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Social Relevance of Speakeasies: Prohibition, Flappers, Harlem, and Change

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The Social Relevance of Speakeasies:
Prohibition, Flappers, Harlem, and Change

by

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Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Senior Independent Study

Supervised by
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Department of History

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INTRO

THESIS STATEMENT

Nine years into Prohibition, 1929, the mayor of Berlin, Germany, Gustav Boess, made an official visit to New York City. Boess stayed in New York City for a week, and did many things any tourist might do when visiting New York. Boess visited parks, hospitals, dined with German-American civic groups, and marveled at the enormous skyscrapers that made up the New York sky-line.¹ Boess was also astounded by the speed of life and activity and awkwardly stated, “It goes here fast.”² Just before leaving, Boess made an equally awkward comment when he asked the mayor of New York, James J. Walker, “When does the Prohibition law go into effect?”³ Alcohol was so prevalent and uninhibited on Boess’s week-long visit to New York he did not realize Prohibition was in place. It is also important to note it had been in effect for almost a decade when Boess made this comment.

Speakeasies, or illegal drinking establishments were wide spread during Prohibition. New York had an enormous number of speakeasies during Prohibition and most likely had more than any other city in the United States, but speakeasies became commonplace throughout the United States all throughout the thirteen years of Prohibition. Speakeasies were in major cities like New York and Detroit, but also in smaller towns like Steubenville, Ohio, and Depue, Illinois. Speakeasies ranged in quality, size, and the types of people that visited them.

¹ Michael A. Lerner, *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

² Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.1

³ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.1

The underground nature of the speakeasy also created many changes in society and culture. The speakeasy created an environment where gangsters, the wealthy, and the lower classes could all drink and socialize together. A larger impact could be noticed in the realm of African Americans and women. African Americans living in Harlem especially experienced cultural changes due to Prohibition. The Harlem Renaissance was occurring at the same time as Prohibition which created an interesting cabaret and speakeasy scene in Harlem, which many middle class whites frequented and enjoyed. Race was still a major issue, but there were an increasing number of African Americans and whites drinking together and listening to jazz played by African Americans. During this time African American musicians were being recorded for the first time in history. Many African American writers were also being published in increasing numbers. Women had won the right to vote shortly after the Eighteenth Amendment had passed, and this new freedom along with a new mind set allowed women to live more freely, even as flappers. This lifestyle is characterized by drinking, smoking, dressing in much more revealing clothes, and having much more sex, much of it premarital.

Even though speakeasies were an illegal enterprises; they existed in great numbers and allowed for social interactions between people of different backgrounds, races, genders, and socioeconomic statuses that may not have happened without them. Prohibition and the enormous amount of speakeasies that were created in response towards Prohibition helped drive several social changes during the 1920's, many of which involved African Americans and women. These social changes helped African Americans and women gain more long-lasting freedom, independence, and equality that continued to be fought into the 1960's and 1970's.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Several sources will be used for the portion that pertains to the lead up to Prohibition. One of which, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, by Daniel Okrent, focuses on a vast number of topics about the Prohibition, spanning from the mid 1750's until the eventual repeal of Prohibition. Okrent's book was used extensively in the chapter regarding the rise of public desire for Prohibition, and how the Women's Christian Temperance Union and Anti-Saloon League made it a reality. Okrent's *last Call* and Thomas R. Pegram's *Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800-1933* were the most important, and broadly used, books in the chapter discussing the rise in popularity of the dry movement. Both of these books were written primarily as social history, with small details of cultural and political history.

Christine Sismondo's *America Walks into a Bar: A Spirited History of Taverns and Saloons Speakeasies, and Grog Shops* was used extensively throughout this entire Independent Study. In Sismondo's book, she discusses the long history of drinking establishments in the United States ranging from the Colonial days in the late seventeenth century through the 1980's. Sismondo's first chapters discussed the importance of taverns starting in the days of Puritans, and also discussed how they helped the Colonial forces to victory over the British in the American Revolution. These chapters provided a quality background that helped explain the importance of drinking establishments in America. Sismondo's *America Walks into a Bar* was in large part written as a social history, and also included some political history. Sismondo's book provided a vast

amount of information which was used throughout this Independent Study, with an emphasis on the portions pertaining to the speakeasy itself and social changes for women.

Cary D. Wintz's *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance* is quite different from every other book on this list, in that it was only used in one chapter, the rise of Jazz and Harlem Renaissance chapter. Wintz discussed several aspects regarding the Harlem Renaissance, ranging from the Great Migration to the decline and unofficial end of the Harlem Renaissance. It was important to discuss the enormous migration of African Americans leaving the South and moving, in large part, to northern American cities because of the impact it had on the cities and the African Americans who moved. There were several books related to the writing style and focus of Wintz. David Levering's *When Harlem Was in Vogue* is one these books. Wintz and Levering practiced a primarily social history, but did write some political history.

Another book that was used extensively on the Harlem Renaissance and rise of jazz chapter, as well as most of the chapters, was Kathleen Morgan Drowne's *Spirits of Defiance: National Prohibition and Jazz Age Literature, 1920-1933*. Drowne's book also detailed the many different kinds of speakeasies during Prohibition, and wrote some about the changing woman of the 1920's. One aspect that Drowne used in her writing that separated her book from any on in this list was at the beginning of each chapter she would discuss certain books and or movies that were made or written during the time of Prohibition, and how they were connected to the topic she was discussing. Drowne's connections of popular literature and film of the time helped show how Prohibition and

the defiance of Prohibition was such a huge part of many people's lives during this era.⁴ Drowne primarily used social history, but did write some political history.

Joshua Zeitz's *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern* was only used in one chapter, but was the most important and broadly used in that chapter. Zeitz describes the many social changes for women during the 1920's. He also described the many aspects that made up the flapper of the 1920's, and also discussed several famous flappers that lived in the 1920's. Zeitz's *Flapper* provided a detailed look at the women of the 1920's, how they changed, and why that decade was relevant for the evolution of women in America. Zeitz's book also focused more on the women of the 1920's than any book that was researched. In most of the books researched women usually had a chapter, but only a couple authors wrote a complete book about flappers and the many social changes that occurred for women during Prohibition. Like every book on this list Social history was primarily used with a small amount of political history.

The last book is Michael A. Lerner's *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City*. Lerner's book focused on New York City during Prohibition, with a focus on speakeasies, African Americans in Harlem, women, and the politics that made Prohibition a law and how political movements made the Eighteenth Amendment a thing of the past, with the passage of the Twenty-First Amendment. Even though *Dry Manhattan* was primarily focused on one city during Prohibition it was still useful in every aspect of this Independent Study. He was constantly using the speakeasy to

⁴Kathleen Morgan Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance: National Prohibition and Jazz Age Literature, 1920-1933* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005), 5.

explain the many new freedoms women were enjoying. Lerner's book was also the only book researched that focused primarily on one city, New York City, during Prohibition. The only book that was similar to *Dry Manhattan* is R.G. Bluemer's *Speakeasy: Prohibition in the Illinois Valley*. Bluemer, like Lerner, focused on one area, the Illinois Valley. Lerner wrote *Dry Manhattan* as a social history, but did write more extensively on political history than any other books on this list.

METHODOLOGY

Social history and political history will be the methods of writing used for this Independent Study. Social history is the history of people and their actions. Political history is the history of the political actions of governments and their officials. Several kinds of methodology could have been used to research and write about speakeasies, but the social interaction and social changes that occurred primarily in speakeasies during Prohibition is fascinating and the most intriguing. Also, it is difficult to write anything regarding Prohibition without using at least a small amount of political methodology. It is important to look at how and why something like the Eighteenth Amendment was written in the U.S. Constitution in a country based on freedom and independence, and why and how another amendment was passed that ratified Prohibition null and void. When researching for Prohibition related topics it became clear social and political methodology were going to be most viable options given the resources available.

In reading the vast number of sources it was became clear of the importance of social interactions and change that occurred in and just prior to Prohibition. Women had won the right to vote just after passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, and were in large part the driving force behind Prohibition. Many of the women who were fighting for the right to vote were also members of organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Mean while a younger generation of women during Prohibition found more independence by doing things like drinking alcohol in speakeasies. These women became much more independent during Prohibition; they wore less clothing, lived on their own more, drank more, had more sex, and worked more.

African Americans have a similar story. In the years leading up to Prohibition, and also during Prohibition, African Americans were moving to northern cities in huge numbers in what became known as the Great Migration. Areas like Harlem became havens for African Americans, and bred movements like the Harlem Renaissance, which in large part coincided with Prohibition. Many gangsters found Harlem to be a monetary gold mine during Prohibition, and many set up speakeasies. Many of these speakeasies even gave many African Americans jobs, which were hard to find during this time. Without Prohibition and the many aspects of politics that made it a reality it is possible the history of African Americans and women in the 1920's would have been much different.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FIGHT FOR PROHIBITION

Before discussing the many social impacts of speakeasies during Prohibition it is important to discuss Prohibition, and the massive dry-movement that helped push the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. Along with the Eighteenth Amendment and Volstead Act, important figures and organizations of the Prohibition Movement will also be discussed. This includes the birth and growth of very influential Prohibition organizations, including the more famous the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League. Both of these organizations were vital to the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment.

During the nineteenth century Americans drank an exponentially infinite amount of alcohol. By 1830 every American drank the equivalent of 1.7 bottles of eighty-proof liquor every week. Compared to today's standards this equates to about three times as much as Americans drink now.⁵ It is important to note that even though these figures represent every man, woman and child in America, women and children generally did not drink. Which means most men drank exponentially more than 1.7 bottles of eighty-proof liquor a week.⁶

Many, mostly women, did not like the amount of alcohol being consumed by men and the negative impacts it created on society, and wanted a change. Many women even started organizing. One of the earlier dry organizations was the Women's Crusade. They were prevalent in many cities throughout the Midwest, but one small town in Ohio made

⁵ Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Scribner Publishing, 2010), 8.

⁶ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.13.

the Women's Crusade more well known to the Prohibition movement than any other. In December of 1873 a large number of members of the Women's Crusade travelled to Hillsboro, a small town east of Cincinnati, Ohio. The women fell to their knees in all of the saloons in town and prayed, sang, read the bible, and "generally creating the largest stir in the town."⁷ The crusaders persuaded nine of the thirteen saloons in Hillsboro to close their doors.⁸ This type of activism began to spread throughout the Midwest, and would lead to a much larger and collective organization.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union started in Ohio in 1874. Anna Gordon described the early days of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, as follows:

as if by magic, armies of women- delicate, cultured, home women- filled the streets of cities and towns of Ohio, going in pathetic procession from the door of the home to that of the saloon, singing, praying, and pleading with the rum sellers with all the eloquence of their mother-hearts. The movement ran like wildfire over the land.⁹

One of the most influential and famous leaders of the Women's Christian Temperance Union was Frances E. Willard. Willard was offered a job as President of the Chicago Women's Christian Temperance Union district; she performed her job so well she was elected as the President of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in 1879.¹⁰

Under President Willard the Women's Christian Temperance Union grew from a small organization from Ohio to becoming world renowned. Willard was said to be a tremendous speaker with an ability to sway any crowd in her favor. Along with her talent

⁷ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.13.

⁸ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.13.

⁹ Holland Webb, "Temperance movement and prohibition," *International Social Science Review* 74 (January 1999): 62.

¹⁰ Webb, "Temperance movement and prohibition," p.63-64.

as a public speaker she was also a talented writer and editor for *The Union Signal*.

Willard also oversaw the construction of the National Temperance Hospital, which specialized in never using alcohol in the process of practicing medicine. Willard was a huge reason why the Women's Christian Temperance Union became such a force. Her leadership in the last thirty years of nineteenth century was irreplaceable in the fight for Prohibition. Willard served as the President of the Women's Christian Temperance Union until she passed away in 1898.¹¹

The Women's Christian Temperance Union may not have been as successful as the Anti-Saloon League at pushing laws through state legislatures, but it did make some changes in politics. In the late nineteenth century the Grange, New York chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union petitioned their state representative to enact their organization sponsored bill, "Scientific temperance education," and it passed."¹² As the years passed into the nineteenth century almost every state had anti-alcohol laws. For example, a New York law, forced children to be taught that alcohol was poison. This was not as helpful as getting someone elected to office, but still showed the influence of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, a group largely made up of women who could not even vote.¹³ Using the knowledge of forcing politicians to do what they wanted, women started pushing for more rights, like the right to vote. In 1890 only seventeen states gave women the right to vote. Kansas gave women municipal suffrage and Wyoming was the only state to grant full suffrage.¹⁴ Carry Nation was one of the most famous women of the temperance movement. Nation threw rocks at a saloon in

¹¹Webb, "Temperance movement and prohibition," p.63-64.

¹² Thomas R. Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800-1933* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishing, 1998), 75.

¹³Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.75.

¹⁴Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.75.

Kansas, Nation explained her actions, ‘You refused me the right to vote,’ she told the Kansas legislature, “and I had to use a rock.”¹⁵ Women like Carry Nation helped push not only Prohibition into the twentieth century, but also the right for women to vote.

The Women’s Christian Temperance Union grew to an eventual 250,000 member organization.¹⁶ They had more members than the women’s suffrage organization.¹⁷ One woman quoted as explaining what the Women’s Christian Temperance Union was: “It has been well said no other association of philanthropic workers has touched so many springs of praise and blame, of love and hate, and become equally distinguished for the friends it has won and the enemies it has made.”¹⁸ Gaining many members and even more followers, the amount of support for an alcohol free country grew drastically. Women and an increasingly large amount of men were sick of the massive amount of alcohol consumed every year, and the negative affects it had on society.

The Anti-Saloon League was another organization that grew, in size and power, drastically between its birth and the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. The Anti-Saloon League was fighting for the same thing as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union: the closure of the saloon. The tactics used by the Anti-Saloon League were much different. The Anti-Saloon League used political means to close saloons and move the country towards total Prohibition. Okrent describes the power of the Anti-Saloon League, as follows: “The Anti-Saloon League may not have been the first broad-based American pressure group, but it certainly was the first to develop the tactics and the

¹⁵Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.75.

¹⁶Okrent, *Last Call*, p.16.

¹⁷Webb, “Temperance movement and prohibition,” p.62.

¹⁸Webb, “Temperance movement and prohibition,” p.62.

muscle necessary to rewrite the Constitution.”¹⁹ Compared to the Women’s Christian Temperance Union’s tactics of closing saloons one at a time by singing and creating a disturbance, the Anti-Saloon League helped create change through public policy. They would support any politician if they supported Prohibition, no matter what their other beliefs were.²⁰

The Anti-Saloon League had two famous leaders, Howard Hyde Russell and Wayne B. Wheeler, both of which were from Ohio and were Oberlin College graduates. Howard Hyde Russell founded the organization in 1895. At the time, Russell saw the two existing anti-alcohol organizations as inefficient. He believed that the Women’s Christian Temperance Union was too involved in too many aspects of politics. The other organization Russell the Prohibition Party, was more ineffective only getting 2.2 percent of the total vote for the presidency, at the party’s height. Russell decided they would only focus on one issue, and would use “political retribution” to get what they wanted.²¹ A better word for this would be intimidation. The Anti-Saloon League was also non-partisan, supporting anyone that supported Prohibition, even if that meant allying themselves with the Ku Klux Klan, which they later regretted. They started losing support and had no chance in getting support from minorities and Catholics when the group was teamed up with the Ku Klux Klan.²² Under Russell the Anti-Saloon League would grow in size and political power, but nothing compared to another influential leader of the Anti-Saloon League.

¹⁹Okrent, *Last Call*, p.35.

²⁰Okrent, *Last Call*, p.35, 38.

²¹Okrent, *Last Call*, p.36.

²²Lantzer, *"Prohibition Is Here to Stay": The Reverend Edward S. Shumaker and the Dry Crusade in America*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 113, 131.

Wayne Wheeler became one of the biggest faces of, not only of the Anti-Saloon League but the Prohibition movement as a whole. Wheeler's strong influence was evident in his obituaries:

The New York Herald Tribune: Without Wayne B. Wheeler's generalship it is more than likely we should never have had the Eighteenth Amendment." The Milwaukee Journal: "Wayne Wheeler's conquest is the most notable thing in our times." The editorial eulogists of the Baltimore Sun had it absolutely right, while at the same time completely wrong: "....nothing is more certain than that when the next history of this age is examined by dispassionate men, Wheeler will be considered one of its most extraordinary figures." No one remembers, but he was.²³

Wheeler was loved and hated by many for his help with Prohibition, but no one could question his influence on politics. Wheeler advanced through the Anti-Saloon League and became the Ohio Superintendent. At this position Wheeler was in charge of many things in Ohio, like getting Prohibition supporting candidates in Ohio elected into offices. Wheeler performed this very well.²⁴ Wayne Wheeler was a huge reason why the Anti-Saloon League became the most powerful Prohibition group in the United States.

Just prior to the U.S. joining World War I, anti-immigrant sentiment was on the rise. There was an unrestricted European immigration into the United States, but one set of immigrants proved more helpful to the Prohibition organizations than any other, German-Americans.²⁵ As the United States and German relations began to worsen so did many American's views of German-Americans. Many owners of breweries, and brewers themselves, in the United States were German; this created many issues for anyone who was anti-Prohibition, or German. Prohibition groups like the Anti-Saloon League found

²³Okrent, *Last Call*, p.38

²⁴Okrent, *Last Call*, p.40

²⁵Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.136.

this as a golden opportunity to push their beliefs about Prohibition, by using anti-German sentiment as an effective tool.

Historian Charles Merz believed that World War I did three things that helped the dry movement, “It centralized authority in Washington; it stressed the importance of saving food; and it outlawed all things German.”²⁶ Obviously these three reasons can be felt directly with alcohol producers, especially brewers. Making large amounts of beer takes lots of grains and malt, which is also very important in producing a wide range of foods that could be used in the war effort. Washington also gained more power during this time. Many felt there was no way the country and the military could be ready with alcohol being consumed by many Americans. When the United States entered the war congress voted for alcohol free zones around all military camps.²⁷

Some German-Americans saw themselves on the side of the Germans in the early years of the war, especially before the United States entered the war. After the Lusitania sunk in 1915 many American officials became more and more apprehensive towards German-Americans, “A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America has not yet become an American.”²⁸ As the United States drew closer many of the largest brewers in America were increasingly seen as enemies of the state. The biggest brewers that were ridiculed include Busch, Pabst, Schlitz, Blatz, and Miller.²⁹ The early twentieth century was not a good time to be a German-American, even if you produced something as popular as beer.

²⁶Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.144.

²⁷Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.144.

²⁸Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.145.

²⁹Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.145.

Brewers were not the only German-Americans ridiculed; average citizens were also being harassed, sometimes to the point of violence. A young German-American man was even murdered in 1918 in St. Louis:

Near St. Louis in April 1918, a mob seized Robert Prager, a young man whose only discernible offense was to have been born in Germany. He had, in fact, tried to enlist in the American Navy but had been rejected for medical reasons. Stripped, bound with an American flag, dragged barefoot and stumbling through the streets, Prager was eventually lynched to the lusty cheers of five hundred patriots. A trial of the mob's leaders followed, in which the defendants wore red, white, and blue ribbons to court, and the defense counsel called their deed "patriotic murder." The jury took twenty-five minutes to return a verdict of not guilty.³⁰

This was most likely an isolated incident, but the fact that a mob killed someone for the sole reason of being born in Germany, and got away with the murder, shows how negative many Americans felt about Germany and German-Americans just prior to and during World War I.

With the help of World War I, the Prohibition movement would get exactly what it wanted, The Volstead Act and the Eighteenth Amendment. By December of 1917 both houses of Congress had approved the Eighteenth Amendment, the House winning by a majority of 282 to 138. It only took one more month for the mandatory three-fourths of the states to ratify the amendment.³¹ The next step of Congress was to pass a law that outlined what the Eighteenth Amendment allowed, The Volstead Act. It allowed for the production of only .5 percent alcohol, production of other non-intoxicating drinks like cider and juices, the sale of alcohol for sacramental and medical reasons, and allowed the

³⁰ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.101.

³¹ Philip P. Mason, *Rumrunning and the Roaring Twenties: Prohibition on the Michigan-Ontario Waterway* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 35.

consumption of alcohol that was purchased before the enactment of the Volstead Act.³² Everything else would be illegal punishable by jail time and fines. The act passed in October of 1919. Although, unlike the Eighteenth Amendment President Woodrow Wilson vetoed the Volstead Act, believing it was too extreme. Congress was set on a dry-America and overrode Wilson's veto, in only days.³³ With the passage of both the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act there was no hope for the country to be anything but dry. At least as far as the law was concerned.

³² Mason, *Rumrunning and the Roaring Twenties*, p.35.

³³ Michael A. Lerner, *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 46-47.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DANGER, THE FUN, AND THE ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF SPEAKEASIES DURING PROHIBITION

Speakeasies existed in massive numbers in cities like New York and Chicago, but also outside of American metropolitan areas; every city, small town, and every rural area, speakeasies were found. Several speakeasies were even discovered operating next to the Prohibition Bureau in Washington D.C. In a 1929 newspaper article the author described a map compiled by D.C. police. The author explained, “It shows that a dozen ‘speakeasies’ literally surround the Prohibition bureau.”³⁴ Not only was there a speakeasy operating close to one of the most important places for the Prohibition movement; there were twelve, that were documented. The enormous spread of illegal drinking establishments throughout America left no chance Prohibition agents and police forces to shut down all, or even a large percentage, of speakeasies during Prohibition. Throughout this chapter the many aspects that made speakeasies what they were and why so many stayed in business, despite being illegal, will be discussed throughout this chapter.

Before examining the speakeasy, it is important to explain the importance of drinking establishments in America, starting before the United States. was an independent country. As Sismondo explains, “Taverns were absolutely critical for the new settlers’ survival. Establishing the tavern was the first priority not just the first

³⁴ *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, (12 October, 1930), p. 8-A.

choice of every colony.”³⁵ When New England was being settled in the early 1600’s, taverns were the only form of infrastructure, until the first official government building was constructed in Boston in the year 1658. Until this building was built, all legal or governmental business in the area in and around current day Massachusetts, were held in either taverns or specific meeting houses. For example, the first town meeting of the town of Dorchester, Massachusetts was held in a tavern in 1633.³⁶ Government and legal matters, though very important uses of taverns during the mid 1600’s, were not the only uses of taverns.

Transportation during the mid 1600’s was primitive, to say the least. Travelling was hard work that took a large amount of physical strain and time, and rest stops were vital. Whether travelling groups needed a simple rest from travelling or a place to stay, taverns were best place to stop.³⁷ Taverns also provided travelers, and citizens alike, something more vital than a place to rest, something clean to drink that would not make anyone sick. Europeans and early settlers did not have the knowledge of bacteria and its effects on the human body, but they did know that brewing and distilling made safe beverages to drink in a time when clean water was often hard to find. Brewing and distilling also gave grains longer shelf lives, an important aspect to growing communities, and especially for farmers.³⁸ Taverns were the most important places in every town in early settlements of the American Colonies.

³⁵ Christine Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar: A Spirited history of Taverns and Saloons, Speakeasies and Grog Shops* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

³⁶ Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.5.

³⁷ Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.6.

³⁸ Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.6-8.

Taverns were also extensively used by colonists to help gain support for the Revolutionary War, and used in the war itself. The Sons of Liberty were famous for using taverns to gain support for the fight for independence. As Sismondo explains, “Generally, the Sons of liberty were extraordinarily successful in controlling their followers by mobilizing them in taverns. There were times, though, when the crowd turned into a mob under nobody’s control.”³⁹ Sismondo specifically described the Boston Massacre as one of these crowds turning into a mob under no control. The Boston Massacre, of 1770, was believed to have been started by a young wig maker’s apprentice and a Redcoat arguing about the bill of a wig, which ended with the butt of the Redcoat’s musket landing violently on the young boy’s face. By then patrons of a nearby tavern had entered into the street to witness the event. The Redcoat whistled for backup, and the violence escalated, ending with five colonists dead from musket wounds. The Boston Massacre was used, as well as exaggerated, by colonists to gain support for the fight for independence.⁴⁰

Many suggest The Green Dragon to be the “cradle” of the revolution, playing a pivotal role in several acts of aggression against the British.⁴¹ It is believed the Boston Tea Party was planned in this Boston tavern, and there is substantial evidence to support this claim. There is a sketch of the tavern, by an anonymous artist, which has a caption that states: “Where we met to Plan the Consignment of a few shiploads of Tea, December 16, 1773.”⁴² Paul Revere was also quoted as describing the importance of the Green Dragon Tavern, as follows: “formed ourselves into a committee for the purpose of

³⁹Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.65.

⁴⁰Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.65.

⁴¹Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.67.

⁴²Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.67.

watching the movements of the British soldiers and gaining every intelligence of the movement of the Tories. We held our meetings at the Green Dragon Tavern.”⁴³ The importance of taverns for gaining support and planning acts of aggression against the British were vital in the creation of the United States.

As the Revolutionary war began, taverns continued to be an important aspect of the fight for independence. It was believed that hundreds of taverns across the colonies were used as recruitment centers for soldiers as well for supplying continental soldiers with free food and drinks throughout the entire war. The Eagle Tavern in Williamsburg, Virginia was especially famous for feeding continental soldiers.⁴⁴ In fact, many battles of the war were even named after certain taverns. For example, “The Battle of Spencer’s Tavern in Virginia; the Battle of Torrence’s Tavern in North Carolina; the Battle of Paoli Tavern near Philadelphia; and the Battle of Vanibibber’s Tavern in Beaufort, South Carolina.”⁴⁵ Throughout the war taverns were also used for political purposes. The signing and travel of the Declaration of Independence is an example of this. The Declaration of Independence travelled through a vast network of taverns throughout the colonies; and was also ratified by the General Assembly in the Indian Kings tavern in Haddonfield, New Jersey in 1776.⁴⁶ In many ways, America was created in a wide network of New England taverns.

As explained in the previous chapter, America’s opinion of drinking establishments as well as alcohol itself drastically changed. Prohibition and the Volstead Act outlawed any type of public drinking establishment, such as saloons or taverns,

⁴³Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.67.

⁴⁴Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.74-75.

⁴⁵Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.75.

⁴⁶Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.75.

forcing anyone who wanted to own, work in, or drink in a public drinking establishment to own or drink in an illegally ran bar.⁴⁷ The speakeasy took on many different names and forms. The most common names for an illegal drinking establishment during Prohibition, aside from speakeasies, include, blind pigs, blind tigers, roadhouses, gin mills, jimmies, and shoe polish shops.⁴⁸ Along with the many different names for speakeasies, there were also an unimaginable number of these illegal drinking establishments.

In New York City alone, there were 35,000 illegal drinking establishments, as estimated by the New York City police department.⁴⁹ This estimate of speakeasies in New York City doubled the number of legal drinking establishments that had previously existed before the start of Prohibition.⁵⁰ By 1926, there were an estimated 17,000 speakeasies in Detroit.⁵¹ It is also important to note that since speakeasies, bootleggers, and proprietors of the speakeasies were involved in illegal activity, they generally did not keep records of their activity. The only documented cases, for the most part, of consumption, sale, and transportation of alcohol during Prohibition were court cases when someone was accused of breaking a law outlined in the Volstead Act. Although, many were busted during Prohibition, the majority were not.⁵² Therefore it is almost impossible to know exactly how many speakeasies there were during Prohibition, but it is safe to say that speakeasies were extremely plentiful in almost every corner of the United States during Prohibition.

⁴⁷ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p. 129.

⁴⁸ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.96.

⁴⁹ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.138.

⁵⁰ Eric Burns, *The Spirits of America: A Social History of Alcohol* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2005), 197.

⁵¹ *Lewiston Evening Journal*, (6 August, 1926), p.1.

⁵² Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.132.

Since there were no set rules or laws for illegal drinking establishments, most of the speakeasies varied greatly from one another. One of the biggest differences found in speakeasies, was quality. Walker described some of the poorest of quality speakeasies as “clip joints.”⁵³ These “clip joints” during Prohibition were notorious for violence and thievery. Walker explains how bartenders of “clip joints” would take advantage of drunken customers who wrote checks to pay for their bill, rather than pay with cash. The intoxicated customer would write a check and give it to the bartender, but the bartender would pretend to shred the check and tell the customer the check had too many mistakes and needed another. This could happen several times before the bartender would tell the customer to simply leave an IOU, while soon emptying the customer’s checking account, with the supposed ripped up checks.⁵⁴ Violence was also prevalent in these types of speakeasies, as Walker explains: “Achille Mirner, a jeweler, was beaten to death in a “clip joint” when he protested that he was being robbed. His murderers went to prison.”⁵⁵ Mirner became one of many victims of “clip joints.”

Not all speakeasies were as rough or dangerous as “clip joints.” Many were of high quality. Walker highlights a specific speakeasy that is without a doubt was of high quality. The speakeasy, The Nepenthe Club, was run by Jim Brinckner, although Walker states that the name of the speakeasy and the owner are false names, likely to protect both identities.⁵⁶ Part of the reason speakeasies, like the Nepenthe Club was different from speakeasies like “clip joints” was the owner. Jim, the owner, was known as a great man.

⁵³ Stanley Walker, *The Night Club Era* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 218.

⁵⁴ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.2128-219.

⁵⁵ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.219.

⁵⁶ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.26.

Walker stated, “The man in a corner might not be able to trust his partner, or his favorite cop, or his bishop, but he could trust Jim Brinckner.”⁵⁷

The Nepenthe Club did not only sell alcohol; it sold food that was supposedly some of the best in New York. The combination of the Nepenthe Club’s quality, its great food, alcohol during Prohibition, and enough tables for eighty people created a large amount of success for Jim Brinckner and the Nepenthe Club. In 1927 Jim made 100,000 dollars in profit. This profit margin was also after bad checks, bribery, and charity.⁵⁸ The Nepenthe was even this successful without allowing women in the door. At Jim’s previously owned speakeasy, Jim’s Corner Place, women were allowed in, but were only allowed a three drink maximum. He claimed that every woman customer “would beg for just one more drink.”⁵⁹ Eventually he, on many occasions, would watch them, women customers, fall asleep and would then have to drag them to a cab. When Jim opened The Nepenthe he claimed he would never allow women into his new establishment.⁶⁰ Even though women began frequenting drinking establishments during Prohibition in much higher numbers, there were still places like The Nepenthe that denied women service.

Another issue Jim, as well just about every other speakeasy owner, had to deal with was the reality of possible raids from Prohibition agents and other law enforcement agencies. Jim did a great job dealing with both Prohibition Agents and police forces. Jim admitted that Prohibition agents were more difficult to deal with but were still never a big problem. He said that agents were often lazy: they would spend quite a bit of time at

⁵⁷ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.28.

⁵⁸ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.33.

⁵⁹ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.31.

⁶⁰ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.31-32.

Jim's speakeasies just sitting around or talking to Jim.⁶¹ There was one situation when two agents he had never seen before entered into the speakeasy announcing that they were going to raid the speakeasy. After much discussion and a \$1,000 bribe, Jim talked the agents out of raiding or even reporting him and his establishment.⁶²

The police forces were often not as invasive or difficult to deal with, but there were still situations with the police. On one occasion a squad of policemen barged in and seemed quite angry. Jim gave all the men drinks and settled them down, eventually talking them out of doing any harm. One policeman even explained, "Hell, I didn't know it was this sort of place. I thought we were raiding a poolroom. Just tell the boys not to place any more bets on the horses over the phone. We don't mind the regular business."⁶³ Jim Brinckner was not the only owner who dealt with agents or police forces; almost all illegal drinking establishments during Prohibition were forced to deal with the reality of raids and officers or agents demanding bribes.

Although, Speakeasies found many ways to deter Prohibition agents and police forces from discovering the illegal alcohol or from reporting the speakeasy. Bribes were the most commonly practiced, but there were many other forms of diversion that kept agents and police forces from even discovering the illegal alcohol. One of the simplest ways owners of speakeasies tried to keep agents from raiding them was to simply disguise the fact that the building was a speakeasy. As Burns explains:

It might resemble anything from a tailor's shop to a bicycle repair shop, from an apartment to a synagogue, from a hardware store to a drugstore to a tearoom. There was an undertaking parlor in Detroit that used its hearses to bring liquor

⁶¹ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.36.

⁶² Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.36.

⁶³ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.37.

for the ostensible mourners; in a downtown lawyer's office the receptionist politely told the inquirers that Mr. Caveat didn't take such cases as they had in mind, while welcoming people already known into the back room where the bar was. In New York City, the International Hair Net Manufacturers' Association displayed a sample hairnet in a frame on the wall plus one roll-top desk and a safe containing a few shot glasses and several bottles of disastrous whiskey.⁶⁴

Clearly, speakeasy owners would use any kind of front thinkable to hide the fact an illegal drinking establishment existed in the location.

Hiding or moving the alcohol away from the establishment was another popular way to keep agents from busting a speakeasy. Some speakeasy owners would purchase an apartment or building neighboring their speakeasy to store and hide their supply of liquor. Addresses of neighboring speakeasies were rarely included in search warrants, usually allowing for a safe place for storage.⁶⁵ Intricate systems of slides and chutes were also used within the speakeasy itself. In many cases, all it was took was a simple push of a button to empty cabinets full of liquor to the basement, emptying the alcohol into the sewer leaving nothing but broken glass.⁶⁶ Membership cards were also popular among speakeasies. As Drowne explains, "Complete strangers were admitted only if they knew the proprietor, knew the password, could produce the card of a trusted reference, or could otherwise convince the bouncer or bartender that opening the door would not lead to a raid or an arrest."⁶⁷ One of the most common forms of preventing agents from discovering the illegal alcohol was secret compartments within the speakeasy itself.

The "21" Club in New York City had better compartments than anyplace else during Prohibition. Along with a handful of hidden compartments in closets in the upper

⁶⁴ Burns, *The Spirits of America*, p.200-201.

⁶⁵ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.153.

⁶⁶ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.153.

⁶⁷ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.97.

floors of the club, whose doors could not have been blown off with dynamite, was a compartment that rivaled bomb shelters. The compartment was more of a secret warehouse located in the basement of the “21” Club. The door to the warehouse was designed to look like the surrounding brick wall. It weighed two tons, but was perfectly balanced so it lay perfectly against the wall and would never get stuck. It had a hidden locking system with no visible locking system. In order to open the door an eighteen inch piece of wire needed to be pushed into a hole in the false brick wall, after which a sharp metallic sound click would be heard, opening the door.⁶⁸ The amount of money speakeasy owners were willing to pay to keep their alcohol from being discovered or destroyed reveals the value of alcohol during Prohibition.



Door leading to ‘21’ cellar (photo courtesy by Google Images and <http://www.mostinterestingdestinations.com/nightlife-dining/21-club-manhattan-new-york/>)

The high number of speakeasies gave many people throughout the country a form of income that may have been lost due to Prohibition. Many of the people speakeasies employed may have had trouble finding a legally established job due to their age,

⁶⁸ Marilyn Kaytor, “21:” *The Life and Times of New York’s Favorite Club* (Viking Adult, 1975), 66-72.

economic status, or race. For example, many speakeasies located in Greenwich Village, a small section of New York City, would hire small boys to watch for police that could be scouting certain speakeasies. They were called “spotters.” Many of these speakeasies would also hire older teenage boys, who were paid \$10 a week to help bootleggers with night deliveries.⁶⁹ One sociologist stated, “The liquor business in one form or another (became) the chief new source of employment or income for residents of the area.”⁷⁰ As the illegal liquor trade gave many less fortunate individuals a steady income, it also provided an entirely new set of problems.

During Prohibition, alcohol itself provided many issues for those who owned speakeasies, as well as for those who consumed the alcohol. Since it was illegal, alcohol during this time was never regulated as it was before or after Prohibition. Those who drank during Prohibition never knew exactly where the alcohol was coming from. There were numerous cases of death due to the poor quality of alcohol or poisonous substances in the drink. Walker pointed out that the alcohol ward of Bellevue Hospital in New York City saw an increase of poisoning from poor quality alcohol and from massive consumption of alcohol itself as Prohibition progressed through the 1920’s.⁷¹ In a more specific story of poisoning from alcohol, in October of 1928, thirty-eight people lost their lives due to poisonous alcohol consumption in New York City. The *Montreal Gazette* reported that, all thirty-eight deaths occurred within three days. Speakeasies located in the Lower East Side were the prime suspect.⁷² The author of the article also stated that, “Dr. Moriss was sure that a flood of poison alcohol had been loosed on the Lower East Side

⁶⁹ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.81.

⁷⁰ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.81.

⁷¹ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.214.

⁷² *The Milwaukee Gazette*, (10 October, 1928), p.3.

and that none of the liquor sold in the higher quality speakeasies was responsible for the deaths. ‘It is too expensive for the poor,’ he said.”⁷³ Poisonous Alcohol was a serious issue for those who drank during Prohibition, and it was especially dangerous for those who did not have enough money to purchase higher quality liquor.

Many bootleggers took advantage of the limited amount of alcohol they obtained and the limited amount of money the poor had. Cutting was a popular tactic used by many bootleggers during Prohibition. Cutting involved taking one good bottle of liquor and splitting it into several other bottles using other ingredients, some of which were deadly. Burnes explains the process of cutting, as follows:

Most often the cutting was done in the middle of the night, in plants that were set up in warehouses or storage facilities that looked deserted, and therefore not suspicious, by day. The tools of the cutter’s trade were water, flavoring, and alcohol. The water increased the quantities of beverage; the flavorings restored the diluted mixture to something approximating its original taste; and the alcohol replaced the lost pizzazz. Joe Kennedy’s scotch, for example, after being watered, might be restored with caramel, prune juice, or creosote, and then spiked back up again with industrial alcohol.⁷⁴

Industrial alcohol was a dangerous substance that could cause nervous system damage, blindness, and even death. Unfortunately, these dangers did not stop many bootleggers from using it as a cutting agent. During Prohibition, the production and sale of industrial alcohol doubled, according to a federal report.⁷⁵

Industrial alcohol was not the only popular substance used by bootleggers for cutting. Antifreeze, hair tonic, shellac, mouthwash, after-shave lotion, perfume, and cologne were all commonly used when cutting; along with whatever else bootleggers

⁷³ *The Milwaukee Gazette*, (10 October, 1928), p.3.

⁷⁴ Burnes, *The Spirits of America*, p.218.

⁷⁵ Burnes, *The Spirits of America*, p.219.

could get their hands on.⁷⁶ As Burnes explains, ““Those people who called them “rot gut,”” referring to some of the alcohol during Prohibition, “were not insulting them so much as providing an accurate description of the product’s effects.”⁷⁷ Drinking during Prohibition was often a gamble, especially if one did not have enough money to pay for quality alcohol.

These dangerous types of alcohol became so common that many cities and regions gave nicknames to specific versions. New York was famous for “Smoke,” which contained water and pure alcohol and could be purchased for \$.10 a drink. Chicago was famous for Yack Yack Bourbon, which was primarily made of iodine. Philadelphia became known for its Soda Pop Moon. Its primary ingredient was rubbing, or methanol alcohol. Sweet Whiskey was the choice of many people living in Kansas City, Missouri. This concoction was famous for containing sulfuric and nitric acid, which in little time would destroy kidneys.⁷⁸ Squirrel Whiskey, Goat Whiskey, Panther Whiskey, Coroner’s Cocktails, White Mule, and Jackass bourbon were commonly drank all over the country. Many of these were made with moonshine, but bootleggers found ways to cut these as well and added various toxic materials.⁷⁹ All of these different styles of “cut” alcohol were dangerous and destroyed countless lives, but there was one type of alcohol that became more infamous than any other type during Prohibition.

Jamaica Gin, more commonly known as “jake,” became the most infamous of all dangerous concoctions during Prohibition. As dangerous as “jake” was, it was actually obtainable, legally, through a prescription. In small doses, “jake” was proven to cure

⁷⁶ Burns, *The Spirits of America*, p.219.

⁷⁷ Burns, *The Spirits of America*, p.220.

⁷⁸ Burns, *The Spirits of America*, p.220.

⁷⁹ Sismondo, *America walks into a Bar*, p.227.

upset stomachs. Unfortunately, during Prohibition bootleggers bought massive amount of the alcohol, and “cut” it in ways that made it even more dangerous.⁸⁰ Many people suffered from the ill effects of drinking “jake.”

When large amounts of “jake” were consumed, it created what became known as “Jake Walk” or “Jake Leg.” Okrent explains the basis for these nicknames, as follows: “The poison Jake, which came from a distilling operation that had carelessly added a potent neurotoxin called tri-ortho-cresyl phosphate, attacked the nerves in the hands and feet, giving victims an odd, shuffling gait that became known as “Jake Walk” or “Jake Leg.””⁸¹ In 1930 alone, 50,000 people were poisoned, obtaining “Jake walk” like symptoms throughout Wichita, Kansas, Cincinnati, Ohio, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and rural areas throughout the Midwest and Plains regions, and some never walked again.⁸² Several Blues songs were even written about the dangers of “Jake,” as Okrent points out:

It's the doggonest disease
Ever heard of since I been born
You get numb in front of your body,
You can't carry any lovin' on.⁸³

“Jake” and other “cut” liquors found in speakeasies, and many other places throughout Prohibition America, ravished many Americans who were simply trying to have a drink. The lower classes, who could not afford quality liquor, were especially affected by poisoned alcohol.

⁸⁰ Burns, *The Spirits of America*, p.221.

⁸¹ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.221.

⁸² Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.29.

⁸³ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.222.

Those who wanted assurance that their alcohol would not kill them, cause blindness, or nervous system damage were forced to pay much more money. Burns explains rise in prices of alcohol during Prohibition, as follows:

In Northern cities, cocktails that sold for \$.15 in 1918 were \$.75 by the early 1920s. Domestic lager beer, which sold for about \$10.50 a barrel in 1918, cost anywhere from \$.15 or \$1 or more a quart by 1930 (that is, \$160 or more a barrel, depending on the quality of the beer.) Domestic spirits, which averaged \$1.39 a quart in 1918, soared to an average of \$4.01 in 1930. Prices on imported foreign beverages also rose significantly, and as Clark Warburton pointed out, no doubt a large quantity of American-made liquor was passed off as imported to fetch higher prices. In short, bootlegging activity was less a sign that drinking was rife than an explanation of why it was so hard to drink cheaply.⁸⁴

Alcohol during Prohibition would have been much more difficult to obtain than before, but there is little doubt that bootleggers and speakeasies took advantage of the known scarcity of alcohol and the fear of buying something cheap and possibly deadly.

During Prohibition, purchasing specific types of liquor became common for the first time in history. Before the start of Prohibition it was almost unheard of to ask for a drink by its brand name. Purchasing alcohol by its brand name during Prohibition showed a level of taste and wealth, and more importantly protected one from drinking something that could cause paralysis, blindness, or death.⁸⁵ Bootleggers could still cut or make fake imported liquor, but there were much less cases of poisoning from cut or fake imported liquor.⁸⁶ Alcohol imported from all over the world would have been heavily sought during Prohibition, but one country's liquor became more popular than any other.

Canadian alcohol was easily the most popular imported alcohol in the United States during Prohibition. It was estimated in a report from 1929 that almost 90 percent of

⁸⁴ Burns, *The Spirits of America*, p.204.

⁸⁵ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.210.

⁸⁶ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.211.

Canada's liquor exports that year were shipped into the United States.⁸⁷ It was also estimated that between 60 and 90 percent of the alcohol that was obtained by Americans during Prohibition was from Canada.⁸⁸ Canadian bootleggers as well as legal Canadian manufacturers became wealthy through the illegal liquor trade. Canada allowed any type of product to be shipped out of the country, as long as it was legally made in Canada. The person transporting the products also had to pay excise and sales tax to the Canadian government. As long as bootleggers were transporting something that could be legally made in Canada and as long as the Canadian government received its taxes, they did not care where the alcohol was going.⁸⁹

Canada's excise taxes on liquor, largely paid by American alcohol drinkers, paid for roughly 20 percent of all tax revenue collected by the Canadian government. Also, in the 1929 the excise taxes provided the Canadian government twice as much revenue as its income tax.⁹⁰ While the Canadian Government made money from American Prohibition, U.S. state and federal governments lost tax revenue. New York State, just prior to the start of Prohibition, estimated that it would lose \$22,600,000 annually from alcohol tax, which made up one quarter of New York State's budget.⁹¹ Also, a group of researchers discovered that the United States federal government lost \$1,874,000,000 in tax revenue 1925, from beer alone.⁹² American bootleggers, Canadian bootleggers, and the Canadian

⁸⁷ *Canada liquor Crossing the Border*, (Washington D.C.: Association Against the Prohibition Amendment, 1929). p. 1. The College of Wooster Special Collections. Wooster, OH.

⁸⁸ Stephen Schneider, *Iced: The Story of Organized Crime in Canada* (Mississauga, Ontario: Wiley Publishing, 2009), 184-185.

⁸⁹ *Canada Liquor crossing the border*, p. 1. Wooster Special Collections.

⁹⁰ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.342.

⁹¹ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.51.

⁹² Burns, *Spirits of America*, p.275.

government all took advantage of American Prohibition, and all came out wealthier, while United States federal, and its state, governments lost massive tax revenue.

The quality of an experience for speakeasy owners and patrons during Prohibition was largely determined on how wealthy someone was. Whether that person was a speakeasy owner, or a speakeasy patron money was a major factor. Even if a speakeasy and its patrons would get busted by agents or police, the drinking establishment provided a safe environment: the alcohol was safe, the amount of alcohol could be purchased, and in many ways, the level of fun someone would have was enhanced. The quality of a speakeasy alone could prevent raids. New York Police rarely raided high quality speakeasies unless they had specific complaints from citizens in the area.⁹³ In fact, Walker, the mayor of New York City throughout most of Prohibition was well known for attending several speakeasies when he was in office. The type of speakeasies he attended were all of high quality.⁹⁴

The disparity between social classes during Prohibition was even more evident than the acceptability of quality speakeasies over poor speakeasies. Sismondo discussed the book *What I Saw in America*, which brings up several points about the divide between social classes during Prohibition. In the book, Chesterton states, “It is to some extent enforced among the poor; at any rate it was intended to be enforced among the poor; though even among them I fancy it is much evaded. It is certainly not enforced among the rich; and I doubt it was intended to be.”⁹⁵ Aside from Chesterton’s point about Prohibition laws turning a blind eye to the wealthy, the wealthy also drank more alcohol

⁹³ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.165.

⁹⁴ Burns, *Spirits of America*, p. 198-199.

⁹⁵ Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, p.220.

than the lower classes during Prohibition. The upper and middle classes, including women, also drank more during the 1920's than they had in 1919.⁹⁶ It may have been more beneficial to be wealthy during Prohibition than any other time in America. It could be argued; Prohibition had little negative effect on the lives of most wealthy Americans.

The wealthy during Prohibition not only drank in high price speakeasies; they are also credited with starting the house party or cocktail party. As Drowne explains, "After the government revoked the license of the wealthy to enjoy evenings of drunken revelry in large public places, those who owned lavish mansions and huge bank accounts compensated by opening their homes as if they were function halls or hotels."⁹⁷ The house party was a place both men and women would drink together, listen to the phonograph and radio, flirt, dance, and gossip about friends who were absent from the festivities. The house parties of Prohibition, and speakeasies alike, became the first places men and women were drinking together outside of the home, when dinner was not the purpose of going out.⁹⁸ House parties became so common that magazines even published articles giving advice on many different aspects of house party culture.

Vanity Fair published an article on the invitation aspect of house parties. The article gave directions on how to let guests know, in a subtle manner, that alcohol was going to be served. One of the suggestions was to add a side note on the invitations telling the guests "Bring your corkscrew."⁹⁹ Often at house parties, class and money

⁹⁶ Leslie J. Stegh, *Wet and Dry Battles in the Cradle State of Prohibition: Robert J. Bulkley and the Repeal of Prohibition in Ohio* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Xerox University Microfilms, 1975), 127.

⁹⁷ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.129.

⁹⁸ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.207.

⁹⁹ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.207.

were flaunted. High quality liquors, often imported, were offered to guests as a sign of wealth, class, and generosity. Providing these types of liquor was also a way for hosts and hostesses to brag about possible connections with bootleggers and their disregard for Prohibition laws. Canadian Whiskey and single malt scotch were popular and expensive options that were shared with guests.¹⁰⁰ Of course, not everyone enjoyed or could find these types of liquors.

For the wealthy that could not find or did not enjoy the taste of straight whiskey or homemade Prohibition style “rot gut,” there was the cocktail. Cocktails became immensely popular during Prohibition because of the fact that most homemade alcohol tasted so terrible and needed sugar or bitters to be consumable. In fact, cocktails and the house parties, associated with them, became so popular that a wide line of cocktail paraphernalia, which was not prohibited under the Volstead Act, began to be sold throughout the country. Some of the paraphernalia included, trays, shakers, napkins, glasses, and even one shaker in the form of Charles Lindbergh’s plane.¹⁰¹ All of which must have been popular as was the idea of house parties itself.

Most house parties during Prohibition would have been better defined as cocktail parties, since the primary purpose of many Prohibition style house parties was mixing cocktails.¹⁰² The size of most cocktail, or house, parties were also usually much smaller than often portrayed in popular media. Most parties were often a small group of people in a most likely nice, but not enormous, home. Most parties rarely reached the size or magnitude of a George Remus or Gatsby party, as portrayed in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The*

¹⁰⁰ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.133.

¹⁰¹ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.133.

¹⁰² Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.132.

Great Gatsby.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, house, or cocktail, parties became a common occurrence, especially for the rich, during and because of Prohibition.

All speakeasies were often quite different from one another, but historians have created a divide between big city speakeasies and speakeasies located in rural areas. Other names for rural speakeasies include roadhouses, barrelhouses, and jook or juke joints.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless they all sold alcohol and were, for the most part, very popular and made large amounts of money. There were thousands of urban speakeasies in individual cities, let alone the entire United States. Specific areas with many speakeasies and specific speakeasies have become better known than others. Greenwich Village, located in New York City, is an area that became well known for speakeasies during Prohibition. One man, who was better known in Greenwich Village than any other, was Barney Gallant in 1919. Gallant purchased the Greenwich Village Inn in 1919, which was arguably the most popular place in Greenwich Village. Gallant also became famous for becoming the first New Yorker to be sent to jail for violating the Volstead Act. In October of 1919, he, along with several of his waiters, was arrested for selling alcohol to his customers. Gallant asked the court to put all the punishment on him, and to dismiss all the charges brought against his waiters. The courts agreed, and Gallant spent thirty days in jail.¹⁰⁵ Luckily for Gallant and Greenwich Village, he continued the business of running speakeasies after his release.

Gallant had aspirations of opening up an upscale speakeasy in The Village, which is interesting; as Walker explains, “The Village, true to its reputation as a hellhole,

¹⁰³ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.132.

¹⁰⁴ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.112.

¹⁰⁵ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.283-285.

probably was the easiest place in New York to get a drink.”¹⁰⁶ Regardless, Gallant took a chance and opened Club Gallant at 40 Washington Square South. Club Gallant was a high class and high price type of speakeasy. Scotch was \$16 a bottle and champagne was \$25 a bottle, and the club was quite exclusive to match the high prices of alcohol.¹⁰⁷ Walker explained the exclusiveness of the club, as follows: “Indeed, there were nights when it was as hard to get into the Club Gallant as it is to get out the prison at Danemora.”¹⁰⁸ Gallant was a firm believer of the idea of exclusivity in Greenwich Village.



40 Washington Square South (as of today), New York, New York (courtesy of Google Images.)

Gallant created a philosophy about how to keep an exclusive club, not only in business but also a highly profitable business. He once stated:

Exclusiveness is the night club’s great and only stock in trade. Take this away and the glamour and romance and mystery are gone. The night club manager realizes that he must pander to the hidden and unconscious snobbery of the

¹⁰⁶ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p 286.

¹⁰⁷ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.286-287.

¹⁰⁸ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.286.

great majorities. It is because they make it so difficult of access that everybody is fighting to get into them.¹⁰⁹

Gallant continued to have success in Greenwich Village throughout Prohibition despite moving locations several times. Even in 1932, in the middle of the Great Depression, Gallant opened the Washington Square Club in an old mansion. Despite the depression and the Washington Square Association, Christian organization located in the Greenwich Village area, which attempted to keep Washington Square as free of crime and as Christian like as possible, the club was a huge success while continuing an exclusive style.¹¹⁰ Gallant left a tremendous impact on Greenwich Village during Prohibition.

As influential Gallant was in Greenwich Village, there were still several speakeasies in New York that became more famous. Possibly the most famous of all speakeasies, and still well known today, was the “21” Club. The “21” club was owned and thought of by John Carl Kriendler and Charles A. Berns, who were cousins. Long before the creation of “21,” both Kriendler and Berns were finishing college, Berns a recent graduate of New York University and Kriendler still attending Fordham University when Prohibition began. Both were living together in Greenwich Village when Kriendler suggested to Berns that they start a speakeasy, but only long enough to make enough money to go back to school. Kriendler still needed to graduate from Fordham and Berns had aspirations of going to law school.¹¹¹ Kriendler had absolutely no money to start any type of business venture, but with the help of his sister and brother-in-law, Anna and Henry Tannenbaum, and their generous nature allowed Kriendler to borrow \$1,000. This money was also the Tannenbaums’ life savings. Kriendler and Berns also went into

¹⁰⁹ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.289.

¹¹⁰ Walker, *The Night Club Era*, p.290.

¹¹¹ Kaytor, “21,” p.3-4.

business with Edward “Eddie” Irving. A friend of Irving’s was in debt to him, and to pay off the debt his friend gave him a “tea room,” which became their first speakeasy. They called it the “Red Head.”¹¹² This first speakeasy may not have been what the “21” club was, but it was a start.

The “Red Head” was a successful speakeasy, but Berns and Kriendler wanted something larger and they closed their speakeasy in early 1925 to open a more upscale, and closed door, type of speakeasy.¹¹³ The Fronton opened at 88 Washington Place. This speakeasy was a little more upscale, complete with a stereotypical speakeasy peep hole and mechanisms that would destroy all the liquor with the push of a button, in case of raids. The Fronton did not exist long, closing its doors in 1926, when New York began condemnation proceedings against several properties in Washington Place to build a subway station.¹¹⁴ After taking advice from a friend, who was also an Italian bootlegger, Berns and Kriendler moved into a place in midtown Manhattan, where the speakeasy business was beginning to boom.¹¹⁵ Their next speakeasy was located on 42 West Forty-Ninth Street, which was under a Columbia University lease hold that is still owned today by the University. The speakeasy became known as “The Puncheon Grotto,” and had several nicknames, ranging from the “Puncheon,” the “Grotto,” “42,” and “Jack and Charlies.”¹¹⁶ As time passed, Berns and Kriendler became interested in owning their own building to house their speakeasy. They found their dream building at 21 West Fifty-Second Street. By purchasing this property for a sum of \$130,000 allowed

¹¹² Kaytor, “21,” p.4.

¹¹³ Kaytor, “21,” p.11.

¹¹⁴ Kaytor, “21,” p.13, 19.

¹¹⁵ Kaytor, “21,” p.19.

¹¹⁶ Kaytor, “21,” p.19.

them to stay in their same neighborhood, keeping the same policemen and Prohibition friends.¹¹⁷ The next step was to name their new speakeasy.

On December 31, 1929 Berns and Kriendler held a “demolition party” marking the last night “42” would be in business. It is important to note that only a select few of close friends and business partners were invited to the party. Throughout the party certain areas of the building were destroyed by guests, hints the name of the party. There was also lots of thought about what to call the new speakeasy. Kriendler suggested simply calling it Jack and Charlie’s “21,” since “42” was so successful, naming it after the address number seemed to be logical, especially since it was half of the number 42.¹¹⁸ It is important to note that they were not moving far at all. In fact at the demolition party several people were crying when Mac, Berns’ cousin, stood on a chair and said, “Why is everybody so sad? We’re only moving three blocks uptown!”¹¹⁹ And finally, they moved into what became one of the more well known speakeasies in history.

They even had an article written about the “21” in the *Daily Mirror*. The author of the article, Walter Winchell, titled the article, “A Place Never Raided, Jack & Charlie’s at 21 West Fifty-Second Street.”¹²⁰ To that point it had never been raided, even when several other speakeasies on Fifty-Second Street were periodically raided. Kaytor explains, “Fifty-Second Street joints were often raided, but it was said that Jack & Charlie’s wasn’t bothered because the big iron gate made the Prohibition agents mistake

¹¹⁷ Kaytor, “21,” p.19.

¹¹⁸ Kaytor, “21,” p.34-35.

¹¹⁹ Kaytor, “21,” p.35.

¹²⁰ Kaytor, “21,” p.51.

it for a police station and, besides this, police forces couldn't afford either the liquor or the food.”¹²¹ This theory was proven wrong with the help of Winchell's article.

Shortly after the article was released, “21” was raided. Once again an article was written about the club, but this time about the raid. The story made front page news throughout New York City. Berns and Kriendler, from the articles, were given the nickname, “Kings of Imported Liquor.”¹²² Berns and Kriendler were arrested and fined fifty dollars each but were fortunately pardoned. As mentioned earlier, the “21” had several mechanisms that kept possible agents from discovering the supply of alcohol, and these were almost all installed after the first raid. The club was raided one more time, and after an extensive search, ten Prohibition agents found nothing except the smell of alcohol, but no source of the smell.¹²³ The second raid showed the importance of the many mechanisms and extensively guarded warehouse in the basement of the club. Berns and Kriendler's “21” was immensely popular, after surviving two raids. The club was so successful that it survived throughout the Great Depression, the transition out of Prohibition, and is in fact still in business today as a high-end restaurant and bar, but now legally.

New York, although had numerous speakeasies, was not the only city that had an exuberant speakeasy scene. Cleveland, Ohio had several speakeasies throughout Prohibition, and several still exist today and were visited by the author. In October of 2011 a trip was arranged to visit several bars that were in existence during Prohibition and were speakeasies during that time. On January 7, 2012 the adventure became a

¹²¹ Kaytor, “21,” p.44.

¹²² Kaytor, “21,” p.51.

¹²³ Kaytor, “21,” p.63-64.

reality, and three former speakeasies and an island famous for bootlegging were visited. The places included Whiskey Island, The Flatiron Cafe, Hotz Cafe, and White Oaks restaurant. All three bars have incredible histories and have all found a way to stay in existence over eighty years after the repeal of Prohibition.

The first place that was visited was Whiskey Island. Today the island is used as port and shipyard for Clevelanders who enjoy sailing or boating on Lake Erie for fun, but during Prohibition the island was used for a much different purpose. The island became well known for bootlegging alcohol across the Canadian-American border, in this case the border was Lake Erie, hints the name Whiskey Island. Famous Cleveland gangsters/bootleggers heavily used Lake Erie as a way to get high quality liquor into Cleveland and anyone who was willing to pay. Moe Dalitz, Cleveland's biggest bootlegger and gangster during Prohibition, most likely would have used Whiskey Island, especially since he was situated in Cleveland and heavily used Lake Erie in his bootlegging operation. Some nicknamed Lake Erie, "Jewish Lake," insinuating that Moe Dalitz owned Lake Erie.¹²⁴ Moe Dalitz was not only Jewish but was named the second most influential Jewish gangster of all time.¹²⁵ Dalitz power stretched great distances as well as the alcohol he bootlegged into the United States. It would have also been consumed heavily in Cleveland, possibly by the patrons of the three former speakeasies that were visited.

Today, the Flatiron Cafe portrays itself as an authentic Irish bar. The bar is located on 1114 Center Street, Cleveland, Ohio. On a surprisingly beautiful day in early

¹²⁴Okrent, *Last Call*, p.272

¹²⁵Schneider, *Iced*, p.206.

January the bar was visited, and the part owner and general manager, Dave Steele, was helpful in giving a detailed interview regarding the history of the bar.



Whiskey Island, Cleveland, Ohio (photo taken by author.)

Steel explained, the building was built in 1875, and was opened in 1910 as an ala cart style restaurant on the first floor of the four story building. The top two floors were used as a brothel. The area in which the bar is located was known as a rough side of town and in many ways still is.¹²⁶

In the early years of the bar, most likely during Prohibition, the type of people that visited were longshoremen and iron workers, many of Irish descent. Steele added, the type of crowd was blue collar, hard working, and in many ways a rough type. He added, the cook who served the food would determine how much food should be served by the size of the customer, and if he did not like someone they would not receive any food.

¹²⁶ David Steele of Cleveland, interview by author, 7 January 2012, Cleveland, The Flat Iron Cafe, Cleveland.



The Flat Iron Cafe, Cleveland, Ohio (photo taken by author.)

In 1923 the first of two fires ravished the building, killing several. It is believed a prostitute dropped a cigarette on one of the top floors, causing the fire. The prostitute was believed to have been one of the victims in the fire. After the fire, the top two floors of the building removed leaving a two-story building. The restaurant closed, but was reopened a year later.¹²⁷

Steele stated that, although he was not completely sure, he was 99 percent sure the restaurant served alcohol during Prohibition. He made this judgment from the types of activity, like prostitution, that occurred in the building during that time. Steele added that much of the paper work was lost in the 1923 fire, and again in the 2007 fire.¹²⁸ Although, judging from what has been discussed earlier this may not have helped since many

¹²⁷David Steele of Cleveland, interview by author, 7 January 2012, Cleveland, The Flat Iron Cafe, Cleveland.

¹²⁸David Steele of Cleveland, interview by author, 7 January 2012, Cleveland, The Flat Iron Cafe, Cleveland.

speakeasy owners, bootleggers, and anyone else who worked with alcohol during Prohibition did not keep financial records of their illegal activity.

Just after leaving the Flat Iron Café the second bar, Hotz Cafe. Hotz Cafe is currently located at 2529 West 10th Street Cleveland, Ohio. The owner's wife, Sheila Hotz, was there to provide a detailed history of the bar. Sheila explained, Hotz Cafe was opened in 1919 as a male only saloon, and was owned and run by John Hotz Senior. John Hotz was the grandfather of the current owner, John Hotz the third. The same Hotz Cafe liquor license has been in the family since its existence, obviously there was no liquor license during Prohibition.¹²⁹ Of which, Sheila explained she was positive the bar was a speakeasy. There had been several newspaper articles written about the Hotz Cafe and its interesting past during Prohibition. Sheila also provided a story of an elderly woman who visited the bar just after one of the articles was released. The woman had grown up next door to Hotz Cafe during Prohibition and remembered it being raided. Sheila said the woman, along with her brothers, helped some of the bartenders put alcohol back into the building after the police had left Hotz Cafe.

Sheila also provided several photos which appeared quite old and were dated in the 1920's. The bar was even believed to have been frequented by several famous baseball players during Prohibition, including Ty Cobb, Lou Gehrig, and Babe Ruth.¹³⁰ Through all the tribulations of running a business, especially a bar, Hotz Cafe still exists today, and is run by the same family that started it ninety years ago.

¹²⁹ Sheila Hotz of Cleveland, interview by author, 7 January 2012, Cleveland, Hotz Cafe, Cleveland.

¹³⁰ Sheila Hotz of Cleveland, interview by author, 7 January 2012, Cleveland, Hotz Cafe, Cleveland.



Hotz Cafe, Cleveland, Ohio (photo taken by author.)

The White Oaks restaurant is the most different of the three former speakeasies. The owners of White Oaks believe their establishment as being an upscale restaurant, much the way it was thought of as an upscale speakeasy in the late 1920's. Unfortunately the restaurant is only open for dinner and it was visited during the day, therefore no interview could be obtained, but the website provides a detailed history of the restaurant.

The restaurant opened in 1928 as an upscale speakeasy. The owners prided themselves on serving quality liquor, from legal distilleries and other alcohol producers from Canada, France, and Scotland. White Oaks was also believed to have had a large gambling scene during Prohibition.¹³¹ The writer of the history of the restaurant also described the immense popularity of the speakeasy during Prohibition, as follows: "The Roster of White Oaks' patrons read like Cleveland 'Who's Who,' and the proud names therein were frequently upstaged by a parade of national and international

¹³¹ <http://www.white-oaks.com/history.htm>

personalities.”¹³² The White Oaks restaurant was once the most popular speakeasies to visit in Cleveland during Prohibition, and even today the owners of the restaurant have successfully continued the prestige of what White Oaks use to be during Prohibition.



White Oaks, Cleveland, Ohio (photo taken by author.)

The average rural speakeasy, or roadhouse, was often different than the upscale higher quality speakeasies like the “21” Club or White Oaks. Rural speakeasies often served many more purposes than only bars and restaurants. Stephen Calt and Gayle Wardlow, both music historians, describe a roadhouse as, “a commercially operated recreation spot that contained several rooms and served as an all purpose gambling den, dance hall, bar, brothel, and even boarding house.”¹³³ Many roadhouses were only open from Friday to Sunday and usually only cater to an all white or black crowd, almost never

¹³² <http://www.white-oaks.com/history.htm>

¹³³ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.112.

mixed. The boarding house aspect as well as the mostly racially segregated nature of the roadhouse proved to be vital to many African Americans travelling throughout the United States during Prohibition. Roadhouses could provide not only alcohol to travelling African Americans but also food and a place to stay for the night, when there may have been little or, more than likely, no place welcome for African Americans.¹³⁴ Of course there were several other aspects that made rural speakeasies unique from speakeasies found in urban areas like New York.

A common front for many, but not all, rural speakeasies was a “soft drink” parlor. For example, in Sheboygan, Wisconsin there were 113 licensed soft drink parlors, and only two that actually sold nonalcoholic soft drinks, the two went out of business.¹³⁵ The Marliere family, from DePue, Illinois, opened up a similar “soft drink” parlor at the beginning of Prohibition. The Marlieres had owned a long time tavern in DePue, but with the start of Prohibition, a decision needed to be made whether to become an actual “soft drink” parlor or to use it as a front for a speakeasy. The family chose the latter. There was no actual record of inventory or records of their speakeasy being raided.¹³⁶ The way in which the family made and transported the alcohol may have helped keep the heat off the Marlieres’ “soft drink” parlor.

One of the Marliere family members was a farmer and fisherman, named Hector. Hector actually had an exclusive spot on Lake DePue that bordered his corn fields. Hector and others working in the family business would distill liquor in their corn fields,

¹³⁴ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.113-114.

¹³⁵ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.208.

¹³⁶ R.G. Bluemer, *Speakeasy: Prohibition in the Illinois Valley* (Granville, Illinois: Grand Village Press, 2003), 34-35.

using their own corn, or nearby marshes. They would also at times fish the Illinois River, while also distilling liquor.¹³⁷ Bluemer explains this process, as follows:

The men realized that by putting half-barrels of mash in their boats, the gentle undulating swells filtering into the lake from the traffic on the Illinois River would aid the fermentation process as the boats bobbed with each passing wave. By leaving the mash barrels on the boat for some time, the activity was virtually immune from detection by federal agents. This relatively safe and secure method of producing moonshine was maintained throughout Prohibition.¹³⁸

The Marlieres were often returning to town with something more than fish from Lake DePue and the Illinois River.¹³⁹ This was just one of many processes to produce alcohol for small time rural speakeasies during Prohibition, especially in the Illinois Valley.

Most enforcement agencies were interested in distilleries that produced large amounts of alcohol, leaving small time operations relatively untouched by law enforcement. Whether these small time operations were making alcohol for local speakeasies or even personal consumption, there was a wide variety of alcohol made. Aside from liquor, beer and wine were sometimes widely available, especially in the Illinois Valley. Willard Kennedy, of Streator, Illinois, along with his sons, created a small time beer bootlegging enterprise. The family owned two twenty gallon fermenting crocks, which would produce seven to eight cases of twelve ounce bottles. One of Lyle Kennedy's, one of Willard's son, jobs was to cap all the bottles. Lyle became so experienced at capping beer bottles that another local bootlegger employed Lyle to cap his bottles, when he was only twelve.¹⁴⁰ The Kennedys were also involved in another type of bootlegging. The Kennedys also had a hand in converting near beer into needle

¹³⁷ Bluemer, *Speakeasy*, p.34.

¹³⁸ Bluemer, *Speakeasy*, p.34-35.

¹³⁹ Bluemer, *Speakeasy*, p.35.

¹⁴⁰ Bluemer, *Speakeasy*, p.36-37.

beer. Near beer was a very low alcoholic beer, which was still legal under the Volstead Act. The Star Union Brewery was a popular producer of near beer in the Illinois Valley, which Willard Kennedy turned into large amounts needle beer. Bluemer explains the process of transforming near beer into needle beer, as follows:

Willard would go to speakeasies, which were also known as “blind pigs,” and insert a large hypodermic needle under the tax stamps sealing the bung holes of on the kegs. The glass barrel of the syringe, which was about two inches in diameter and 15 inches long, was slowly filled into the near beer. Then the same quantity of alcohol was injected into the barrel. This increased the alcoholic content by about ten times the original amount.¹⁴¹

Brewing and needle beer were great opportunity for small time enterprises, but some people enjoyed the taste other alcoholic beverages, like wine.

Many small Italian communities in the Illinois Valley grew large amounts of grapes, which they produced into wine. Most enforcement agencies cared little about the illegal wine industry, since much of the wine produced was for home consumption, although some did produce larger quantities of wine and sold it to local speakeasies. Many who grew grapes in the Illinois Valley, likely for home wine consumption, would also sell grapes to wine producers who did not want to grow grapes themselves. Some wine producers would even order grapes from California. It was not rare for orders upwards of a quarter ton of grapes from California to be shipped to individuals living in small towns in the Midwest. It is important to note that growing and ordering grapes, even in large quantities, was legal.¹⁴² Unfortunately, the speakeasies that purchased wine and other types of alcohol were not legal.

¹⁴¹ Bluemer, *Speakeasy*, p.37.

¹⁴² Bluemer, *Speakeasy*, p.37-38.

Like most speakeasies throughout the United States during Prohibition, raids were always an imminent threat. Raids were a serious problem, especially for many highlighted in Bluemer's *Speakeasy: Prohibition in the Illinois Valley*. As Bluemer explains, "No place, not even the local barber shop, was safe from the long arm of the law."¹⁴³ "Soft drink" parlors were often prime targets for enforcement agencies, since it was common for speakeasies to use "soft drink parlors" as a front for speakeasies. Bluemer highlighted one speakeasy, located in the small town of Rutland, Illinois, which was located in the basement of a two story building that was raided. One quart of moonshine was discovered in the floor boards and the owner was put in jail.¹⁴⁴

In many cases, alcohol consumption was not the only illegal activity patrons and speakeasy owners were jailed or fined for. Gambling was a popular activity in many rural small town speakeasies. Bluemer describes several that were busted. One called the Malady saloon was outfitted with slot machines, a poker table, a craps table, and 400 poker chips. In another raid of a different speakeasy, the sheriff had to call for a truck to transport all the evidence. The sheriff confiscated 1,500 poker chips and several poker tables and slot machines.¹⁴⁵ Gambling was popular in small towns in the Illinois Valley, as well as most small towns throughout the United States.

Steubenville, Ohio is an example of a small rural town where gambling was popular, along with speakeasies. Steubenville was a little different from most towns, especially Ohio towns. Ohio was arguably one of the birth-places of the dry movement, but not all of Ohio followed suit. In fact, the mayor of Steubenville was arrested in

¹⁴³ Bluemer, *Speakeasy*, p.128.

¹⁴⁴ Bluemer, *Speakeasy*, p.86.

¹⁴⁵ Bluemer, *Speakeasy*, p.50.

September of 1930 for “conspiring to violate the Prohibition laws.”¹⁴⁶ Much of Steubenville and Jefferson County were relaxed when it came to Prohibition Laws. Anthony Biggio, describes the relaxed atmosphere in Steubenville and Jefferson County during Prohibition, as follows:

Steubenville was a town of vice. It had always been a destination place for people looking for prostitution and drink. Included in the big picture were the minor rackets like playing the numbers and small and large gambling operations. Slot machines were part of the minor rackets. In Steubenville, and the larger Jefferson County, most people understood the difference between honest larceny and dishonest larceny. His niche was bootlegging and the slot machines. Dishonest larceny may involve murder and included any of the rackets run by out of town elements. Honest larceny could only be carried out by local citizens of family. In that way everyone would share some of the profits.¹⁴⁷

Biggio wrote a book about his father, Frank Biggio, titled *You Told Me That Before, Dad*. Biggio included a chapter called *Prohibition*, in which Biggio describes his father’s life during Prohibition, focusing on bootlegging, running a speakeasy, and the mood of Steubenville and Jefferson County during Prohibition.¹⁴⁸

Taverns, speakeasies, roadhouses, and numerous other establishments helped shape the United States, before it was a country, before Prohibition, during Prohibition, and after Prohibition. They gave people places to stay, eat, drink, socialize, work, and even helped in the process of building a country. Even in the face of illegality, they not only existed; they continued to thrive. Even with the threat of jail time and large fines, people continued to run drinking establishments and people continued to visit speakeasies in large numbers. Many not only used the scarcity of alcohol during Prohibition to make

¹⁴⁶ Stegh, *Wet and Dry Battles in the Cradle State of Prohibition*, p.217.

¹⁴⁷ Anthony J. Biggio, *You Told Me That Before, Dad* (Wooster, Ohio: The Wooster Book Company, 2010), 33.

¹⁴⁸ Biggio, *You Told Me That Before, Dad*, p.33- 41.

a living, but in many cases a fortune. With the help of Prohibition pushing drinking underground to speakeasies, several changes began to take place in America. Several of these changes will be examined in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE, RENT PARTIES AND CABARETS, AND THE RISE IN POPULARITY IN JAZZ

Harlem experienced many changes during Prohibition and a few years preceding the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. The Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, Prohibition and its many challenges and opportunities that it created, and the rise of the popularity of jazz which coincided with each other will all be examined. All of these events combined to create an important time for not only African Americans, but to anyone who visited or lived in Harlem during Prohibition. Numerous books, poems, essays, and music were written and performed by African Americans during this time. Musically, not only were songs written by African Americans; entirely new genres of music and styles of playing certain instruments, like stride piano, were created during this time. This era also saw a growing acceptance of African American music and culture by white Americans.

Harlem was originally not meant to be an African American community. It was originally intended to be a white upscale suburb of New York City. As Shipton explains:

Its big avenues, Seventh and Lenox, were the consequence of a generous town-planning policy that encouraged wide boulevards with plenty of trees and two carriageways to be built. In the original area to be developed, at the end of the nineteenth century, spacious housing was erected, designed for people who wanted to live away from the main business areas but have easy access to them, via the elevated 129th Street.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Alyn Shipton, *Fats Waller: The Cheerful Little earful* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2002), 6.

This would change during the first few years of the twentieth century, as the land between Harlem and downtown Manhattan became heavily developed. The price of land climbed higher and higher, until 1904 when the bottom of the market fell out. Realtors were desperate to make good on their investments, and started selling and later renting to African Americans.¹⁵⁰ This could not have occurred at a better time, as many African Americans were travelling north to cities like New York, in what became known as the Great Migration.

New York City's African American population increased from 60,666 in 1900 to 91,709 in 1910. For the most part, the migration had not yet seen the massive movements it became famous for. In 1910 75 percent of African Americans still lived rural areas and 90 percent lived in southern states.¹⁵¹ Also, most of the early movements of early African Americans was more westward than northern. The large migration of African Americans to northern cities was focused between 1915 and through the 1920's. New York City's African American population grew 250 percent during this time. It grew from 91,709 in 1910 to 327,706 in 1930.¹⁵² A huge majority of these African Americans moving to New York were living primarily in the small two square miles of the neighborhood of Harlem.¹⁵³ New York had the largest African American population, but it was far from the only northern city that had a large African American population growth during this time. Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland's African American population

¹⁵⁰ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.6.

¹⁵¹ Cary D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance* (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1988), 13.

¹⁵² Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.13.

¹⁵³ John Louis Howland, "Ellington Uptown:" *Duke Ellington, James P. Johnson, & the Birth of Concert Jazz* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 12.

grew during this time too, and actually had faster rates of African American population growth than New York.¹⁵⁴

According to Wintz, there were a few major factors why the Great Migration occurred, other than leaving the oppression of living in former slave states. They include an economic depression in the South between 1914 and 1915, the cotton boll weevil infestation in 1915 and 1916, devastating floods that ravished the South in 1915, and food prices skyrocketing during World War I; all were major factors that pushed the enormous migration of African Americans out of the South.¹⁵⁵ Donald Henderson also pointed out several reasons for the massive exodus of African Americans living in the South. Aside from the reason already stated, Henderson also adds a changed crop system, low wages, inadequate living quarters and schools, poor treatment from almost all whites, including an emphasis on law enforcement, the growing numbers of lynching, unfairness in courts, and letters from friends who had already migrated north explaining the improvement of life in the North for reasons for African Americans to leave the South.¹⁵⁶ Henderson also provides possible reasons the North was better for African Americans, as follows: “high wages, a shorter working day than on the farm, less political and social discrimination than the South, better educational facilities, and the lure of the city.”¹⁵⁷ The North was better for African Americans, but it was still far from perfect.

¹⁵⁴ Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.13-14.

¹⁵⁵ Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.14.

¹⁵⁶ Donald H. Henderson, “Causes of the Recent Negro Migration,” *The Journal of Negro History* 6 (October 1921): 411.

¹⁵⁷ Henderson, “Causes of the Recent Negro Migration,” p.411.

Race riots were becoming commonplace at the turn of the century. There were large scale riots in New York in 1900, Springfield Illinois in 1904, and Greensburg, Indiana in 1906 to name a few. In 1908 there was another riot in Springfield, Illinois, which was believed to be the most serious northern riot prior to World War I. George Richardson, was an African American man who was accused of raping a white woman. Richardson was found innocent, but many whites in Springfield still wanted what they believed to be justice. The angry whites took their anger out on the entire community, and five thousand members of the state militia were ordered in to stop the violence.¹⁵⁸ The number and intensity of riots would not improve for many years; in fact they would become more serious.

The end of World War I saw the biggest surge of racial violence of the first half of the twentieth century. Many African Americans were coming back as battle-tested veterans with new ideas of equality and freedom. Many whites noticed a change in many African Americans. A letter was written to the *Arkansas Gazette*, a white newspaper, in January 1920 that stated: “We have a new negro; he has come back from the war changed... In some cases he has come back with ideas of social and political equality.”¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately for African Americans many white Americans felt differently. The summer of 1919 became known as “Red Summer.”¹⁶⁰ Between the months of June and December of 1919 there were major race riots in twenty-eight American cities. During the “Red Summer” seventy-eight African Americans were lynched, ten of the seventy-

¹⁵⁸Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.8-9.

¹⁵⁹ Gail L. Buckley, “Brave New Black World: A Century of Harlem Renaissance,” in *Hirschfeld’s Harlem: Manhattan’s Legendary Artistic Illustrates This Legendary City Within a City* (New York: Glen Young Books, 2003), 19.

¹⁶⁰ Buckley, *Hirschfeld’s Harlem*, p.18.

eight were veterans, and some in uniform.¹⁶¹ The “Red Summer” not only led to an enormous amount of violence; it created a new militant mindset for some African Americans. After World War I many African Americans began fighting back against white mobs. Many African Americans found their military training from World War I very helpful in the riots. Washington, Chicago, and several small towns witnessed African Americans shooting back at white mobs to protect themselves and their families.¹⁶² Riots and violence were not the only way African Americans experienced prejudice and inequality.

African Americans faced another problem once they made it to the cities: where they were going to live. African Americans living in New York felt this more than most. Most of the 300,000 African Americans living, primarily, in Harlem were placed in housing meant for 60,000 people.¹⁶³ African Americans also felt huge disparities in wages and rent prices. Wages for African Americans were very low, while rent was very high. Harlem apartments would often be six times as much as apartments in the South, with some costing up to \$250 a month.¹⁶⁴ In 1927 The Urban League reported 48 percent of African Americans living in Harlem spent over twice as much of their income on rent. Changes in rent prices, wages, job opening, and other areas that could have helped African Americans would have been very difficult, since whites owned 80 percent of the businesses and real estate in Harlem.¹⁶⁵ The combination of poor wages and high rent prices forced some families to live in a single apartment with several families. The overcrowding led to some obvious issues, some African Americans even chose to

¹⁶¹ Buckley, *Hirschfeld's Harlem*, p.18.

¹⁶² Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.13.

¹⁶³ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.7.

¹⁶⁴ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.140.

¹⁶⁵ David L. Lewis, *When Harlem was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 107-108.

practice “shift sleeping.”¹⁶⁶ As described by Drowne “shift sleeping” is, “whereby a day worker sleeps in a bed at night and a night worker occupies it during the day.”¹⁶⁷ Times were still difficult for African Americans who migrated, even those living in areas like Harlem.

Finding work was also difficult for African Americans living in Harlem. In the 1920’s, 59 percent of business in Harlem employed whites only. Highly sought after union jobs were also off limit to African Americans.¹⁶⁸ George Schuyler stated in 1925, ““The unions control many industries and it is next to impossible to for the dark brother to get admitted to many of them.” “Fact is,” he continued, “the Negro of New York state is very largely restricted to working as porter, cook, elevator operator, messenger, laborer, musician, chauffeur, laundress, maid, cook, dishwasher, stevedore, waiter and janitor.””¹⁶⁹ The amount of jobs African Americans were generally offered were slim, and the type of jobs they were offered did not pay well. African Americans had to come up with different ways to make ends meet.

Fortunately, African Americans living in Harlem and throughout the United States, Prohibition provided several new employment opportunities. Career opportunities in the many nightclubs and speakeasies in Harlem exploded for African Americans. Many African Americans, many even in favor of Prohibition, realized the possible financial gains through the illegal liquor market and took jobs in night clubs and speakeasies. Many of the speakeasy jobs African Americans took in Harlem ranged from bartenders, musicians, waiters, dancers, hostesses, chefs, and busboys. Many earned a

¹⁶⁶ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.140.

¹⁶⁷ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.140.

¹⁶⁸ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.205.

¹⁶⁹ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.205.

better income working in speakeasies than anywhere else. For example, bartenders in Harlem could make double and even triple the income of a laborer working in Harlem.¹⁷⁰ African Americans who took their chances with bootlegging made even more money, as did most bootleggers. Walter Clifton, a journalist during the Prohibition era, was quoted as saying that Prohibition was a “commercial blessing” for black communities throughout America.¹⁷¹ Clifton said this was especially true for African American bootleggers who could now, “by homes, have large bank accounts and even automobiles.”¹⁷² The government may have lost desperate tax income, but Prohibition did provide a steady, and in many cases, quality income for many who desperately needed it, especially African Americans.

As mentioned earlier, the housing situation in Harlem was grim; keeping a residence during this exciting time would have been very difficult, even if one were employed. Many African Americans found different ways to obtain income, outside of a normal job or even a job working in a speakeasy. One way was to hold rent parties.

Shipton describes rent parties as follows:

The principle was simple – a charge was made at the door of an apartment for admission to a party at which everyone had a good time. A piano and the best pianists in the area, were provided by way of entertainment, and at the end, not only had most of the neighborhood enjoyed themselves, but also the shortfall in the rent had been made up in admission charges.¹⁷³

Rent parties became a cultural staple for Harlmeites. As mentioned earlier, many African Americans living in Harlem and other cities were poor. Entertainment was widely available in New York, as well as in Harlem. Unfortunately many of the shows

¹⁷⁰ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.206-207.

¹⁷¹ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.208.

¹⁷² Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.208.

¹⁷³ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.7.

on Broadway, cabarets, and upscale speakeasies, even some in Harlem, were far too expensive for most African Americans to enjoy, if they were even allowed in. Therefore, if African Americans wanted to enjoy themselves, rent parties were often the only choice. As Drowne explains, “Despite their occasional violence, rent parties formed the backbone of Harlem nightlife for many residents who wanted to drink and socialize without spending very much money.”¹⁷⁴ Rent parties gave African Americans, especially the poorer of African Americans, a way to earn money or a chance to socialize and drink without spending large amounts of money.

Preparations made by the hosts of rent parties were very important. Hosts needed to clear the front rooms of the apartment of all furniture and rugs, but had to leave the piano. Some would even rent folding chairs from local funeral parlors.¹⁷⁵ Thieves, fights, and unwelcome guests were a common occurrence. Some hosts would hire “Home Defense Officers.”¹⁷⁶ “Home Defense Officers” were basically bouncers. Hiring a “Home Defense Officer” would cost a little more, but in the long run it could draw in more guests with the added security.

During the time when the rent parties were popular, Prohibition was in full effect outlawing alcohol. Rent parties were one of the outlets where alcohol could be found in large quantities. Two of the most popular kinds of liquor found at rent parties were homemade corn liquor, often called “King Kong,” and bootleg gin. Drinks were often sold by the pint or the quarter pint, often called “shorties.” Drinks would cost between

¹⁷⁴Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.147.

¹⁷⁵Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.144.

¹⁷⁶Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.144.

\$.25 and \$.50.¹⁷⁷ Food was often offered for a small price as well. Soul food was almost always the food offered. Some common choices included, “Hoppin’ John, fried chicken, mulatto rice (rice and tomatoes), gumbo, chili, collard greens, potato salad, and sweet potato pone.”¹⁷⁸ Alcohol and soul food were very vital to making a specific rent party popular.

Some rent party hosts would also supply, for a little more money, a back room for privacy. These backrooms were used for a variety of activities, including drug use, privacy for couples, and gambling. Compared to expensive drugs, like cocaine, marijuana and opium were widely used, easy to find at rent parties, and gave many a high for little money.¹⁷⁹ The gambling aspect of the back rooms was also popular. Throwing dice and card games gave some African Americans more money than they could ever make at an honest job, but could also lose it all. These rooms were also used for promiscuous activities between men and women, married or unmarried. For the case of married couples, these backrooms provided privacy that they may not have had at home, if they even had a home.¹⁸⁰

Ironically, the idea for speakeasies started in churches. They were called parlor socials and showed the strength of community support. These parlor socials were arranged to pay for the preacher or to support a needy congregation member. Musicians would provide entertainment, and large amounts of food were provided for the people attending. The price for food was minimal, and the money was then used to pay for the

¹⁷⁷ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.144.

¹⁷⁸ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.144.

¹⁷⁹ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.146.

¹⁸⁰ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.146.

entertainment, food, and either the preacher or the congregation member in need.¹⁸¹

Obviously, these parlor socials almost sound like blue prints for rent parties, minus the alcohol and what many Christians would call sinful activity.

When thinking about rent parties, the idea of community support is not a topic that is generally discussed, but it is clearly there. The entire idea of rent parties was to help pay the rent and other bills. Rent parties were in many ways a grass roots form of social welfare. People who attended rent parties enjoyed helping struggling black families. Some also believe that rent parties gave black communities a sense of community, possibly not felt before.¹⁸² African Americans could not stop the powerlessness they felt, since whites owned almost everything in Harlem, but they could help out fellow African Americans who were struggling.

Rent parties were a widely discussed topic during the 1920's and early 1930's, not only among the average citizens of Harlem but also by African American writers and intellectuals. There were numerous African American intellectuals, writers, artists, and musicians in Harlem during Prohibition. Harlem became the center of what became known as The Harlem Renaissance. Wintz explains, "The Harlem Renaissance was basically a psychology – a state of mind or an attitude – shared by a number of black writers and intellectuals who centered their activities Harlem in the late 1920's and early 1930's."¹⁸³ These activities included the writing of books and poems, discussions of civil rights, as well as the growing popularity of jazz, rent parties, and speakeasies.

¹⁸¹ Scott E. Brown, *James P. Johnson: A Case of Mistaken Identity* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press and Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, 1986), 166.

¹⁸² Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.145.

¹⁸³ Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.2-3.

Many, but not all, writers and poets not only supported rent parties and the rent party lifestyle; they also frequented these parties on a regular basis. Langston Hughes, an African American poet and writer during the Harlem Renaissance, was fond of rent parties, attending them regularly. Hughes once stated:

Almost every Saturday night when I was in Harlem I went to a house-rent party. I wrote a lot of poems about house-rent parties, and ate many fried fish and pig's foot – with liquid refreshments on the side. I met ladies' maids and truck drivers, laundry workers and even shoe shine boys, seamstresses and porters. I can still hear their laughter in my ears, hear the soft slow music, and feel the floor shaking as the dancers danced.¹⁸⁴

But Hughes was not the only writer who wrote about and loved the rent party. Wallace Thurman and Claude McKay wrote extensively about rent parties. Thurman especially wrote numerous books that either mentioned or focused on rent parties.¹⁸⁵

Some of these include, *The Blacker Berry* (1929), *Infants Sorrow* (1932), and even a play titled *Harlem: A Melodrama of Negro Life in Harlem* (1928).¹⁸⁶ Thurman also tried to place a positive light on rent parties. In *The Blacker the Berry*, the main character is a young African American woman named Emma Lou Morgan. Morgan finds herself uncomfortable, even ashamed of her dark skin color. The “Rent Party” chapter of the book finds Morgan visiting a rent party. At first she is very critical of the events. As Drowne explains, “Emma Lou, who like Du Bois, feels certain such wild behavior undermines the possibilities for racial uplift and the ultimate acceptance of African Americans by white people.”¹⁸⁷ Morgan’s opinion changed as the night went on,

¹⁸⁴ Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.92.

¹⁸⁵ Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.92.

¹⁸⁶ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.148.

¹⁸⁷ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.149-150.

especially as she drank more alcohol.¹⁸⁸ Thurman's views towards rent parties as well as his opinion of many other black intellectuals and theories came through in this chapter. Thurman believed that when writing about life and experiences one should write exactly how they were or how it still is; rent parties are a clear example of this.¹⁸⁹

Many writers during the Harlem Renaissance did not believe this. The Harlem Renaissance was in many ways a struggle between young writers and poets, like Thurman and Hughes, and an older group of men and women that was rooted in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and a much different style of writing. Three of the most famous of this older group include James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, and W.E.B. Du Bois.¹⁹⁰ The style of writing of this older generation was much different from the younger writers. For example, Du Bois never wrote about rent parties. James W. Johnson wrote the book *Black Manhattan* in 1930 which never mentioned rent parties. Du Bois, especially, believed that portraying positive images, or "respectable," aspects of black life was more important than representing accurate aspects of the African American culture of the time.¹⁹¹ Du Bois's ideas about not writing about certain African American cultural aspects were different from Thurman, who believed in trying to present an as accurate description of life, more in particular African American life.

In 1926 one of the most important books of the Harlem Renaissance was published, *Nigger Heaven*. This book was also one of the most debated and criticized works among African American intellectuals. Interestingly enough, *Nigger Heaven* was

¹⁸⁸ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.150.

¹⁸⁹ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.148.

¹⁹⁰ Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.2.

¹⁹¹ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.148

written by a white man, Carl Van Vechten. Vechten had always been fascinated by African American culture. In the early 1920's he became well known for hosting mixed parties with both African Americans and whites. He was also well known for frequenting Harlem speakeasies and Cabarets. During this time, Vechten became close friends with Walter White, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People member, and James Weldon Johnson. Both White and Johnson introduced Vechten to many Harlem celebrities.¹⁹² These connections would prove to be beneficial to Vechten when he began researching and writing *Nigger Heaven*. Unfortunately, these many connections did not keep the book from mass dispraise within the African American community, especially Harlem.

Nigger Heaven was criticized widely by many in the African American community and Harlem. James Weldon Johnson's secretary was disgusted with the book:

To the very end I hoped for something which would make me feel that he had done Negro Harlem a service by this work. . . . What Mr. Van Vechten has written is just what those who do not know us think about all of us. . . . I am serious when I say that I think only you can redeem Mr. Van Vechten by writing something to counteract what he has done.¹⁹³

Johnson's secretary was far from the only African American intellectual who disliked Vechten's book. W.E.B. Du Bois was arguably the most critical of Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*. Du Bois was quoted as saying the book was, "a blow in the face" and an "affront to the hospitality of black folk and the intelligence of white."¹⁹⁴ Du Bois saw the book as an attack on the African American race as well as an attack on an intellectual

¹⁹² Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.96.

¹⁹³ Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, p.180.

¹⁹⁴ Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, p.181.

movement that was trying to improve the image as well as the well being of African Americans. Benjamin Brawley also criticized the book. Brawley believed that *Nigger Heaven* had become the most important book to young African Americans during the 1920's. Brawley also believed that the book presented a view of Harlem that was to say the least, distorted.¹⁹⁵ Not everyone felt as strongly against *Nigger Heaven* as W.E.B. Du Bois, but many, like Brawley, and Johnson's secretary, still found the book as a massive misinterpretation of Harlem and African American culture.

Criticisms of the book continued into the 1970's through scholarly journals.

Nathan Huggins criticized Vechten in a literary article in 1971, as follows:

Try as he might to illustrate the Negroes were much like other people, Van Vechten's belief in their essential primitivism makes him prove something else. It stands to reason, after all. Had he thought Negroes were like white people, he would not have adopted Harlem the way he did. His compulsion to be fair to the race while he exploited the exotic and decadent aspects of Harlem caused the novel to flounder.¹⁹⁶

Even as the decades past African American intellectuals continued to discuss and criticize Vechten's work.

African American writers, professionals, and intellectuals were not the only ones who criticized the book. Being caught reading the book was even thought to be "bad form," in Harlem.¹⁹⁷ The book was even petitioned, by a man named Cleveland G. Allen, at the 135th Street Library to prohibit the books distribution in New York City. Some nightspots in Harlem even banned Vechten. Many African Americans believed Vechten was a literary voyeur. Another common belief was Vechten exploited his vast

¹⁹⁵ Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.100.

¹⁹⁶ Mark Helbling, "Carl Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance," *Negro American Literature Forum*, 10, no.2 (1976): 45.

¹⁹⁷ Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, p.181.

connections in Harlem for the sole reason of make himself rich.¹⁹⁸ Not all African Americans criticized or even disliked *Nigger Heaven*. James Weldon Johnson may have had the most positive comments about Veichten's book than any other African American. Johnson stated, "Has anyone ever written it down – in black and white – that you have been one of the most vital forces in bringing about the artistic emergence of the Negro in America."¹⁹⁹ Johnson's opinion of Veichten and *Nigger Heaven* was much different from his secretary, which was mentioned earlier. Many more, especially young, African American writers and intellectuals had much more positive views of the book than the older generation of African Americans.

Langston Hughes and Wallace Thurman did not necessarily criticize the book in the fashion of W.E.B. Dubois, but rather criticized the negativity that surrounded the book in the African American community. Lewis puts it best:

Hughes saw the artist working against "an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from whites." " 'Oh, be respectable, write about nice people, show how good we are,' say the negroes. 'Be stereotyped, don't go too far, don't shatter our illusions about you, don't amuse us too seriously. We will pay you,' say the whites."²⁰⁰

Hughes was very critical of Du Bois's point of view of the book. Hughes was also a strong supporter of the common person as well as supporting art and writing about the common person. Thurman's views of *Nigger Heaven* can be seen in his poem, *Fire*. Thurman did not believe the book was as good as it could have been, but Thurman's true displeasure was for the critics of the book who were trying to censor or stop writers from writing about certain aspects of African American life of the time, like certain elements

¹⁹⁸ Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, p.181.

¹⁹⁹ Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, p.187.

²⁰⁰ Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, p.191.

of the ghetto. Thurman pushed writers to ignore the “ignoramus” and write not allow anyone to censor their choice in material to write about.²⁰¹

The reaction towards *Nigger Heaven* within the average African American was quite diverse, discussed widely within a scholarly context, and was for the most part rejected. The reaction to the book in white America was much different. Van Vechten’s book is widely blamed for creating an excitement in Whites to learn about, and enjoy, African American culture. Small numbers of whites had frequented Harlem nightspots before the release of the book, but the release of *Nigger Heaven* created a “Negro craze” that sent thousands of whites into Harlem cabarets and speakeasies.²⁰² Not only did Vechten take credit for the excitement whites had in Harlem during the late 1920’s. He even believed in himself to be the “catalyst” for a shared excitement of the Harlem Renaissance in African Americans, and a growing white population interested in African American culture.²⁰³ The excitement created many positives and negatives for the African American community. Publishing companies, who previously would never talk to an African American, were pursuing a vast amount of black writers and poets. Publishing companies were eager to cash in on the sudden fascination of African American culture.²⁰⁴ Unfortunately, the newly found white fascination with Harlem and African American culture was not all positive or helpful for the African American community and Harlem.

²⁰¹ Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.100-101.

²⁰² Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.94-95.

²⁰³ Helbing, “Carl Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance,” p.41.

²⁰⁴ Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*, p.94-95.

Fisher wrote in the *American Mercury*, “‘The Caucasian Storms Harlem.’ ‘The Best of Harlem’s black cabarets have changed their names and turned white.’”²⁰⁵ The Cotton Club is the most well known cabarets Fisher discussed. The Cotton Club opened for business in 1918, but under a different name, the Douglas Club. The club had several name changes until settling on the Cotton Club, even being bought by a new owner. In 1920 a famous boxer, Jack Johnson, purchased the club and reopened the club in 1923. Under new management the club became specifically meant to be enjoyed by whites. Very few African Americans were even allowed through the doors. Musicians were almost always the only African Americans allowed in the club.²⁰⁶ The owners of the Cotton Club were interested in one thing, money. Racial progress was not on their agenda and many patrons of the club were not upset to about their decision to keep the club almost all white. Jimmy Durante once said, “Nobody wants razors, blackjacks, or fists flying – and the chances of a war are less if there’s no mixing.”²⁰⁷ Not all clubs and Cabarets became what the Cotton Club was, but many did.

The rise of the popularity of jazz is a very important aspect of the Prohibition era. Jazz did not start during prohibition and neither did it die with the passage of the Twenty-First Amendment, but the rise in its popularity during the thirteen years of Prohibition cannot be ignored. This is especially true in the context of the Harlem Renaissance where jazz was a permanent staple in speakeasies, cabarets, and rent parties. Jazz’s popularity in New York City, especially during Prohibition, can never be denied, but the origins of the genre started thousands of miles away.

²⁰⁵ Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, p.165.

²⁰⁶ Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, p.209.

²⁰⁷ Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, p.209.

Neil Leonard discusses the beginnings of jazz, as follows: “Although the history of collectively improvised jazz is not fully clear, it is patent that by 1900 New Orleans was the center for collectively improvised bands.”²⁰⁸ Many of these jazz bands were started by African American brass band members living in New Orleans. By 1910, being a jazz musician had become a full time job in the New Orleans and the South.²⁰⁹ Jazz music would soon spread, change, and evolve. There are several theories on how and why jazz spread.

Gioia explains in his book *The History of Jazz*, the Great Migration was the biggest catalyst of the spread of jazz. Much of the movement of African American jazz musicians coincided with the movement of thousands of African Americans looking for a better life. Many of the white jazz musicians, such as The Original Dixieland Band, moved northward as well. Many of the white jazz musicians found that record companies were much more interested in them in the North, that is until the record companies discovered the great economic value of signing African Americans.²¹⁰ Gioia also points out that “one of the biggest ironies of the history of New Orleans jazz is that so much of it took place in Chicago. By the early 1920’s, the center of the jazz world had clearly shifted northward.”²¹¹ Chicago, arguably the center of the jazz by the early 1920’s, is also credited with having a numerous number of different types of jazz,

²⁰⁸ Neil Leonard, *Jazz and the White Americas: The Acceptance of a New Art Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 11.

²⁰⁹ Leonard, *Jazz and the White Americas*, p.12.

²¹⁰ Ted Gioia, *History of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 45-46.

²¹¹ Gioia, *History of Jazz*, p.45.

including, “black jazz, white jazz, hot jazz, sweet jazz, New Orleans jazz, and Dixieland jazz.”²¹²

There was a jazz style that New York was credited with creating, stride piano. Gioia describes Harlem, where most of the stride piano was played during the 1920’s, as comprising of two worlds. There were the African Americans who were struggling to make ends meet, sharing their apartments with other families, and doing anything to survive. The other Harlem consisted of African Americans, most often educated and who were much better off. They usually consisted of writers, artists, and professionals, such as doctors and lawyers.²¹³ This Harlem is often described when discussing the Harlem Renaissance. Stride is much more closely associated with the poorer and more disenfranchised section of Harlem, and was quite popular at rent parties.

Playing piano was a way to make a living in an underground economy. Gioia describes the importance of stride piano to the world of jazz and the connection it made between impoverished Harlem and the more wealthy African American class that coexisted in Harlem:

The piano was often the battleground these two visions of black artistic achievement. It is not going too far to suggest that the piano was to Harlem what brass bands were to New Orleans. The instrument represented conflicting possibilities – a pathway for assimilating traditional highbrow culture, calling card of lowbrow nightlife, a symbol of middle-class prosperity, or quite simply, a means of making a living. But, with the benefit of hindsight, we tend to view the piano of Harlem of the late 1920’s and early 1930’s as the center of a new type of music. Harlem stride piano, as it has come to be known, stood as a bridge

²¹² Gioia, *History of Jazz*, p.75.

²¹³ Gioia, *History of Jazz*, p.94-95.

between the ragtime idiom of the turn of the century and the new jazz piano styles that were in the process of evolution.²¹⁴

With this new style came many great musicians.

James P. Johnson is arguably the greatest jazz pianist of all time, even though he never reached the popularity and credit he deserved. Interestingly, Johnson's date of birth is not known for certain, and is widely debated. It is believed that he was born either on February 1, 1891, 1894, or 1897. Johnson was also known as James Johnson, Jimmy Johnson, Jimmie Johnson, and James J. Johnson.²¹⁵ Brown describes these skewed historical facts as follows: "The inaccuracy and inconsistency in these biographical tidbits is indicative of the treatment given to the life and career of a musician who's far reaching contributions to American Music should have earned him the greatest popular and critical acclaim."²¹⁶ Luckily, regardless of his relative unpopularity as compared to other jazz musicians, Johnson still became a great musician.

Johnson grew up in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Although his birth date is widely debated more evidence pushes the idea he was born in February of 1894. Johnson's father was a mechanic and store helper. His father worked for a man named Price. Johnson's middle name, Price, was given to him because of his father's boss. His mother was believed to have been born in Petersburg, Virginia. Both of his grandfathers had interesting pasts as African Americans. His father's father fought in the civil war and his mother's father was born half African American half Indian who purchased his own freedom. According to the Bureau of Statistics in New Brunswick, New Jersey his

²¹⁴Gioia, *History of Jazz* p.95-96.

²¹⁵Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.4.

²¹⁶Brown, *James P. Johnson* p.4.

father's name was William H. Johnson and his mother's name was Josephine Harrison.²¹⁷ As with his actual birth date, his family history is very limited. His life became known in better detail as he matured.

Johnson's love for music, especially the piano, started when he and his family moved to Jersey City in 1902, where he was introduced to ragtime and ticklers. Ragtime is considered a mix of Afro-American and white European styles of music and dance.



Photo of James P. Johnson (courtesy of: Google Images and <http://m.eb.com/assembly/12116>)

Brown describes the origin of the music as follows: "Ragtime's exuberant feeling derives from folk sources connected with the various shout dances, the Counjaille, Bamboula, Calinda, and Ring-shout. In addition to the black dance forms, the slave musicians were exposed to the European folk dances of their white owners."²¹⁸ A tickler was simply a ragtime piano player. Johnson was too young to attend the saloons in Jersey City where

²¹⁷ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.9-10.

²¹⁸ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.29.

ragtime was played, but he still learned many popular ragtime songs simply by walking by the saloons and listening to the music from the outside. Johnson also met several ticklers and other ragtime musicians through his older brother. Many of these musicians were directly in contact with the black underworld, where gambling, drugs, prostitution, and many other illegal activities coincided with the music Johnson loved.²¹⁹ After falling in love with rag time music and meeting many musicians Johnson knew he wanted to become a tickler.

Johnson's love for ragtime may have cultivated his strong interest in music, but it was the shout style that influenced his piano playing more than any other. The shout style that Johnson was influenced by started in African American churches. Church leaders began looking at the model white churches used, which generally believed dancing and some kinds of music as sinful. Dancing was firmly rooted in African culture. To keep music and dancing in the church leaders changed the terminology: 'The "ring shots" or "shuffle shouts" of the early Negro churches were attempts by the black Christians to have their cake and have it to: to maintain African tradition, however veiled or unconscious the attempt might be yet embrace the new religion.'²²⁰ Johnson found enormous inspiration in his own musical style, known as stride. In fact one of Johnson's friends and fellow pianists, Willie "The Lion Smith," once said, "Shouts are stride piano."²²¹

James P. Johnson may not have received the popularity he deserved, but he has been credited with creating a new way to play piano, stride. Johnson is sometimes

²¹⁹ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.23-24.

²²⁰ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.16-17.

²²¹ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.22.

referred to as the, “grandfather of hot piano,” and the “Father of Stride Piano.”²²² The left hand is usually what differentiates stride from other types of piano playing. Johnson pointed out the difference between ragtime and stride, as follows: “The difference between stride and traditional piano ragtime was in the structure and the precise bass played in a rag style by the left hand, while the characteristic strides were performed by the right hand.”²²³ Johnson and several other jazz pianists used this style throughout their careers in recording studios, cabarets, speakeasies, and rent parties.

Johnson got his job playing piano in 1912 for a cabaret owned by Charles Ett. The cabaret he played in was two rooms put together in a rough side of town, but still served beer and liquor. Johnson was paid \$9 a week from the owner and whatever he got in tips, usually amounting to about \$18 a week. Johnson said he was paid so much that he never wanted to go back to school.²²⁴ Johnson went back to school, but that did not stop him from mastering his skills playing stride.

Johnson recorded many songs, and was one of the first African Americans to record a piano roll; the very first was the ragtime pianist Scott Joplin. Brown describes how a piano roll recoding works:

The pianist played through the desired piece on a special piano. As he played, the hammers drew marks on a roll of paper pulled through the mechanism. Afterwards, the marks on the paper were cut to form notched holes, varying in size depending on the duration of the note. The master roll would then be used to produce copies.²²⁵

²²² Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.4-5.

²²³ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.120.

²²⁴ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.51.

²²⁵ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.89.

Johnson recorded one to two piano rolls a month from 1916 on for Aolian and several other companies. Johnson also wrote several songs that became quite well known, especially during the 1920's. Two of the more well known are *Carolina Shout* and the *Charleston*. The *Charleston* even became the most popular songs by the middle of the decade.²²⁶ Even today the *Charleston* is often described as being the song of the 1920's. Although, very few people know who composed the song.²²⁷ Nonetheless, the *Charleston* became widely played and danced too during the 1920's.

Johnson, along with several other stride pianists started playing rent parties. Johnson, Willie "The Lion" Smith, and Fats Waller were often grouped together. They even had a booking agent, Lippy Boyette, who would line them up parties, sometimes up to three rent parties in one night. Sometimes, when more than one pianist was booked for one rent party, the pianists would battle with each other. The competition between the pianists would often be taken more seriously by the intoxicated crowd, while the pianists often saw the competition as friendly. Many, especially other pianists, still believed Johnson to be the most talented pianists at rent parties.²²⁸ But rent parties were not the only venues Johnson played. He would often be invited to play at all white cocktail parties on Park Avenue in New York City. Many of Johnson's white counterparts would attend anytime Johnson would play a venue on Park Avenue just to pick up his rhythms and playing styles.²²⁹

In the late 1910's and the early 1920's Johnson played at a Harlem cabaret called Leroy's with another well known stride pianist, like Willie "The Lion" Smith. This is the

²²⁶ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.159.

²²⁷ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.159.

²²⁸ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.167-170.

²²⁹ Brown, *James P. Johnson*, p.175.

same place where Johnson, who had become his mentor, introduced Thomas Wright Waller to his first job playing piano in a cabaret. When Johnson invited Thomas Waller, better known as Fats Waller, to play at Leroy's in 1920, Waller was only sixteen years of age.²³⁰ Fats Waller's mother, Adeline Waller, gave birth to Fats on May 21, 1904. Fats Waller was the seventh of eleven siblings; unfortunately he was only one of five who survived past infancy. Waller's father, Edward Waller, owned a trucking business, but his real passion was the church. The Waller family attended the Abyssinian Baptist Church on West 40th street. Edward Waller was a pillar for the church and often preached on the corner of Lenox and 135th street. The family discovered early on that Fats had an interest in music, piano more in particular. The Waller family purchased a piano, which gave the family many memories and amusement. Fats even injured one of his sisters on the piano stool, after spinning her around on it until it broke. Fats Waller never took piano playing seriously until the passing of his mother, shortly after which he got into an argument with his father and moved out. Waller moved in with Russell Brooks, who was the older brother of a classmate as well as a stride pianist.²³¹ Moving out in many ways started the tremendous career that Waller had.

Brooks may not have given Waller a job but he did allow him to practice on his piano and introduced Waller to James P. Johnson, who gave Waller his first job playing piano. Aside from giving him a job, Johnson also mentored him as a pianist, teaching the young Waller everything he knew about playing piano.²³² Johnson may have had more talent playing piano than Waller but Waller's personality gave him a dimension that few

²³⁰ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.2-4, 8.

²³¹ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.8-11.

²³² Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.10-11.

could match. Waller was five foot eleven inches tall and weighed 285 pounds at the time of his death, and everything he did in life may have been bigger than his stature.²³³ As Shipton puts it, ‘He womanized, he ate vast meals, and perhaps most noticeably he drank huge quantities of alcohol. The stories may exaggerate, but one after another they tell of the gin on the piano, the bottles of scotch in the recording studio, “the liquid and ham eggs.”’²³⁴ Waller’s lifestyle amazingly had no affect on his piano playing, but it did affect his personal life. Ronald, Waller’s third son, was asked what his father did for a living while in school. Ronald replied, “He drinks gin.”²³⁵ Waller was famous for shouting vulgar jokes, as well as speaking often while playing songs on the piano. Waller’s talents and his larger-than-life personality made him one of the first jazz musicians to become famous, even internationally.²³⁶

Waller also had numerous jobs while playing at and after Leroy’s. Throughout the early and mid 1920’s Waller played at the Lincoln, a Harlem theatre, where he actually played the organ. With the help of Lippy Boyette, James P. Johnson’s promoter as well, Waller also found himself on the rent party circuit. Waller was making \$23 a week working at the Lincoln, but he needed more income after the birth of his first child.²³⁷ Throughout the early and mid-1920’s, Waller also played at largely wealthy white downtown Manhattan parties and fashionable apartments on Riverside Drive.²³⁸ Waller’s fame and popularity did nothing but grow as the years past.

²³³ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.10-11.

²³⁴ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.3.

²³⁵ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.3.

²³⁶ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.3.

²³⁷ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.15-16.

²³⁸ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.23.

During the 1930's, Waller appeared in several movies and "soundies."
"Soundies," are comparable to music videos of today, but they were meant to be played on jukeboxes.²³⁹ Around this time Waller made a few trips to Europe. The first of his trips was in 1932. Waller primarily played in night clubs of France and met many jazz fans and enthusiasts. Interestingly enough, jazz had become quite well known and popular in Europe. Waller would not return to Europe until 1938, when his manager, Ed Kirkeby, set up a European tour through a European management company named Moss Empired United.



Photo of Fats Waller (Photo courtesy by: Google Images and <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/fats-waller-p7764>)

To the surprise of many, Waller's manager got Moss Empired United to pay Waller \$2,500 a week for a ten-week tour. Much of the Europeans who heard Waller play raved about his talents, but reviews on his jokes and vulgar comments while playing were not so widely enjoyed, as they were in America. Many believe that Waller's personality

²³⁹ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.103.

while performing is what set Waller apart from many other talented jazz pianists.²⁴⁰

Waller's success seemed to have no limits.

Tragically there was only one event that could stop his growing fame and popularity, his death. In 1943 he was on tour on the West Coast when he started to develop a cold or flu that turned into bronchitis. Waller was forced to lay in bed for ten days, under a doctor's orders. After the ten days were up, Waller played a few more shows and some all night parties, but he never really recovered. On December 13, 1943 Waller and Kirkeby left for New York by train. Waller slept the entire day of December 14. Unfortunately his condition did not turn better, and he passed away on the train on December 15, 1943.²⁴¹ Ironically, there are no correlations between his death and his massive alcoholism and overeating. Nonetheless, the world lost a great jazz musician, who died far too young.

Another musician popular during the Harlem Renaissance may have the most recognizable name of the three. Edward Kennedy Ellington, better known as Duke Ellington, had a much different childhood and early life as compared with Johnson and Waller. Ellington's parents, Daisy Kennedy Ellington and James Edward Kennedy, lived in Washington D.C. Washington may have still been considered a southern town. Like many cities in the U.S., especially cities in the South, African Americans were denied many rights and freedoms that kept them as second class citizens even after the Civil War. Nonetheless, Washington was somewhat different from most southern cities. Even before the end of the Civil War, Washington became a safe haven for escaped slaves. By

²⁴⁰ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.114-119.

²⁴¹ Shipton, *Fats Waller*, p.132-133.

the end of the Civil War free African Americans outnumbered the enslaved African Americans in the city.²⁴² Many of the escaped and eventually freed slaves living in or near Washington had a strong desire to become educated. Howard University, a traditionally African American University, was founded in Washington in the year 1867. Washington also provided many jobs and opportunities for African Americans who required various skills to make a living that did not involve sharecropping or farming of any kind, as in South.²⁴³ Cohen describes the value of growing up in D.C. as an African American, “an emphasis on African American Identity, pride, and history was imparted to African American children, who were taught to command, rather than demand, respect.”²⁴⁴ Later in life Ellington was referred to as a “race man.” Ellington growing up in Washington D.C. during the beginning of the twentieth century helped mold his beliefs about racial equality.²⁴⁵

There were similarities among the three jazz pianists discussed in this chapter. They all had at least one religious parent. Ellington’s mother was very religious. She would make Ellington attend his father’s family church as well her family church every Sunday.²⁴⁶ She made sure Christianity played a major role in Ellington’s life. Unlike Waller and Johnson, Christianity continued to be a major part of Ellington’s life until he passed away. Although, Ellington may not have lived as a perfect Christian: he was famous for heavy drinking and womanizing. Ellington was once late for an appearance, and he apologized for his tardiness by saying, “Forgive me, ladies and gentlemen – but,

²⁴² Janna Tull Steed, *Duke Ellington: A Spiritual Biography* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 31-32.

²⁴³ Steed, *Duke Ellington*, p.31-32.

²⁴⁴ Harvey G. Cohen, “The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting the Strategy for an African American Maestro,” *The Journal of African American History* 89 (October 2004): 291.

²⁴⁵ Cohen, “The Marketing of Duke Ellington,” p.291.

²⁴⁶ Steed, *Duke Ellington*, p.29.

believe me, if you had seen her, you would understand.”²⁴⁷ Still, Ellington was also well known for reading the Bible and praying regularly.²⁴⁸ It may have been contradictory, but Ellington was still deeply religious.

Ellington was also different from Johnson and Waller. In that he started his career with a band rather than starting out by himself. Ellington and his band of “Washingtonians” traveled north to Harlem in the early 1920’s. The band’s first job was playing at Barron’s Exclusive Club and then the Hollywood Club, which changed its name to the Kentucky Club.²⁴⁹



Photo of Duke Ellington (Photo Courtesy by:
http://students.cis.uab.edu/uabeuph/jazz_golden_era.html)

As previously discussed, the Cotton Club opened in 1923. Duke Ellington and what became known as The Duke Ellington Orchestra began played the Cotton Club in 1927.

One of Ellington’s family members, Mercer Ellington, explained:

²⁴⁷ Steed, *Duke Ellington*, p.20.

²⁴⁸ Steed, *Duke Ellington*, p.20.

²⁴⁹ John L. Fell, and Terkild Vinding, *Stride!: Fats, Jimmy, Lion, Lamb, and All the other ticklers* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press; Institute of Jazz Studies Rutgers, State University of New Jersey, 1999), 115.

The band was all the way in the back in the Cotton Club, in a shell, with a dance floor in front. The dancers came and went on either side of the shell out onto this raised dance floor. The stage was set up to represent the Land of Cotton, with a plantation cabin, rows of cotton bushes, and trees that shot up when the show started. On three sides of the floor were swinging garden gates, with primitive archways and vines over them, through which the public came up to the floor to dance. The concept of the Cotton Club represented. . . the South of the Negro. The people who came there wanted what they thought was the red-hot feeling of the South as depicted by Negroes.²⁵⁰

The Cotton Club's ambience may have been racist and unethical, but it launched Ellington's career. As Howland explains, "Ellington's Cotton Club employment was the catalyst for his long career."²⁵¹ Ellington and his orchestras' performances at the Cotton Club were regularly nationally broadcasted on the radio, which helped spread Ellington's popularity as well as, for the most part, kept Ellington and his orchestra in New York. The Cotton Club broadcasts were also the first time African Americans were regularly nationally broadcasted.²⁵² Playing at the Cotton Club boosted Ellington's popularity in Harlem, but throughout the country and even the world.²⁵³ Ellington's fame and popularity were unquestioned, and he was as one of the most well known jazz musicians of his time.

Many intellectuals debate when the Harlem Renaissance ended. Buckley has argued that "Black Friday," or the beginning of the Depression, drastically changed Harlem forever. With a failing economy jobs became even harder for African Americans to obtain jobs. It also slowed the cash flow of both black and white Americans, who felt the economic impact of the Depression. Buckley describes the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 and the removal of mob money as, "the nail in the coffin for those who liked

²⁵⁰ Fell, and Vinding, *Stride!*, p.116

²⁵¹ Howland, "*Uptown Ellington*," p.39.

²⁵² Cohen, "The Marketing of Duke Ellington," p.297-298.

²⁵³ Howland, "*Uptown Ellington*," p.39.

Harlem best for protected illegality.”²⁵⁴ Ironically, Prohibition created a large degree of cash flow into a community, while its repeal drove much of the illegal money out.

Harlem during the early part of the twentieth century became the center of African American culture. It became the place to move, to write and write about, to write and perform music, and so much more. Harlem became the center of everything for many African Americans. Harlem provided vast speakeasies and rent parties to enjoy alcohol as well as many other vices, while patrons also enjoyed high quality music during Prohibition. The level of artistic expression, whether through music or writing, was exuberant. The Harlem Renaissance, which was created out of many coinciding events, World War I, The Great Migration, and Prohibition, gave African Americans a large step towards equality. Jobs were created, ideas were created, talked about and written about, and a sense of community was created, especially in Harlem during this time. These social changes may not have been the idea of groups that helped create the Harlem Renaissance, like Prohibition organizations, but they indirectly helped African Americans gain more freedom, and confidence to fight for even more equality and freedom forty years later.

²⁵⁴Buckley, *Hirshfeld's Harlem*, p.22.

CHAPTER FOUR

FLAPPERS, SEX, DATING, AND SPEAKEASIES

The term flapper is believed to have originated in England just prior to World War I. Zeitz describes some of typical characteristics and behavior of flappers, as follows: ““flapper”- the notorious character type who bobbed her hair, smoked cigarettes, drank gin, sported short skirts, and passed her evenings in steamy jazz clubs, where she danced with in a shockingly immodest fashion with a revolving cast of male suitors.”²⁵⁵ Throughout Prohibition women, especially of middle and upper middle class drank much more during Prohibition. Much of the increase in drinking was also in the public realm of speakeasies. Many women were embracing a new found freedom in the 1920’s by living the flapper life, as described by Zeitz. This newly found independence did not only derive from the right to vote, which was won at the beginning of Prohibition, but also from careers, from living alone, and from a new found sexual freedom. Women drinking in speakeasies, smoking, and enjoying themselves were widely criticized, much of the criticism coming from other women. Throughout this chapter women of the 1920’s and their involvement in speakeasies, the many aspects that made up the flapper, and several individual flappers will be discussed.

Many believed Prohibition was the reason women started drinking in public, and many saw it as a new low for society. Herbert Asbury believed that women began drinking the second it became illegal.²⁵⁶ It is easily argued that women drank substantially more alcohol during Prohibition, but there is evidence some women

²⁵⁵Joshua Zeitz, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and Women Who Made American Modern* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006) 6.

²⁵⁶Sismondo, *America Walks Into a Bar*, p.225.

drinking in saloons before the start of Prohibition. The women who frequented saloons went not only for the alcohol, but also to socialize and to receive a free lunch.²⁵⁷

Sismondo also described an actual account of one woman who enjoyed visiting saloons with her friends, as follows:

Dorothy Richardson, who, in 1905, published an account of her life as a New York wage-earner, describes a scene at a laundry where she and her female colleagues were being worked fairly mercilessly. When one fainted, an older co-worker suggested that the lady's weakness resulted from lack of food. The following day, six women from the laundry ate at a saloon, ordering beers with "all the trimmings" and enjoyed a hearty hot lunch. Richardson, previously a teetotaler, grew to enjoy the beer that came with it.²⁵⁸

Most saloon owners, in contrast to Richardson's account, did not allow women to drink inside their saloons.



Flapper revealing hipflask (Photo Courtesy: Google Images and <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/prohibition.htm>)

Although, many saloons would serve women alcohol through the back or side door and some allowed women to drink in the back. This was especially the case just

²⁵⁷Sismondo, *America Walks Into a Bar*, p.221

²⁵⁸Sismondo, *America Walks Into a Bar*, p.221

prior to Prohibition. Most saloons encouraged women to drink, but off the premises. Most saloon keepers did not mind giving women alcohol, as long as the saloon itself remained male only.²⁵⁹ Or as Sismondo puts it, “So long as they didn’t have their foot on the brass rail, women were allowed to drink.”²⁶⁰ Some took having their feet on a brass rail to another level; by owning or operating their own saloon.

There were some women who owned and ran saloons before Prohibition. The number of these saloons run by women declined after the Civil War. Unfortunately several government bodies outlawed the right for women to serve alcohol. Even saloons run by married couples were forced to make changes, usually moving women into the kitchen of the saloon. Some women were not under the jurisdiction of these bodies of government, or simply broke the law. A saloon in Ashtabula, Ohio was run by a woman named “Big Tit Irene.” Chicago was notably home to two women owned saloons, one owned by a woman named “Peckerhead Kate.” The other was known as “Big Maud,” who also ran her saloon during Prohibition in Chicago.²⁶¹ Maud ran her illegal saloon in what was called the “Bad Lands,” and it was stated that Maud could offer, “a drink, a woman, a bed for the night, and nine times out of ten, a broken head.”²⁶² She was also infamous for more than simply running a speakeasy. Sismondo explains, as follows: “A brief look at Prohibition-era crime bosses of Chicago reveals women were in the game almost as deeply as men. Herbert Asbury describes Maud as ‘another of the gigantic

²⁵⁹Sismondo, *America Walks Into a Bar*, p.221.

²⁶⁰Sismondo, *America Walks Into a Bar*, p.221.

²⁶¹Sismondo, *America Walks Into a Bar*, p.221-222.

²⁶²Sismondo, *America Walks Into a Bar*, p.222.

Negresses' of which he thought there was a surfeit in Chicago.”²⁶³ Prohibition, indirectly, created other types of jobs for women in speakeasies.

Throughout Prohibition, women were even paid by speakeasy owners to take advantage of unsuspecting men. As Lerner explains, these women, or hostesses, were trained, “to get as much information as possible from prospective suckers regarding their bank accounts and business.”²⁶⁴ Hostesses, along with this tactic, had several ways to empty the bank accounts and wallets of “suckers.” These women could entice men into buying themselves expensive drinks, get the men to buy them drinks, and charge them ten dollars for a dance. Not only did several of these men empty their pockets trying to impress a woman who was taking advantage of them, but were often overpaying for drinks that were often watered down.²⁶⁵ A woman who worked at the Rendezvous in New York, located at West 84th Street stated, “Any sucker who comes in here never walks out conscious. When his pockets are emptied or check obtained from him, he is carried out from here into a taxi, driven by a chauffeur who we know.”²⁶⁶ A job like this could become dangerous for several reasons.

The goal of a hostess was to ditch the man before any type of sexual exchange was expected, but some women would allow for a sexual exchange, in order to take advantage of the man through black-mail. This would obviously only work if the man were married. Aside from the obvious dangers, like the one just mentioned, hostesses also had to compete against women who were trying to take advantage of a man for reasons other than a pay check. Hostesses were paid handsomely for their efforts. Many

²⁶³Sismondo, *America Walks Into a Bar*, p.222.

²⁶⁴Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.182.

²⁶⁵Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.182-183.

²⁶⁶Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.182.

women were paid upwards of a third of whatever the man they seduced spent. This would often give these women between a \$150 and \$400 dollar check every week.²⁶⁷

Many women during Prohibition simply liked frequenting speakeasies. Large cities, especially, saw an increase women drinking. For example, in New York arrests of women for public drunkenness drastically increased immediately after the passing of the Volstead Act. The number of women arrested for public drunkenness stayed high throughout Prohibition in New York.²⁶⁸ Lerner describes the importance of women, as follow: “Rather, it was her effect on drinking culture that had until this point remained solidly masculine (despite the occasional presence of women), as well as her role in furthering the cultural and political rebellion against the dry crusade.”²⁶⁹ The flapper became as important to the Prohibition era as bootlegged liquor had.

The women’s role of rebelling against the dry crusade was evident, even in speakeasies. Many speakeasies wanted to cash in on the high number of new bar patrons, and built and designed speakeasies catered towards the increased number of women drinking in public. Okrent explains the new variations made by speakeasy owners, as follows:

Table service made it unnecessary for women to perch on a barstool or poise a foot on a brass rail. New styles of entertainment- jazz bands, torch singers, dance like the Charleston and the shimmy- emerged to accompany coeducational drinking. As mild as they might have seemed individually, together these innovations “set up conditions peculiarly attractive to women,” a dry publicist acknowledged. The installation of “powder rooms” sealed the deal.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.183.

²⁶⁸ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.211.

²⁶⁹ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.176.

²⁷⁰ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.211.

Speakeasy owners were willing to do anything and did about everything to take advantage of the increased number of women drinking.

Simply changing the color of the walls was a popular way to attract women. Tony's and The Park Avenue, both speakeasies in New York, had intricate color schemes that were appealing to women. Another Speakeasy in New York, called the Aquarium, skipped the focus on the color of the walls and chose to put an enormous fish tank in the speakeasy. Many speakeasies also made it a point to hire attractive men to work as bartenders or waiters.²⁷¹ It was almost as if many speakeasies were attempting to appear as far from the traditional saloon as possible in order to attract women.

Drinking establishment designs and new styles of entertainment were not the only changes that occurred due to the increased number of women drinking. The cocktail, in addition to masking the poor taste and quality of most bootlegged liquor, had largely become popular due to women desiring something more to drink than straight whiskey and beer. The sweeter tasting cocktails pleased the pallet of women much more than beer and whiskey, as well as masking the harsh taste of bootlegged liquor.²⁷² Many Speakeasies had their own styles of cocktails. For example, the Aquarium, in New York, served a drink called a Goldfish. The Goldfish was derived of equal parts of goldwasser (a type of liquor with gold flakes in addition to the liquid), gin, and French vermouth, and was quite popular with women. The Zani, also a New York speakeasy, was famous for

²⁷¹ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.176.

²⁷² Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.176.

the Zani Zasa. This popular drink with women was composed of gin, apricot brandy, egg white, lemon juice, and grenadine.²⁷³

Often drinking alongside the flapper was a type of man many characterized in popular media in the 1920's as the "sheik." The term "sheik" became popularized through the 1921 movie named, *Sheik*, starring Rudolph Valentino. Like the flapper, the "sheik" was stereotyped as wearing specific types of clothing. The "sheik" was known for wearing knickers, argyle socks, sweater vests, a peaked cap, and sometimes instead of knickers, huge baggy pants known as "Oxford bags" would be worn. If a "sheik" was attending a party he would often wear a bow tie, spats on his shoes, a double-breasted suit, a raccoon hat, and a bowler hat.²⁷⁴ This type of man was often college educated or still attending a college or university, young, rich, and had similar moral and ethic standards of the stereotypical flapper. As Drowne explains, "He has become accustomed to his women friends drinking, smoking, and petting at parties; the ethics of his parents' generation seem to him infinitely outdated."²⁷⁵ With the help of the flappers and "sheiks," different beliefs about morals and ethics, ideas about dating and sex began to change in the 1920's.

The idea of dating was becoming much more common and taking the place of courting, and the speakeasy was helping to further this social change. Sismondo explains these changes, as follows, "Courtship, with all its rigid rules and established codes, was precisely what was about to be discarded, replaced with the more casual 'dating' that was invented-or at least enabled in the speakeasy. Dating was not only less formal; women

²⁷³ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.176-177.

²⁷⁴ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.72.

²⁷⁵ Drowne, *Spirits of Defiance*, p.72.

had more power in initiating it.”²⁷⁶ Speakeasies, along with restaurants and movie theatres were cashing in on the growing popularity of dating. Dating was believed to be less blinding than the predecessor, courting.²⁷⁷ Dating, as well as drinking was meant to be experimental and entertaining. Fauss defined dating as, “a ritual of sexual interaction.”²⁷⁸ Women were also much more independent in this style of relationship; dating relationships might or might not lead to marriage.²⁷⁹ Stories of dating, especially within the context of speakeasies, became popular throughout the 1920’s.

One couples’ story became well known in the mid 1920’s. Ellen Mackay, was the daughter of a wealthy man who often held lavish balls throughout different venues in New York. One of Mackay’s father’s goals was for his daughter to meet several quality suitors. At one of his larger balls, Mackay was even introduced to the Prince of Wales. The Prince visited the Mackay mansion at Harbor Hill, located on Long Island. Mackay was part of the most high class social circles of New York, but unfortunately for Mackay’s father his daughter enjoyed the speakeasies of New York over his lavish balls. Mackay even contributed a couple of articles to *The New Yorker*, which was a new magazine at the time. The title of her first article for *The New Yorker* was “*Why We Go to Cabarets: a Post-Debutante Explains.*” The article was so immensely popular and made the new magazine relevant and popular. The article described the many positive aspects of the speakeasy compared to the boorish balls her father held, that were often

²⁷⁶ Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, p.224.

²⁷⁷ Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.176-177.

²⁷⁸ Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.176.

²⁷⁹ Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, p.224.

visited by un-alluring men who did not know how to dance.²⁸⁰ Mackay did not just write about speakeasies. She often frequented them.

Mackay loved one speakeasy more than any other; Jimmy Kelly's located in New York on 181 Sullivan Street. Mackay loved this particular speakeasy because she met the love of her life there, Irving Berlin. Berlin was a Russian Jewish composer, and was quite successful.²⁸¹ Sismondo describes the night, as follows: "One evening Berlin headed downtown rather than up, to Jimmy Kelly's at 181 Sullivan Street, where he met Mackay who, it turned out, had practically been stalking the lonely widower."²⁸² Kelly, a gangster, Berlin, a Russian Jew, and Mackay, the daughter of an enormously wealthy man, all enjoyed the privacy Kelly's club. It is interesting that these three are forever linked, thanks to Prohibition, given their diverse backgrounds. Berlin and Mackay began dating in 1925 and married in 1926, much to the disapproval of her father.²⁸³ Mackay later wrote a follow-up article for *The New Yorker*, in which she stated, "modern girls (were) conscious of their identity and they marry who they choose, satisfied to satisfy themselves."²⁸⁴ Mackay's statement reiterates the evolving social changes of dating during the 1920's. It could also be used to explain another social change which was related to dating, namely sex.

Throughout the 1920's, premarital sex became much more common-place than in years past. Lois Long of *The New Yorker* once stated, "You never know what you were

²⁸⁰ Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, p.223-224.

²⁸¹ Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, p.223-224.

²⁸² Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, p.224.

²⁸³ Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, p.224-225.

²⁸⁴ Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar*, p.225.

drinking or who you'd wake up with."²⁸⁵ Unplanned pregnancies were an obvious issue for women like Long. During the 1920's, birth control techniques and abortion also became more common. Long was also quoted about this topic, as follows: "We wore wishbone diaphragms that weren't always reliable. There was a doctor who handled abortions for our crowd. She would take a vacation at Christmastime to rest up for the rush after New Year's Eve."²⁸⁶ Long may have taken her sexual escapades to a different level in comparison to most women in the 1920's, but premarital sex was much more common during the 1920's than previous decades, especially in the speakeasy scene.

The Prohibition era created many new opportunities for sexual adventure, but many people started noticing a change in the sexual behavior of people long before the start of Prohibition. As Zeitz explains, "As early as 1913, social commentators observed that the bell had tolled 'Sex o'clock in America,' signaling a 'Repeal of Reticence' about matters both carnal and romantic."²⁸⁷ Statistically speaking, the commentator who was quoted saying this was correct. Only 14 percent of women born before 1900 admitted to having premarital sex before turning twenty-five.²⁸⁸ A survey conducted in the 1940's and 1950's suggested that as much as 50 percent of women in the 1920's lost their virginity before marriage.²⁸⁹ Women in the 1920's were also much more likely to have an orgasm compared to the generation before.²⁹⁰ As Zeitz puts it, "In short, a lot more

²⁸⁵ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.179.

²⁸⁶ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.179.

²⁸⁷ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.23.

²⁸⁸ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.22-23.

²⁸⁹ Angus McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History*, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 43-44.

²⁹⁰ Alfred C. Kinsey and others, eds., *Sexual Behavior In The Human Female*, (Philadelphia: W.B. Sanders Company, 1953), 300-301.

women of the younger generation were having premarital sex, and many of them were enjoying it.”²⁹¹

Ironically, the number of children being conceived by women was drastically dropping as the nineteenth century turned into the 1920’s. In fact the number dropped from seven children born to every woman in 1800 to three children born to every woman in 1920.²⁹² Zeitz describes several reasons for this, contraception being one. Several contraception techniques, and new innovations, which included coitus interrupt, prophylactics, the rhythm method, and abortion. Another reason was that the large number of families moving to urban areas no longer needed to have several children as did rural families; in fact having several children in an urban home was a disadvantage. The last reason is that an increasing number of white collar jobs required more schooling, which delayed a desire to have children.²⁹³ Of course, a lack of desire to have children did not stop people from having sex, in and out of marriage.

Men were also opening up their ideas about sex, and more specifically premarital sex. Three-quarters of all men said they would marry a woman who had previously had premarital sex.²⁹⁴ Zeitz describes these changes in the early twentieth century, as follows: “Most of the Jazz Age youths viewed sex as an appropriate and fulfilling act between two people who loved each other and intended to marry. Although this was a revolutionary view in its time, it paled in comparison to the further unraveling of social

²⁹¹ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.22-23.

²⁹² Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.44.

²⁹³ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.44-45.

²⁹⁴ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.118.

customs in the 1950's and 1960's."²⁹⁵ Socially speaking, times were changing, especially for women, and many did not like it.

Ironically, the strongest critics of flappers were hard-line feminists. In the fifty years leading up to the 1920's women mobilized by the millions to stand up for their right to vote, for equal income with men, safer workplaces, Prohibition, and legal rights with men.²⁹⁶ As Zeitz explains, many feminists in the 1920's believed flappers were uninterested in politics and equality: "the New Woman of the 1920's (women like Lois Long and Zelda Fitzgerald) struck many veteran feminists as an apolitical creature interested only in romantic and sexual frivolities."²⁹⁷ The flapper appeared to be especially problematic for the temperance movement, as one of the most common stereotypes of the Prohibition era woman was that she enjoyed alcohol. Before the flappers of the 1920's, women were expected not only to abide by the beliefs of the temperance movement, but also to campaign for Prohibition and temperance.²⁹⁸ As Lerner explains, "Those Women who failed to live up to this expectation were considered immoral, eccentric, or beneath the American standard of womanhood."²⁹⁹ The flapper was a controversial figure, to say the least.

Some states even passed, or at least tried to pass laws that tried to restrain the changing nature of the female behavior in the 1920's. Many of the laws addressed skirt length. Twenty-one states legislatures had either discussed or even passed into law bills regarding skirt length, all of which varied in defining what was immoral or immodest.

²⁹⁵ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.118.

²⁹⁶ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.105.

²⁹⁷ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.105.

²⁹⁸ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.174.

²⁹⁹ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.174.

For example, in Ohio the dresses of girls under fourteen years of age had to reach their instep, while in Utah a fine or prison sentence could be issued to any woman whose skirt was three inches above her ankle.³⁰⁰ The *New York American* also discussed the issue of the many bills written in the early 1920's regarding skirt length, as follows: "It would seem that, were these to become laws, the dress with its four-inch-high skirt which would be moral in Virginia would be immodest in Utah, while both the Utah and Virginia skirts would be wicked enough in Ohio to make their wearers subject to fine or imprisonment."³⁰¹

Like the many bills that were written in an attempt to keep women "moral," many books and essays were also written for the same reason. *Flapper Jane*, by Bruce Bliven was one of these essays. Bliven's writing, which was published in *Essays of 1925*, was also one of the more famous essays about flappers. His essay, in which he describes his character, "Jane," as the quintessential flapper, is still widely used in books that discuss women of the 1920's, and for good reason: Bliven describes the flapper, the many changes the flapper created, and the fear many Americans felt because of the changes the flapper brought to American Society.³⁰² He finishes his introduction by describing the flappers' stereotypes: smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and attending petting parties, but he tries to strike a sense of fear in Americans when he poses the question, "how wild is Jane?"³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Angela J. Latham, *Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2000), 48.

³⁰¹ Latham, *Posing a Threat*, p.48.

³⁰² Bruce Bliven, "Flapper Jane," in *Essays of 1925*, ed. Odell Shepherd (Hartford, Connecticut: E.V. Mitchell, 1925), 242-248.

³⁰³ Bliven, "Flapper Jane," p.242.

Throughout Bliven's essay, Jane and flappers alike are criticized for the clothes they wore, or rather lack of clothing. Bliven continually discussed his disapproval of flappers wearing skirts short enough to show knee. He also points out the almost complete disappearance of the corset. The argument of the absence of clothes is even used to discuss new hair styles of the flapper, referring to the bob.³⁰⁴ Bliven even stated, "This year's styles have gone quite a long step toward genuine nudity. Nor is this merely the sensible half of the population dressing as everyone ought to, in hot weather."³⁰⁵ As outlandish as his statement is regarding the new styles, like showing knees, his argument was quite solid. The average woman's outfit used one third of the fabric in 1928 as it did fifteen years prior.³⁰⁶ Bliven also criticized the stereotypical social and moral choices of flappers.

His criticism of the changing ideas about sex and marriage, as seen through flapper Jane, is quite extensive. Bliven discussed these changes through this, as follows: "'Women still want to be loved,' goes on Jane, warming to her theme, 'but they want it on a fifty-fifty basis, which includes being admired for the qualities they really possess. Dragging in this strange-allurement stuff doesn't seem sporting. It's like cheating in games, or lying.'"³⁰⁷ Women during this time, in addition to a sexual liberation, were enjoying much more independence and equality with single men.

An increasing number of women were earning their own wages and living alone. Bliven tackled this issue, once again through his character Jane, as follows: "Of course,

³⁰⁴ Bliven, "Flapper Jane," p.243-245.

³⁰⁵ Bliven, "Flapper Jane," p.244.

³⁰⁶ Maureen A. Molloy, *On Creating a Usable Culture: Margaret Mead and the Emergence of American Cosmopolitan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 43.

³⁰⁷ Bliven, "Flapper Jane," p.247.

not so many girls are looking for a life meal ticket nowadays. Lots of them prefer to earn their own living and omit the home-and-baby act. Well, anyhow, postpone it years and years. They think a bachelor girl can and should do everything a bachelor does.”³⁰⁸

Bliven, once again, had evidence to defend his argument that women were becoming more independent. Throughout the 1920’s women increasingly moved to the city to work, and in many cases they lived alone or only with women. By 1929, more than one third of all women were employed, and more than half of the single female population was employed. Large cities like Chicago and Philadelphia especially saw an influx of independent women. In these cities between one-quarter and one-third of women lived in their own apartments or boardinghouses.³⁰⁹ Zeitz quoted an observer of the growing independence of women in the 1920’s, as follows: “In those cities where women twenty-five to thirty-five can control their own purse strings many of them are apt to drift into casual or steady relationships with certain men friends which may or may not end in matrimony.”³¹⁰ This new found independence meant that flappers were spending their money on what they desired.

If the women of the Prohibition era wanted to look like flappers, they were going to have to spend quite a bit of money on clothes. The traditional “flapper look,” also known as the “garconne look,” included bobbed hair, high heels, short tubular dresses, dropped or invisible waistlines, tank tops, high hemlines, intricate decorative beading, stockings, and often a bell-shaped cloche hat. Color schemes and changes in fabric varied from years to year, but the “flapper” look stayed consistent throughout the 1920’s.

³⁰⁸ Bliven, “Flapper Jane,” p.247.

³⁰⁹ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.28.

³¹⁰ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.28.

The “flapper look” stayed in fashion for such a long time in large part to due to one of the biggest designers of the “flapper look,” Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel.³¹¹ Latham describes Chanel’s influence, as follows: “By the 1920’s her influence rivaled even Paul Poiret’s. Chanel was largely responsible for the popularity of the simple, rather boyish look that became a staple of women’s fashions at this time, first in France and subsequently in the United States.”³¹² Chanel’s style reached its peak in influence in 1923. Her look became known as the famous “garconne look.” Purchasing something designed by Chanel would have been very costly, as were most clothes that were designed to have the “flapper look.”³¹³

Perfecting the “flapper look” was quite pricey. It would have cost on average at least \$117 in the 1920’s to purchase the clothes and accessories that were needed to look like a flapper. Many experts agree this would cost \$1,200 today.³¹⁴ The high prices of fashion would have been an issue for women, especially single women trying to make it on their own. There were exceptions, but most women did not make much money in the 1920’s. As Zeitz explains, “Working women faced rampant wage employment discrimination that sharply curtailed their spending power.”³¹⁵ In Chicago a study found that the average woman working as a factory worker or clerk earned around \$22 dollars a week in the 1920’s. The bare minimum living expenses were between \$20 and \$25 a week. Most women not only struggled to afford to master the “flapper look,” they struggled to make ends meet.³¹⁶ Nonetheless women were still much more independent

³¹¹ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.156,159.

³¹² Latham, *Posing a Threat*, p.33.

³¹³ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.156.

³¹⁴ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.81.

³¹⁵ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.36.

³¹⁶ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.36.

than women had been in previous generations. Flappers may not have been as political as their foremothers, but the large increase of women working and living on their own in the 1920's was a large leap in independence.

Many feminists denounce flappers because of their lack of interest in politics and growth as a gender, which was seen in the generation just prior to the flapper.³¹⁷ Zeitz stated, "Much as veteran second-wave feminists in the 1990's would lament the seemingly apolitical posture of Gen-X women, flappers simply didn't strike the first-wave feminists in the 1920's as concerned one way or the other about the weightier issues."³¹⁸ Of course not all women agree with this assumption. Dorothy Dunbar Bromley is one of those women. In Bromley's argument supporting flappers, she concluded the flapper, "knows that it is her American, her twentieth century birthright to emerge from a creature of instinct into a full-fledged individual who is capable of molding her own life. And in this respect she holds that she is becoming man's equal."³¹⁹

There were some women in the 1920's who did not believe Prohibition was a good idea and were politically active. In 1929 the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform was created as a bipartisan women's group with the goal repeal of Prohibition. The Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform was founded by Pauline Morton Sabin. Sabin was a wealthy New Yorker who was the heiress to the Morton Salt fortune. She was also, like many American women, a supporter of Prohibition who reversed her stance regarding the issue as the 1920's progressed.³²⁰ Sabin explained her beliefs about Prohibition in 1932, as follows: "I felt I should approve

³¹⁷ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.112.

³¹⁸ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.112.

³¹⁹ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.112-113.

³²⁰ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.192

of it because it would help my two sons. . . I thought a world without liquor would be a beautiful world.”³²¹

Before starting the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform, she had not been terribly active politically. Sabin did not even campaign for Prohibition or women’s suffrage. When Sabin did enter politics she only did it because she believed having more political power would help the many New York charities she worked with. Sabin quickly excelled in politics, and in 1923 was named to the Republican National Committee. Sabin now had political power and a continually growing disgust of Prohibition laws, and she was far from the only woman who desired a change.³²² In 1928 Ella Boole, of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, stated to congress, “I represent the women of America.” This statement became the tipping point for Sabin, as a reporter quoted her stating, “Well lady, here’s one woman you don’t represent.”³²³ At a Women’s Republican luncheon in April of 1929 Sabin resigned her position on the Republican National Committee, and stated, “I want to devote my untrammelled efforts towards working for a change in the Prohibition law.”³²⁴ Only a few weeks later, Sabin had created the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform.

The Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform was criticized, especially by the temperance movement and other dry movements. The president of the Georgia Women’s Christian Temperance Union district, Mary Amor, referred to the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform as “Mrs. Sabin and her cocktail-drinking women,” and pledged, “We will outlive them, out-love them, out-talk them, out-

³²¹ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.192.

³²² Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.178-179.

³²³ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.192-193.

³²⁴ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.193.

pray them, and out-vote them.”³²⁵ Unfortunately for Amor and other supporters of Prohibition, this statement was proved wrong by the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform. By 1930 there were 50,000 members in the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform in New York State, surpassing the 45,000 New York members in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. By 1931 the national enrollment of the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform surpassed the Women’s Christian Temperance Union national enrollment by a count of 400,000 members to 381,000 members, all of which were women. Soon, this number exploded to 1,300,000 national members of the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform, which made it the largest repeal group in the country.³²⁶

The type of woman the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform was attracting was also quite different from the woman of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Women who were part of the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform were not flappers, but still had a much different look as compared with women of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Lerner discusses this, as follows:

They did not dance or dress like flappers, and they insisted they did not drink like flappers. But the press portrayed them as having the same spirit, daring, and energy as flappers, which gave them considerable appeal. In contrast with the women of the WCTU, a reporter for *Time* argued, the women of WONPR were “more charming than churchy,” while the photogenic comparisons in the press of the graceful Sabin and the WCTU’s dowdy Ella Boole visually reiterated the same point.³²⁷

³²⁵ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.193-194.

³²⁶ Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p. 178.

³²⁷ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.194.

The beauty of the women of the Women's Organization National Prohibition Reform was also discussed in the political realm. Jefferson Chase, of *Vanity Fair*, was intrigued by the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform, and stated that they had "set up one of the most amusing and effective lobbies which the Capitol has ever seen," and also noted that it uses the full force of social blandishments and sex appeal upon Senators and Congressmen."³²⁸ Chase even referred to this as "flapper politics."³²⁹ Sabin and other members of the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform were largely in the spotlight but were still far from as popular as a handful of women that took the flapper lifestyle to another level.

Zelda Fitzgerald was one of those women. Zelda Fitzgerald, before marrying F. Scott Fitzgerald, was originally Zelda Sayre and had grown up in Montgomery, Alabama. She was born into one of the more prominent families in Montgomery. Zelda's father was a judge, Anthony Sayre, and was also a strict Victorian. Zelda, even when she was young, was known as a wild individual, and this combined with her family standing in the community created the gossip that often surrounded her and her family. Unfortunately for the Sayres, the gossip surrounding Zelda was often well grounded. Zelda was well known for sneaking out of country club dances and her bedroom window to join the most eligible bachelors in Montgomery. Sneaking out would often entail a couple hours of drinking, petting, and necking in a secluded back seat of a car.³³⁰

Zeitiz describes a couple of her more-well known moves, as follows: "During the summer, when it got hot, she slipped out of her underwear and asked her date to hold it

³²⁸ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.195.

³²⁹ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.195.

³³⁰ Zeitiz, *Flapper*, p.13-14.

for the evening in his coat pocket.”³³¹ Regardless of Zelda’s wild teenage years, it is doubtful she actually went ‘all the way’ during this time. Zeitz explains, as follows:

But this sort of “flirtation was an old Southern custom; ‘going the limit’ was not. Zelda was a reigning beauty and a ‘knockout’ in the Paleolithic slang of the day, far too popular to have ‘put out’ for her beaux, far too shrewd in the tactics and strategy of popularity to grant her favors to one suitor and thereby alienate a regiment of them.”³³²

Zelda changed her habits, but only ever so slightly, when she started dating her future husband.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, a St. Paul, Minnesota native, had spent four years at Princeton, without earning a degree. Instead of entering an extra year to finish his degree, he entered the military in 1917. While in officers training Fitzgerald made a poor impression on his platoon Captain, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Fitzgerald was not interested in being a soldier, and his demeanor showed it. He was more interested in writing his novel, *The Romantic Egotist*, which he finished and sent to an editor at Charles Scribner’s and Sons, with the help of a short leave from the army in 1918.³³³

After returning to the army in May of 1918, his commanding officers decided that his duties would be best served within the United States. After being transferred to a few different army bases, all located in the United States, Fitzgerald was transferred to Camp Sheridan in June 1918, which was located near Montgomery, Alabama. Fitzgerald was quickly becoming accustomed to Montgomery, and its many single females with the help of a collegiate friend, Lawton Campbell.³³⁴ Fitzgerald, when he was young, never had

³³¹ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.16.

³³² Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.15.

³³³ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.15-16.

³³⁴ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.15-17.

money or family connections, but he did have some characteristics that helped him get any girl he wanted. As Zeitz explains, “Still, he knew he had ‘good looks and intelligence,’ qualities that generally helped him get the ‘top girl’ wherever he went.”³³⁵ These qualities served him well in Montgomery.

Fitzgerald quickly became infatuated with Zelda, as Zeitz explains: “The moment his eyes locked on her, Scott was taken by Zelda’s beauty.”³³⁶ After two years of Fitzgerald chasing Zelda through several different suitors, different jobs, moving several times, and the final release of *The Romantic Egotist*, which was renamed *This Side of Paradise*, Zelda Sayre became Zelda Fitzgerald, much to the disapproval of many of their friends. The marriage was also only two months after the release of *This Side of Paradise*.³³⁷ Zeitz notes that Fitzgerald was anointed with the following designations: “‘F. Scott Fitzgerald, who originated the flapper,’ ‘Flapperdom’s Fiction Ace,’ and only somewhat more modestly, the nation’s ‘Expert on Flappers.’”³³⁸ Fitzgerald, on many occasions admitted to using Zelda’s antics for ideas in his writing. Meade explains his using of Zelda’s personality and actions in his writing, as follows:

By this time Zelda had earned a national reputation as the ultimate flapper, a figure of extreme glamour personifying the new image of ‘flaming youth.’ In interviews Scott proudly announced, ‘I married the heroine of my stories,’ while Zelda posed for rotogravures with her skirt inches above her knees.³³⁹

From this point on, the Fitzgeralds represented almost every stereotype of flappers and sheiks.

³³⁵ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.17.

³³⁶ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.17.

³³⁷ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.53.

³³⁸ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.39.

³³⁹ Marion Meade, *Bobbed Hair and Bathtub Gin: Writers Running Wild in the twenties* (Bloomington, Indiana: Pathways Press, 1997), 29.



Zelda Fitzgerald (Photo Courtesy: Google Images and <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Multimedia.jsp?id=m-2366>)

The Fitzgeralds took advantage of their newly found small fortune from the relatively good success of *This Side of Paradise*. They had many large parties, most of their guests being Scott's bachelor friends from Princeton. Their home began to appear like a fraternity, of which Zelda was the only woman. Zelda greatly enjoyed the situation. In one night, Scott spent \$43 on alcohol, which would equal around \$500 today.³⁴⁰ The Fitzgeralds were living fast exciting lives, and Zelda was especially enjoying herself. Meade describes the life Zelda was enjoying early in the Fitzgeralds' marriage, as follows:

After nine months of marriage she loved nothing better than parties and speakeasies, and of course shopping. She had the most glamorous dancing dresses, and one with diaphanous panels of Scheherazade froth in the palest shade of pink, another a glittery silver gown, slinky and theatrical. Who cared if

³⁴⁰ Meade, *Bobbed Hair and Bathtub Gin*, p.27.

her apartment was a wreck? She always stepped out the door knowing that she looked gorgeous.³⁴¹

Zelda was arguably, the quintessential flapper of the 1920's, but it could also be argued there were several others who could have been given the same title.

Lois Long was another woman who became well known for her flapper image and more notably for her articles in *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*. Zeitz discusses Long's influence on readers, as follows: "She became one of America's most insightful chroniclers of the new, middle-class woman who seemed to embody the flapper's spirit and style."³⁴² Long often wrote about her long nights of dining, drinking, and dancing, all of which were paid for by the magazine. Long also wrote all her stories under the alias, "Lipstick." Long, at her height, was making \$3,900 a year, placing her at the top 14 percent of professional women in the 1920's. Even though much of her audience was middle class women, her life and income were not of the middle class.³⁴³

Long could also influence the success of the speakeasies she visited. Long, or Lipstick, would often describe the speakeasies she visited, which could help the business or destroy them. Either way, her stories were always detailed and entertaining. The true identity of Lipstick was just as intriguing as the stories she wrote. *The New Yorker* also made it a point to never release a photo or reveal the true identity of Lipstick. Along with the secrecy surrounding Lipstick, Long often tried to provide even more secrecy by describing herself in many different ways.³⁴⁴ Most of Long's followers believed her to be in her mid-twenties and a woman, but that did not stop Long from referring to herself

³⁴¹ Meade, *Bobbed Hair and Bathtub Gin*, p.45-46.

³⁴² Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.89.

³⁴³ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.89, 92.

³⁴⁴ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.99.

as, “a short, squat maiden of forty who wears steal-rimmed spectacles, makes her son pay her dinner checks, and habitually carries a straw suitcase filled with Aquizone,” and Long would sometimes close Lipstick’s column as, “the kindly, old, bearded gentleman who signs himself-Lipstick.”³⁴⁵ Long wrote extensively about the Prohibition era, but she also lived it.

Long and her friends were well known for frequenting “21.” After “21” closed, she and her friends often visited several speakeasies, clubs, and cabarets in Harlem, a common practice by many middle class whites. On most occasions, Long and her large group of friends would not leave for home until three in the morning, usually not getting home until after the stock exchange bell would ring, signaling the opening for business, before she got home. Nights like these were not uncommon for Long. In fact, she would do this almost every night, and developed an incredibly high tolerance for alcohol.³⁴⁶ In regards to drinking, Long stated, “If you could make it to the ladies’ room before throwing up,” she claimed, you were, “thought to be good at holding liquor...It was customary to give \$2 to the cab driver if you threw up in his cab.”³⁴⁷

Long, even though she was well known for visiting Harlem, still had many negative beliefs about African Americans, especially African American women. Long was far from the only person who enjoyed Harlem’s night life but also disparaged the people who worked and lived there, and she had one of the largest platforms in which to

³⁴⁵ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.99.

³⁴⁶ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.90.

³⁴⁷ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.90-91.

this from.³⁴⁸ Zeitz describes Long's beliefs about Harlem and Africans Americans, as follows:

Lipstick's argument was slick and invidious all at once. It was okay to slum in Harlem, she told readers, as long as they understood that the Charleston was a white woman's dance. Black women, by definition, could never be 'flowers of American womanhood.' At best, they could aspire to being exhibits in a freak show. Long revisited this theme again and again, reversing her most cutting invective for black women. Black men, after all, posed no threat to the flapper.³⁴⁹

Unfortunately, Long's beliefs were quite common, even within the group of white middle class men and women who visited Harlem during Prohibition.



Clara Bow (Photo Courtesy: Google Images and <http://verdoux.wordpress.com/2008/03/30/clara-bow/>)

The New Yorker was not the only form of media that took advantage of the economic possibilities of a woman portraying herself as a flapper. Actresses were often

³⁴⁸ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.193.

³⁴⁹ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.193.

portrayed as flappers in film in the 1920's and would enjoy the flapper life first hand. Two of the more-well known actresses who portrayed themselves as flappers include Louise Brooks and Clara Bow. Clara Bow was in several movies, most notably *Painted People*, *The Plastic Age*, and *It*. Bow claimed immense popularity and notoriety. In a 1929 national survey of 2,700 surveys, theatre owners voted Bow the year's top female box-office draw by almost twice as many votes as any other actress.³⁵⁰ F. Scott Fitzgerald also noticed Bow's rising popularity and placed in his flapper pantheon, as follows:

Clara Bow is the quintessence of what the term 'flapper' signifies as a definite description: pretty, impudent, superbly assured, as worldly-wise, briefly-clad and 'hard berled' as possible. There were hundreds of them her prototypes. Now, completing the circle, there are thousands more, patterning themselves after her.³⁵¹

Bow helped make the flapper a household term.

Louis Brooks' career was modest in comparison to Bow's, but for the 1920's Brooks was much more immoral, and open about her adventures. Zeitz lumped Brooks into a group of three great flapper actresses, with Clara Bow and Colleen Moore. Of the three, Moore was known as the unthreatening and moral flapper, Bow was known as the naughty flapper but would always discover the problems with her unconventional life by the end of the film, and Brooks was known as the "the real deal."³⁵² Brooks was often open about her life, especially her sex life. Brooks once told some friends privately that when she was between the ages of 17 and 60 she had slept with 430 men, or about 10 a

³⁵⁰ David Stenn, *Clara Bow: Runnin' Wild* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 40,54,87, 128-159.

³⁵¹ Stenn, *Clara Bow*, p.87.

³⁵² Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.245.

year.³⁵³ On several occasions she stated to friends, colleagues and acquaintances, “I like to drink and fuck.”³⁵⁴ Using the flapper in film made the idea of being a flapper even more popular. Unfortunately for many the style would lose its zeal.



Louis Brooks (photo Courtesy: Google Images and http://louisebrookssociety.blogspot.com/2010_06_01_archive.html)

The New York Times declared that flappers were no longer relevant in early 1928, and they were not far off.³⁵⁵ With the advent of the Great Depression it became much more difficult for women to afford the look of a flapper. Nonetheless flappers left their mark on history forever. Many, especially feminists, may argue whether flappers made an impact of the betterment of women, but it is difficult to argue the independence of the women of the 1920's. With the help of the extreme decline of the saloon and the massive increase of speakeasies, women drank more and enjoyed the new social construct of

³⁵³ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.245.

³⁵⁴ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.245.

³⁵⁵ Zeitz, *Flapper*, p.288.

dating. No longer did women have to suffer through the parent controlled courtship.³⁵⁶ Women could now date any man they wanted, could cut it short, and could do anything physically they desired. Most women of the 1920's may not have fought for the right to vote and for Prohibition like the decades preceding the 1920's, but they, ironically with the help of Prohibition, may have gained more personal freedom for women than the generation before them.

³⁵⁶ Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.176-177.

CONCLUSION

On December 5, 1931 at 3:31 P.M. Utah became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the Twenty-First Amendment, making the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act null and void.³⁵⁷ Prohibition, in some respects, was successful. The United States as a whole drank less during Prohibition. Some areas were an exception to this statement, New York City for example, but generally the country as a whole drank less. Americans, on average, consumed about two-thirds of the amount of alcohol during Prohibition that was consumed prior to the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. These numbers are the results of a 1991 published study by Jeffrey Miron and Jeffrey Zweibel. Miron and Zweibel compiled the number of incidences of cirrhosis of the liver, cases of psychosis, alcoholism-caused deaths, and arrests for public drunkenness during and right after Prohibition. Miron and Zweibel also found that during the first few years of Prohibition Americans drank less than one-third of the alcohol that was consumed just prior to Prohibition. Also, it was not until 1970 that Americans consumed on average as much as they did just prior to Prohibition.³⁵⁸ The Women's Christian Temperance Union and Anti-Saloon League had some success with their noble experiment, but it failed in almost every way imaginable.

It has been argued that Prohibition created an enormous amount of violence, and arguably started organized crime in the United States. Prohibition also created enormous social change through the speakeasy scene. Women especially practiced much more independence in the 1920's, in large part because of the underground drinking scene that

³⁵⁷ Okrent, *Last Call*, p.354.

³⁵⁸ Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, p.164.

was created because of Prohibition. The independence and freedom that was gained in the years preceding Prohibition, and widely practiced during Prohibition, may be a major contributor to the future feminist movements of the 1960's and 1970's.

African Americans gained more independence and freedom just prior to and during Prohibition in much the same way that women did. With the combination of Great Migration and the increased opportunities for African Americans that were created in the underground drinking scene during Prohibition African Americans experienced much more independence, and many more opportunities to make an income and support a family. The combination of Prohibition and the Great Migration also helped drive the Harlem Renaissance, where some of the greatest music, writing, and art were created by African Americans, to that point in time. Musicians especially took full advantage of this scenario, and many white record companies signed African Americans for the first time in history. The combination of the Great Migration and Prohibition created more freedom, more opportunities for work, and for the most part a better life, especially for those African Americans who moved to areas like Harlem.

Like women, African Americans gained much more freedom during the 1960's, and it can be argued that Prohibition helped lay the seeds for African Americans to fight for more equality through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. The Prohibitionist goal of making Americans drink less was successful, for the most part, but it came with the cost of higher crime and enormous social change for women and African Americans, which were not goals of groups like the Anti-Saloon League and Women's Christian Temperance Union. Indirectly, Prohibition made America a much more equal country for African Americans and women.

Prohibition and its many aspects continue to entertain Americans over ninety-years after the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. Most recently, Ken Burns' PBS documentary production, *Prohibition*, has shown the entertainment value and interest Americans still have for the subject. Ken Burns' three-part series provides an outline of the entire thirteen years of Prohibition, and the years leading up to the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. Home Box Office has also cashed in on America's interest in Prohibition with their hit television show, *Boardwalk Empire*. This show details the life of a highly ranked Republican politician in Atlantic City during Prohibition, who is corrupt in almost every way imaginable, especially in terms of bootlegged liquor. Aside from entertaining many in its first two seasons, it was also a major influence for my choosing of a Prohibition-based topic for Senior and Junior Independent Study.

One may ask why Prohibition has intrigued, and continues to intrigue, so many Americans. Prohibition is often characterized as a glamorous time, but there is much more to it than that. Prohibition was a federal law that removed a freedom many loved and enjoyed, and in many cases depended on to provide an income. Many may find comfort in a group of people rebelling and rising up against a law that was believed to be unjust by many. Public interest for the fight for medical and even legalization of marijuana has been growing immensely, and many production companies have been cashing in on the growing popularity of the issue. National Geographic, The History Channel, The Discovery Channel, and many more small time companies are making numerous documentaries, movies, and television programs in which marijuana, and its various federal and state laws, is the focus. Once again many Americans are intrigued, but still torn regarding an issue quite similar to the Prohibition of alcohol. Perhaps

ninety-years from now people will examine the prohibition of marijuana, or possibly other substances, much the way they view the Prohibition of Alcohol, as immensely interesting but nonetheless a mistake.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

SECONDARY SOURCES

Biggio, Anthony J. *You Told Me That Before, Dad*. Wooster, Ohio: The Wooster Book Company, 2010.

Biggio's book is a biography of the author's father, Frank Biggio. What makes this book useful is the fact that Biggio's father was a bootlegger and owned a speakeasy during Prohibition. Biggio grew up in Steubenville, Ohio. This rural town had a relaxed view of many laws, especially Prohibition and gambling laws. This book provides an interesting look into a rural style speakeasy and the city government of Steubenville, that generally allowed speakeasies to exist uninhibited.

Blumer, R.G. *Speakeasy: [Prohibition in the Illinois Valley]*. Granville, Illinois: Grand Village Press, 2003.

Speakeasies in a rural setting became an important aspect of one of the chapters of this Independent Study. Blumer's book focused on many aspects regarding rural speakeasies during Prohibition, with an emphasis on rural speakeasies in the Illinois Valley. Blumer provided many examples of how rural speakeasies were different from urban speakeasies, but also how they were similar.

Brown, Scott E. *James P. Johnson: A Case of Mistaken Identity*. Metuchen, NJ: Scranton Press and the Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University, 1986.

This biography of arguably the greatest jazz musician, especially jazz pianists, provides a broad look at James P. Johnson. The book outlines the life of Johnson from his birth, and the obscurity that surrounds it, and finishes with his death. Brown makes it a point to describe Johnson as the creator of 'stride,' a form of piano playing popularized through jazz and pianists like Johnson. Brown not only discusses the importance of 'stride,' but also how to play it. Much of this also occurred during Prohibition making much of this book immensely important to this Independent Study.

Burns, Eric. *The Spirits of America: A Social History of Alcohol*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004.

Burns provided a broad outline of the history of alcohol in America, but most of his writing focused on the fight for Prohibition, life during Prohibition, and the fight for the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. In addition to Burns' discussion of Prohibition, he broadly discussed the many dangers of bootlegged liquor that was often mixed with many dangerous toxins and/or poisons. This was

found to be quite useful, but was far from the only portion of *Spirits of America* that was used. This book was used extensively throughout the entire Independent Study.

Buckley, Gail L. "Brave New Black World: A Century of Harlem Renaissance." In

Hirschfeld's Harlem: Manhattan's Legendary Artistic Illustrates This Legendary City Within a City, 13-24. New York: Glen Young Books, 2003.

This chapter of *Hirschfeld's Harlem* provides ample information regarding the History of Harlem, especially in terms of the original intentions of the planners of Harlem. Also, how the original intentions of Harlem were never achieved. Buckley also discusses how and why city planners placed the many African Americans in Harlem, who moved to New York during the Great Migration. The Renaissance that occurred in Harlem during the 1920's was also examined. The entire chapter was quite useful when discussing African Americans, the Great Migration, and the Harlem Renaissance.

Drowne, Kathleen Morgan. *Spirits of Defiance: National Prohibition and Jazz Age*

Literature, 1920-1933. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005.

This book gives an overview of many different aspects that Prohibition played culturally through books and movies. The author explained different subject matters that were relevant during Prohibition like bootlegging, speakeasies, flappers, and many more. At the end of each chapter Drowne would highlight books or movies that were written or released during prohibition that were related to the subject matter of the chapter. Drowne's expansive research was useful for providing basic, and in some cases detailed, topics in almost every facet of Prohibition.

Fell, John L, and Terkild Vinding. *Stride!: Fats, Jimmy, Lion, Lamb, and All the Other*

Ticklers. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press; Institute of Jazz Studies Rutgers, State University of New Jersey, 1999.

Both authors wrote this book to discuss the creation of stride piano, as well as to discuss some of the creators of the style of piano playing and the greatest stride pianists that ever lived. The authors also discussed the importance of Harlem and rent parties to the creation of stride piano. This book was used sparingly, but was still quite useful.

Gioia, Ted. *The History of Jazz*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

This book provides a detailed outline of the history of jazz. It starts with the beginning stages in New Orleans, how it travelled to New York and Chicago, and more recent additions to the music genre of jazz. The beginning stages of jazz and the rise in popularity of jazz in the 1920's were the most useful sections of the

book for this Independent Study. Anyone interested in writing about jazz or with an interest in jazz would find this book immensely useful.

Howland, John L. *"Ellington Uptown": Duke Ellington, James P. Johnson, & the birth of Concert Jazz*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009.

Howland's book describes the rise of Duke Ellington and James P. Johnson in the 1920's, and the rise in popularity of jazz that Ellington rode to fame. The importance of the Cotton Club to Ellington's success was also discussed. In addition to the outlining the lives of Ellington and Johnson, with an emphasis during the 1920's, Howland also discussed the Great Migration and some of the negative sides of the migration, including violent riots. As a whole, Howland's book was useful in many aspects of this Independent Study.

Kaytor, Marilyn. *21: The Life and Times of New York's Favorite Club*. Viking Adult, 1975.

Marilyn Kaytor's book, *21*, focused on two men, John Kriendler and Charles Burns. These two men opened several speakeasies during Prohibition in New York City, and eventually opened one of the most famous speakeasies, '21.' The book details the lives of the two owners and their process of owning speakeasies, and eventual purchase of the building that became the famous '21.' The book spans from the beginning of the Burns and Kriendlers' speakeasy ownership up until the early 1970's. Kaytor's book was found to be incredibly useful, and provided ample information when discussing the story of one of the most well known speakeasies of Prohibition.

Kinsey, Alfred C., Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin, Paul H. Gebhard, eds. *Sexual Behavior In The Human Female*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1953.

Kinsey, along with the other researchers, compiled an immensely large amount of statistics regarding the sexual activity of thousands of women in this book published in 1953. This book was only used once to point out the increase in orgasms women experienced in the early twentieth century.

Latham, Angela J. *Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers of the American 1920s*. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2000.

Latham discussed everything that was connected to flappers. She discussed the clothing they wore, specific women that were regarded as flappers, the women who designed the signature look of flappers, the process of women gaining more independence, and many more aspects of flappers. She also discussed several laws that were voted into law, or at least debated, regarding women's clothing.

Posing a Threat was found to be useful when discussing the women of the 1920's, and even more useful when examining the criticism flappers faced.

Lantzer, Jason S. *"Prohibition Is Here to Stay": The Reverend Edward S. Shumaker and the Dry Crusade in America*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009.

Lantzer discusses lots of different aspects of the Prohibition movement, but primarily focuses on politician and Anti-Saloon League member named Edward S. Shumaker. Shumaker was a politician in Indiana, rendering much of this book useless for an Independent Study about speakeasies, but there are some useful points that were used in my Independent Study. This is especially true in regards to the chapter focused on dry movement and the process of getting the Eighteenth Amendment passed.

Leonard, Neil. *Jazz and the White Americans; The Acceptance of a New Art Form*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Leonard's book takes a look at the rise of jazz with an emphasis of how it was perceived in the general public. He focuses primarily between the years of 1900 to about the mid 1930's. In comparison to every other book regarding the rise of jazz Leonard puts more emphasis on the importance of white jazz musicians, more specifically the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. Leonard did discuss the importance of African Americans in jazz, but seemed biased towards white musicians in comparison to many other authors. Some information was found useful, but was not generally used much.

Lerner, Michael A. *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007.

The primary focus of Lerner's *Dry Manhattan's* was how Prohibition affected New York City and its enormous population. Lerner argued, with substantial evidence, New York was just as wet, if not more, during Prohibition as it was prior to the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. Lerner discussed numerous aspects of the affects of Prohibition, especially when discussing the many social changes. The social changes in regards to women in New York was found especially useful for this Independent Study. As a whole Lerner's book became one of the most important sources of this Independent Study.

Lewis, David L. *When Harlem was in Vogue*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

The Harlem Renaissance was the basis of this writing, with an emphasis of the white populations' response to it. Much of the response towards the Renaissance was to visit Harlem, drink, and enjoy the area, but also to always leave and go home. Many middle class whites would do this on a regular basis, it became known as 'slumming.' Several people wrote about the Harlem Renaissance, even

some whites. Lewis discussed one these books extensively, Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*. The book became a driving force behind an explosion of middle class white New Yorkers 'slumming' in Harlem, but the African American reaction towards Vechten's book was much different. In addition, Lewis also discussed in immense detail the Great Migration and several other aspects of the Harlem Renaissance. As a whole Lewis' book was broadly used in this Independent Study.

Mason, Phillip P. *Rum running and the Roaring Twenties: Prohibition on the Michigan-Ontario Waterway*. *Great Lakes books*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995.

Bootlegging, and more specifically bootlegging across the Detroit River from Canada and into Detroit was the focus of this book. Mason provides interesting information in these regards, but much of it was useless for this Independent Study. A small use was found though, discussing Prohibition laws.

McLaren, Angus. *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

Sexuality is the focus of this book, with a larger focus on the sexuality in the West. By the West the author means much of Western Europe and North American. McLaren looks at the advancements in tolerance of sex, criticism of sexuality, homosexuality, and many other factors that have made up sexuality in the twentieth century. This book was only used once in this Independent Study., to discuss a large increase in women having premarital sex in the 1920's.

Meade, Marion. *Bobbed hair and Bathtub Gin*. Bloomington, Indiana: Pathway Press, 1997.

Meade's *Bobbed hair and Bathtub Gin* focused on the lives of a few specific women that would have been considered flappers during the 1920's. Meade also made it a point to include very personal aspects of the women she wrote about. One of the women she focused on was Zelda Fitzgerald, wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald. In the chapter discussing women during Prohibition, in this Independent Study, a few women during Prohibition who were famous for being flappers were discussed in detail, and Zelda Fitzgerald was one of them. This made this book quite useful for that section.

Molloy, Maureen. *On Creating a Usable Culture: Margaret Mead and the Emergence of American Cosmopolitanism*. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2008.

This book largely discusses the studies and beliefs of Margaret Mead. Mead travelled to many several parts of the world performing anthropological work, researching people largely un-contacted by civilization. Making much of this

book, although interesting, useless for a thesis about speakeasy culture, but Molloy did discuss some of Meads beliefs about Flappers.

Okrent, Daniel. *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*. 1st Scribner hardcover ed. New York, NY: Scribner, 2010.

Okrent discusses almost every possible topic of Prohibition. He discusses the beginning of the Prohibition movement, with the birth of the Women's Christian Temperance Union to the repeal of Prohibition. This made *Last Call* useful in every possible section of this Independent Study. Okrent wrote more about Prohibition as a whole than most of the authors on this bibliography. Okrent did not go into as much detail in any specific topic of Prohibition but provided a high quality outline of everything that occurred during Prohibition and the years that led up to it.

Pegram, Thomas R. *Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800-1933*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998.

This book focuses on a wide time span of Prohibition, from the beginnings of the dry movement to the repeal of Prohibition. Much of the author's focus is on the early years of the dry-movement and factors that helped push Prohibition into law, like anti-German sentiment and The U.S. joining World War I. There is also a limited amount of information about the culture that was created because of prohibition. *Battling Demon Rum* helped explain the early years of the Prohibition movement and the repeal.

Schneider, Stephen. *Iced: The Story of Organized Crime in Canada*. Mississauga, Ontario: Wiley, 2009.

Schneider's book looks at the long history of organized crime in Canada. Canada had a large spike in organized crime during American Prohibition, much the way the United States did. *Iced*, provided ample information regarding the way Canadian gangsters, and the Canadian government took advantage of American Prohibition and made enormous amounts of money. This was found useful when describing the alcohol that was consumed in speakeasies during Prohibition.

Shipton, Alyn. *Fats Waller: The Cheerful Little Earful*. New York: Continuum, 2002.

Shipton discusses the entire life of Fats Waller, from his birth to his unexpected early death. By discussing every aspect of his life, which included a vast amount of information pertaining to the rise of jazz in the 1920's provided ample information to discuss the rise of jazz. Waller was well known for playing piano at rent parties, which was widely discussed in this Independent Study. Shipton also included some of the more depressing information regarding Waller's life, like his alcoholism, many ex wives and children which he did not pay child

support, and several other aspects. Nonetheless, Shipton's book was widely used in this Independent Study.

Sismondo, Christine. *America Walks into a Bar: A Spirited History of Taverns and Saloons, Speakeasies and Grog Shops*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

The history of the drinking establishment in America is the basic outline of this book. Sismondo began her book by discussing the importance of saloons and taverns as early as the days of Puritans in the seventeenth century and finished the book by discussing drinking establishments in America during the 1980's. The section discussing America's speakeasies during Prohibition was the most useful, but Sismondo's discussion of the importance of the tavern during the days of the Puritans and during the Revolutionary war provided tremendous information for a background story for speakeasies. Her discussion of Prohibition was also extensive and quite useful throughout the entire process of writing this Independent Study.

Stegh, Leslie J. *Wet and Dry Battles in the Cradle State of Prohibition: Robert J. Bulkley and the Repeal of Prohibition in Ohio*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Xerox University Microfilms, 1975.

This book is primarily about the political battles that were wrapped around Prohibition, with an emphasis on the politics of Ohio during Prohibition. Stegh Starts with the fight for Prohibition, and then the fight for the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. Stegh's book does a great job of detailing the political battles of Prohibition, but there is little that was used for this Independent Study.

Steed, Janna T. *Duke Ellington: A Spiritual Biography*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999.

Steed's primary objective was to outline the life of one of the greatest and most well known jazz musicians, Duke Ellington. Steed discussed Ellington's early life all the way to his death, with an emphasis on the rise of jazz and the rise Ellington's popularity. Both of these, in large part, coincided with each other. The rise of jazz was a major focus of this Independent Study, making this book valuable, especially when Ellington's career in the 1920's was discussed in detail.

Stenn, David. *Clara Bow: Runnin' Wild*. New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000.

Clara Bow focuses on the life of one of the most famous actresses of the 1920's, Clara Bow. Stenn describes many different aspects of her life, including her movie career, love life, her flapper lifestyle, and her enormous popularity. When discussing the women of the 1920's for this Independent Study a few women were discussed in detail, Clara Bow was one of them. Stenn's book provided ample information to discuss Clara Bow's life in the 1920's.

Wintz, Cary D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1988.

Every aspect of the Harlem Renaissance and black culture from the 1910's to the 1930's was discussed by Wintz. Rent parties, the Cotton Club, and other cabarets were extensively discussed, which proved to be quite valuable to this Independent Study. Wintz also described the Great Migration in great detail, discussing several reasons why it occurred along with detailed statistics of how many African Americans left the South, and which cities had the most African Americans move there. Overall, Wintz's book became one of the centerpieces of the chapter discussing the Harlem Renaissance and rise of jazz.

Zeit, Joshua. *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2006.

Zeit discusses every possible aspect of the flappers in the 1920's. This book also became the backbone of a chapter that discusses flappers and the women of the 1920's. Like the title says, sex, style, and celebrity were all examined in detail in *Flapper*, all of which were researched and discussed extensively in this Independent Study.

Cohen, Harvey G. "The Marketing of Duke Ellington: Setting the Strategy for an African American Maestro." *The Journal of African American History*. 89. no. 4 (2004): 291-315.

Cohen provides an interesting look at how Ellington gained so much commercial success in a time when racism was still a major issue. Cohen discusses the importance of radio, the Cotton Club, television, and many other issues. Cohen's article provided a different look at the jazz age in comparison to many of the books read.

Helbling, Mark. "Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance." *Negro American Literature*. 10. no. 2 (1976): 39-47.

Helbling's focus was on Vechten's book *Nigger Heaven*. Helbling discussed reasons why Vechten wrote the book, the response of the book in both the white and black communities, and also discussed several other writings by Vechten. Helbling also discussed other issues related to the Harlem Renaissance. Vechten's book was discussed in this Independent Study, making this article useful for that section, but was used minimally throughout the rest of this Independent Study.

Lewis, Michael. "Access to Saloons, Wet Voter Turnout, and Statewide Prohibition Referenda, 1907-1919." *Social Science History* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 373-404.

Lewis's article focuses on the wide popularity and desire much of the country had for Prohibition prior to the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. Lewis pointed out that saloons were the largest target of the dry-movement. He explains many of the problems most of the Prohibition supporters saw with saloons. This source provided a small amount of information for this Independent Study, but will supply a large amount of information pertaining to the era right before the passage of Prohibition.

Webb, Holland. "Temperance Movements and Prohibition." *International Social Science Review* 74, no. 1/2 (January 1999): 61.

Webb places much of her focus on the beginnings of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League. She also has a small amount of information on the brewers' response towards growing support for Prohibition. The author also discussed some of the results of Prohibition, like organized crime. The article is vague at times, but does present some quality information that was used in this Independent Study.

The White Oaks Restaurant , "Whit Oaks Restaurant History ." Accessed February 12, 2012. <http://www.white-oaks.com/history.htm>.

This webpage provided ample information to a former speakeasy, and still operating restaurant, in Cleveland Ohio.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Walker, Stanley. *The Night Club Era*. The John Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Walker's book was recently republished in 1998, but was originally published in 1933. Walker presented a firsthand account of the speakeasy scene in New York City during Prohibition. He described some of the worst quality of speakeasies and the many dangers that accompanied them, including several killings. Walker also described the high class speakeasies, like '21' and several situated in the Greenwich Village. Several of the secondary sources in this bibliography used Walker's *Night Club Era*, showing its relevance. Walker's book was the most important and used primary source in this Independent Study.

Bliven, Bruce. "Flapper Jane." In *Essays of 1925*, ed. Odell Shepherd, 242-249. Hartford, Connecticut: E.V. Mitchell, 1925.

"Flapper Jane" showed the large amount of criticism the lifestyle of flappers drew from the public. Bliven's goal of writing this essay was to scare young women into not living like Jane, the quintessential flapper. This primary source accurately describes many stereotypes of the flapper, but in a negative fashion. Every secondary source used in this Independent Study that discussed flappers used "Flapper Jane." This primary source was, and still is, so popular for many reasons, the most important being it accurately described the flapper and showed the fear many adults had the younger generation, specifically women, were changing for the worse.

Henderson, H.D. "Causes of the Recent Negro Migration." *The Journal of Negro History*. 6. no. 4 (1921): 410-420.

Henderson's article about the Great Migration is interesting since it was written in the middle of the historical event. The timing of this article makes it quite interesting. The article was not used widely, but did provide a different look to compare with secondary sources that discussed the Great Migration.

Association Against the Prohibition Amendment, *Canada Liquor Crossing the Border*.

Washington, D.C.: Association Against the Prohibition Amendment, 1929. The College of Wooster Special Collections. Wooster, Ohio.

This document describes the way in which Canadian bootleggers smuggled liquor into the United States, and it explains the large amount of money Canadian bootleggers and the Canadian government made off of American Prohibition. This document was helpful when discussing the types of alcohol that was consumed in Speakeasies during Prohibition.

Hotz, Sheila, part owner of Hotz Cafe. Interview by author, 7 January 2012, Cleveland.

Hotz Cafe, Cleveland.

Sheila Hotz is the wife, and part owner, of Hotz Café, a former speakeasy and still current bar. This interview provided information of a former speakeasy, while also allowing the author to take pictures and physically walk around in a former speakeasy.

Ryan, Terry, Great Lakes Brewing Company Field Representative. Interview by author, 7 January 2012, Cleveland. Great Lakes Brew-Pub, Cleveland.

Terry Ryan provided a tour of the Great Lakes Brew-Pub, the brewery, and several other components that make up the Great Lakes Brewing Company. The building that holds the Great Lakes Brew-Pub dates back before the start of Prohibition, but Ryan was positive it was not a speakeasy during anytime of Prohibition. Although, the company does act as if the pub was, or at least could have been a speakeasy. In fact, there are several holes in the beautifully crafted wood work that makes up the bar. The brewing company claims the holes were put there by Elliot Ness's gun, but Ryan was positive this was not the case. Nonetheless, Ryan provided an enormous amount of information regarding the Great Lakes Brewing Company and several other buildings that surrounded the Great Lakes Brewing Company.

Steele, Dave, part owner of The Flat Iron Cafe. Interview by author, 7 January 2012, Cleveland. Flat Iron Cafe, Cleveland.

Much like Hotz Cafe, the Flat Iron Cafe provided the author to walk around in a former speakeasy and take several photographs. The interview, also like Hotz Cafe, gave an oral history of a former speakeasy