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Humanities 10

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## **Smuggling During Prohibition: How The Absence of Alcohol Led to An Abundance of Problems**

Eight-year-old Angelo Michael Lenzie is excited. It's 1923, in the middle of Prohibition, which is a national ban on alcohol in the U.S. Tomorrow, Angelo's wealthy sister is going to buy him his first long pantsuit. He goes to sleep happy, but when he wakes up, everything's gone. His sister's husband, Benito, has been arrested for bootlegging, and the restaurant that Benito ran has been shut down. Little Angelo is devastated; when will he get his pantsuit? Prohibition laws passed in the early 20th century, after much campaigning from various organizations. The ban on alcohol affected millions of people, including Angelo, whose brother-in-law's restaurant sold liquor illegally. Many people lost their livelihood, but they found other ways to make money — namely, bootlegging. Although most of North America was in support of it, Prohibition was administered ineffectively, leading to rampant corruption and smuggling.

During World War 1, the movement to pass Prohibition laws took off. This was called the Temperance Movement, and it advocated for a completely sober society. The Temperance Movement believed that alcohol was the barrier to 'moral superiority' — a phrase widely used within the movement. Early organizations supporting the Temperance Movement were formed in the 19th century, and by the 20th, they had spread so much that they were able to enact real change. There were many of these organizations supporting the Temperance Movement, mainly stemming from churches. Some of the biggest organizations were the Order of Good Templars, founded in New York in 1851, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, founded in Ohio in 1874. The Temperance Movement spread among churches and religious

organizations across the world, and legislators began to take notice. Prohibition was enacted in Canada in 1916, during World War 1, and in the U.S. in 1920. It is clear that the Temperance Movement was directly responsible for it.

Once Prohibition was passed, immediate problems arose. There were several loopholes in the laws that people began to use to their advantage. One of these was getting a fake prescription for alcohol from your doctor, as it was still legal for alcohol to be used for medical purposes. People also were able to legally buy and sell the supplies and ingredients to brew and distill liquor, then make it themselves. These loopholes were frowned upon, but they weren't the main focus of investigations by the Prohibition Bureau in the U.S. Their investigations were supposed to bring down major smugglers and crime bosses, but so many members of the Bureau were corrupt that it was difficult to accomplish anything. This corruption ran deep into the system, in both Canada and the U.S. Even the U.S. Attorney General, Henry Daugherty, was corrupt, taking bribes from bootleggers and selling alcohol on the side. Corrupt officials like him could warn bootleggers of forthcoming raids and investigations, and the bootleggers would have time to get away. These problems persisted throughout the entirety of Prohibition.

Smuggling alcohol became a huge business, impacting thousands. People were desperate for alcohol, leading to illegal distilleries and speakeasies, password-protected nightclubs that sold alcohol. Other less conspicuous places like restaurants sold alcohol on the side. The government often raided these institutions, but since there were so many corrupt government officers that bootleggers could bribe, many of them suffered no consequences. Bootlegging was more difficult than other illegal activities, and it was easier for bootleggers to work together, forming 'organizations' which controlled the brewing, smuggling, and distribution of liquor. This was the birth of organized crime; famous mobsters like Al Capone and Bugsy Siegel got their start in bootlegging, and used their crime organizations to make themselves rich. This, in my opinion, was the most significant impacts Prohibition had on history. Organized crime led to countless acts of violence during the 1920s and 1930s, and it is

a part of our history that is easily recognizable to anyone. Gangsters were famous, and the crimes they committed were terrible. If there hadn't been such a huge market for bootlegging, many people would still be alive. This market inspired other things, too. Some of the liquor that was being smuggled came from Canada, as liquor laws were not as severe as in the U.S. An exception of Canada's prohibition laws was that Canadians could still manufacture and export liquor, but they couldn't sell it within Canada. That meant it was perfectly legal for Canadians to brew alcohol and send it to the U.S.— whoever received it there would receive all the blame. These businesses of smuggling changed crime, especially organized crime, in the U.S. and Canada forever.

Prohibition was a simple idea, but in practice, it completely backfired. Instead of creating a just and moral society, it led to the birth of organized crime in North America, and widespread corruption of government officials. When legislation passed in the late 1920s to end Prohibition, there were public celebrations. Of the many people involved in illegal trade of alcohol, only a fraction were punished. The Temperance Movement, though strongly supported by the public, ultimately failed in its one goal: restrict and prevent the drinking of alcohol. Prohibition remains significant to this day, because it affected both Canada and the U.S. so heavily; the legislation changed millions of lives, and it created organized crime in North America, leading to much bigger problems; these crime rings organized huge acts of violence. Organized crime was a big problem in the 20th century, leading to the deaths of many people, but it definitely would not have been as severe if Prohibition never existed.

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