



## POLITICAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS

**RATIFY TO REPEAL:**  
Protesting Prohibition 1914-1933**OVERVIEW**

Through viewing photographs and objects, students will learn about the debate over Prohibition, and how various groups across gender, class, and ethnic lines advocated for and against the repeal of the 18th amendment.

**STUDENT GOALS**

- Students will learn how the debate over Prohibition occurred against the background of World War I and its aftermath, the woman suffrage movement, and the growth of consumer culture.
- Students will discuss the roles that women played in both campaigns for and against Prohibition, and how their tactics reflect the changing roles of women in early 20th-century New York.
- Students will learn how immigrants and workers were often blamed for the widespread violation of Prohibition and how they were targeted by law enforcement.
- Through analyzing photographs and objects, students will discuss how gender and class informed the campaigns for and against Prohibition, and how these ideas were visually represented in these historical resources.

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS****Grade 4:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**Grades 6-8:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

**Grades 9-10:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.



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## KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

- Temperance
  - Prohibition
  - Saloon
  - Repeal
  - Speakeasy
  - Enforcement
  - Regulate
  - Bootlegger
  - Reform
  - Morality
  - Amendment
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## ACTIVISTS

- Pauline Sabin
  - William Anderson
  - Fiorello La Guardia
  - Governor Al Smith
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## ACTIVISTS

- Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)
  - Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform (WONPR)
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**RATIFY TO REPEAL:** Protesting Prohibition 1914-1933**INTRODUCING RESOURCES 1-4**

In 1919, after decades of a national temperance campaign urging voluntary abstinence from alcohol, voters ratified the 18th amendment prohibiting alcohol's manufacture and sale. New York City, with its famed nightlife and saloon culture, was at the center of the debate raging over "Prohibition." While couched in the language of improving the health and moral standing of the populace, opposition to Prohibition often pitted Anglo-Protestants against immigrants and working-class New Yorkers. In addition, uneven enforcement and the continued circulation of illegal alcohol led to widespread lawbreaking, corruption, and a nationwide backlash.

New York's elected officials like Governor Al Smith and Congressman Fiorello La Guardia worked with grass-roots activists, such as the Manhattan-based Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform (WONPR), to dismantle Prohibition. In 1933, the 21st Amendment repealed the 18th—the only time an amendment has been entirely repealed. An early "culture war," the controversy concerned not just alcohol, but also the government's power to regulate behavior.



Unknown. *Anti-Prohibition Parade*. July 4, 1921. Museum of the City of New York.



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**DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS**

- Are these protesters for or against Prohibition? What are their reasons?
- Since this photograph was taken in 1921, two years after World War I, how do the protesters' concerns relate to their identities as men?
- Why did they stage this protest on July 4? What other symbols of American freedom are they invoking?

**INTRODUCING RESOURCE 2**

Women have been considered some of the most visible advocates of the temperance movement—the movement beginning in the nineteenth century to voluntarily abstain from drinking alcohol. Less known is that women were also some of the most active opponents of the 18th amendment. The Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform (WONPR) was founded in 1929 to show that not all women supported temperance. On the heels of the successful suffrage campaign that won women the right to vote in 1920, the WONPR, reflected the modern “new woman” of the 1920s. From its headquarters in New York City, the organization also gained publicity by organizing events such as a motorcade through New York State. The motorcade left from Fifth Avenue and 92nd street, home of Mrs. Christian R. Holmes (née Bettie Fleishmann), pictured second from right in the top photograph.



Unknown. *New York Motorcade of the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform, 1931.* Museum of the City of New York.



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## DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- How is this photograph different from the other image of protesters from 10 years before (Resource 1, page 3)?
- How are the activists presenting themselves? Describe their pose, their attire (dress), and their expressions.
- These women organized a series of meetings and targeted their “motorcade” (a procession of motor vehicles) in dry districts of New York State where alcohol was banned. In what ways did their gender and class make them effective campaigners to repeal prohibition? What new vision of women are they projecting?

## INTRODUCING RESOURCES 3 & 4

The WONPR also used consumer culture to push their political agenda. The group opened a “repeal shop” on Madison Avenue in 1932, and another in the elite Bergdorf-Goodman department store, which sold pins, playing cards, neckties, scarves, and other items that featured slogans calling for the repeal of the 18th amendment. They also sold makeup compacts and cigarette lighters that appealed to the modern woman—and perhaps some flappers—of the age. They auctioned off facials at Elizabeth Arden, to this day a popular item at fundraisers. In 1932 the home was considered to be the woman’s domain, and particularly with the newfound dominance of modern advertising of mass-produced consumer goods in the 1920s, this included shopping for products for themselves and their families. The production and sale of everyday items to fund opposition to Prohibition was part of a broader tradition of women using consumer goods to advance political causes.



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“Repeal 18th Amendment W.O.N.P.R.” Makeup Compact, Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform, 1929-33. Museum of the City of New York.

“Repeal, Ratify, Regulate” Cigarette Lighter, Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform, 1929-33. Museum of the City of New York.



**DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS**

- Why would the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform (WONPR) set up a shop to sell these products?
- Who is the WONPR appealing to?
- Why would they produce these types of objects?
- Describe how these objects represent the identity of the “new” and modern woman of the 1920s?



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## ACTIVITY

Some Prohibition advocates had presented their quest to outlaw alcohol as a battle between “native” and working-class ethnic cultures. Supporters had blamed immigrants and workers for the widespread violation of the law once enacted, and New Yorkers who frequented saloons—places to drink but also to hold union meetings, speak native languages, and in some cases vote in local elections—claimed they were unfairly targeted by law enforcement.

As Prohibition wore on, foreign-born and working-class New Yorkers argued that it infringed on civil liberties and was un-American. At demonstrations, they carried placards that declared “We Prefer Brewers of Beer to Brewers of Bigotry.” Anti-Prohibition politicians and organizations appealed to New Yorkers across class, ethnic, and racial lines—a strategy that helped them repeal the 18th amendment.

The class will divide into 4 separate groups. One group will imagine they are veterans who returned from World War I, another group will represent the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (for more information visit <http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/prohibition/roots-of-prohibition/>), a third group will be participants in the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform, and the fourth group will represent a group of immigrant factory workers who oppose Prohibition. Each group should consider the following questions and discuss:

- Who are the people represented in your group?
- What might be their position on Prohibition?
- Why do they feel this way?

Each group should create a slogan to represent their collective response to Prohibition and then design a product to sell to support their cause that would appeal to a variety of New Yorkers.



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**ADDITIONAL READING****THE NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLES**

“Women Wets Begin Motorcade Appeal,” October 13, 1932, describes the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform’s campaign through the “dry” Congressional districts of upper New York.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1932/10/13/100863507.html?pageNumber=38>

“Fewer than 20,000 in Anti-Dry Parade,” July 5, 1921.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1921/07/05/107019557.html?pageNumber=1>

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**CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS**

“The Injustice of Marijuana Arrests” by Jesse Wegman, July 28, 2014.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/29/opinion/high-time-the-injustice-of-marijuana-arrests.html>

“As Coal Prospects Decline, a Colorado Town Reconsiders Marijuana” by Jack Healy, March 23, 2016.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/24/us/as-coal-prospects-decline-a-colorado-town-reconsiders-marijuana.html>



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**SOURCES**

"*Repeal 18th Amendment W.O.N.P.R.*" Makeup Compact, Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform. 1929-1933. Museum of the City of New York.

"*Repeal, Ratify, Regulate*" Cigarette Lighter, Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform. 1929-1933. Museum of the City of New York.

McGirr, Lisa. *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015.

Okrent, Daniel. *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*. New York: Scribner, 2011.

Seidman, Sarah, "The New York Women Who Dismantled Prohibition," MCNY Blog, December 15, 2015.

<https://blog.mcny.org/2015/12/15/the-new-york-women-who-dismantled-prohibition/>

Unknown, *Anti-Prohibition Parade*. July 4, 1921. Museum of the City of New York.

Unknown, *New York Motorcade of the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform*, 1931. Museum of the City of New York.