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This image—depicting a reaction to the proposed 18th Amendment (regarding “Prohibition”) of the U.S. Constitution—was included in the *New York Tribune’s* issue of December 18, 1917 (after both the House and the Senate had passed a revised resolution regarding the amendment). From "Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers," at the Library of Congress.

After many decades of agitation by temperance societies and the Anti-Saloon League, Congress passed a joint resolution to forbid the use of liquor in the U.S. The national law, proposed by Congress during World War I, would become the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution if ratified by thirty-six states.

By January 16, 1919, thirty-six states had ratified the proposed amendment that banned "the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors" within the United States and its territories. It was slated to take effect one year later, on January 16, 1920.

Because the Eighteenth Amendment itself included neither enforcement provisions nor violation penalties, Congress passed a national prohibition law called the Volstead Act. Named for the Minnesota lawyer and Congressman who facilitated it, that law gave federal authorities broad enforcement powers.

Because of its potential to violate individual rights already guaranteed by the Constitution, however, the Volstead Act could not become effective until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it was constitutional. Given the political climate, it is not surprising the high court found no problem with the Volstead Act.

Vested with the authority to enforce prohibition, police agencies immediately began to destroy existing supplies of liquor. It is estimated that between 50-60 million gallons were eliminated.



But ... anyone who thought alcoholic beverages would vanish from American society was naive. As it happened, an entire illicit industry - run largely by gangsters - supplied the country's continuing demand for intoxicating beverages.

It wasn't the first time that organized crime had taken hold of Chicago.

Credits:

In-text image: [Robert Runyon photo](#) (online via the Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin): "U.S. officials destroying liquor at the Brownsville Customs House, December 20, 1920."

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Media Stream



Prohibition - Destroying Liquor

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Anti-Saloon League - Atlantic City

Photo online, courtesy Library of Congress.

Quoted passages from *Prohibition: Thirteen Years that Changed America*, by Edward Behr.

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