1933, and marked the end of the "noble experiment" to regulate the nations' social customs.