

THE TWENTIES IN POLITICAL CARTOONS

Eight political cartoons examining Prohibition from wet and dry perspectives appear on the following pages. They span the years from 1921, when the nation was one year into the “Noble Experiment,” to early 1930, when its path to repeal was hastened by the Great Depression.

PROHIBITION

To analyze a political cartoon, consider its:

- ❑ **CONTENT.** First, basically describe what is drawn in the cartoon (without referring to the labels). What is depicted? What is happening?
- ❑ **CONTEXT.** Consider the timing. What is happening in national events at the time of the cartoon? Check the date: what occurred in the days and weeks before the cartoon appeared?
- ❑ **LABELS.** Read each label; look for labels that are not apparent at first, and for other written content in the cartoon.
- ❑ **SYMBOLS.** Name the symbols in the cartoons. What do they mean? How do they convey the cartoon’s meaning?
- ❑ **TITLE.** Study the title. Is it a statement, question, exclamation? Does it employ a well-known phrase, e.g., slang, song lyric, movie title, radio show, political or product slogan? How does it encapsulate and enhance the cartoonist’s point?
- ❑ **TONE.** Identify the tone of the cartoon. Is it satirical, comic, tragic, ironic, condemning, quizzical, imploring? What adjective describes the feeling of the cartoon? How do the visual elements in the drawing align with its tone?
- ❑ **POINT.** Put it all together. What is the cartoonist’s point?

QUESTIONS

- ❑ What arguments for and against Prohibition are presented in the cartoons? what benefits, harm, and unforeseen consequences?
- ❑ How is “the public” depicted? Uncle Sam? ardent wets and dries? How do cartoonists employ these generic caricatures?
- ❑ What perspectives are expressed in the cartoons published in Kansas and Nebraska? in Chicago? in New York City? Why?



“Spirit of Prohibition: ‘Get Down and Give the Lady Your Place,’” *Life*, January 29, 1921



“Bullet Proof”
Chicago Daily Tribune, April 29, 1926



“Spirit of Prohibition: ‘Get Down and Give the Lady Your Place’”

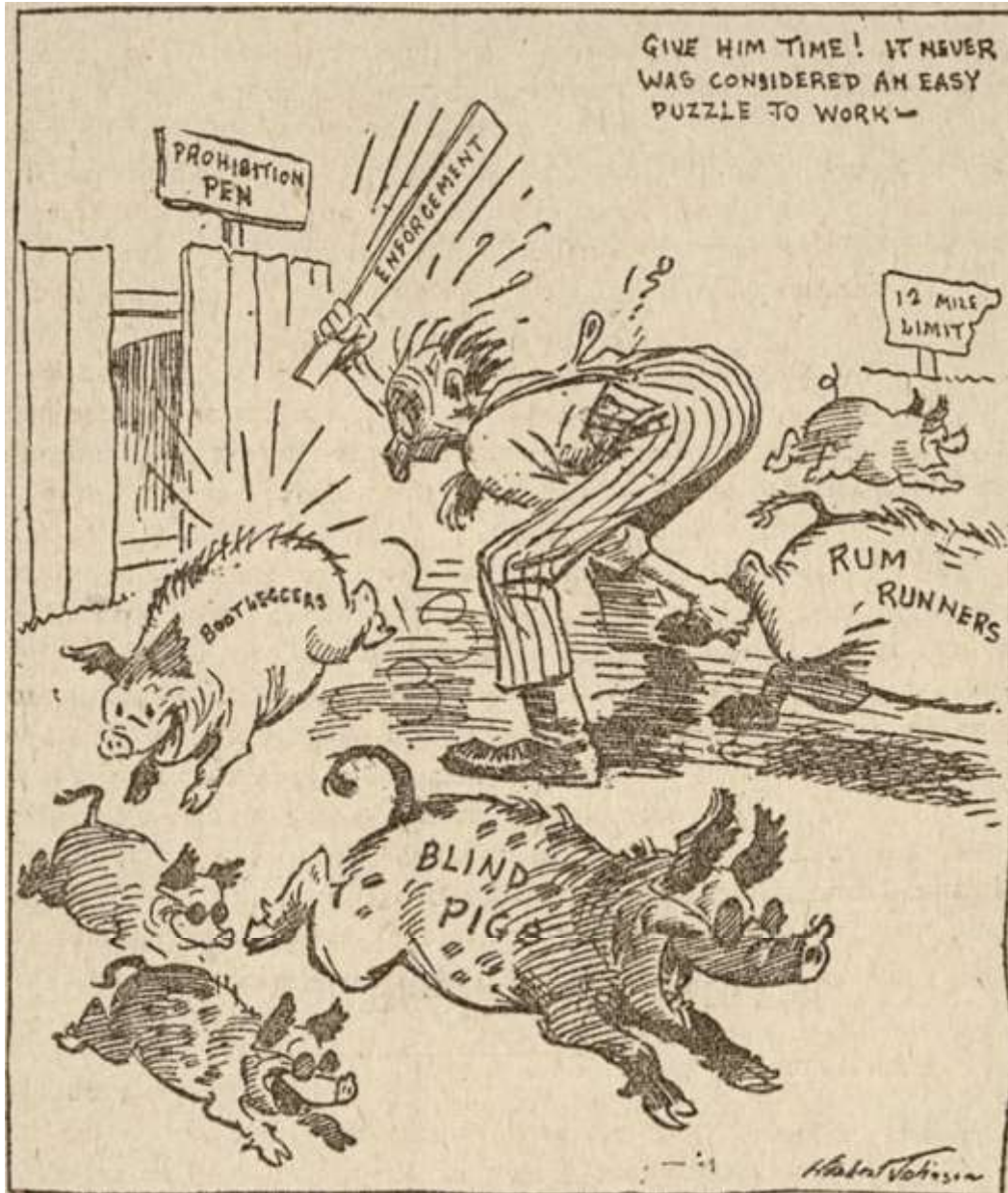
Life, January 29, 1921

Cartoonist: William H. Walker

The “Spirit of Prohibition” is depicted as a preacher-reformer, his “wings” implying a holier-than-thou attitude.

Temperance activist Carrie Nation carries a book of blue laws, laws that restrict commercial activities, especially the sale of alcohol, on Sunday, the Christian Sabbath.

Permission request in process to Digital Holdings, Inc. Digital image from original publication.



"Pigs in Clover"

Kansas City Times, September 10, 1921

Cartoonist: Herbert Johnson

Reproduced by permission of the Indiana Historical Society.

"Pigs in clover": those living in their ideal setting, in luxury.

Pigs in Clover, a popular puzzle toy introduced in 1889, "never was considered an easy puzzle to work."

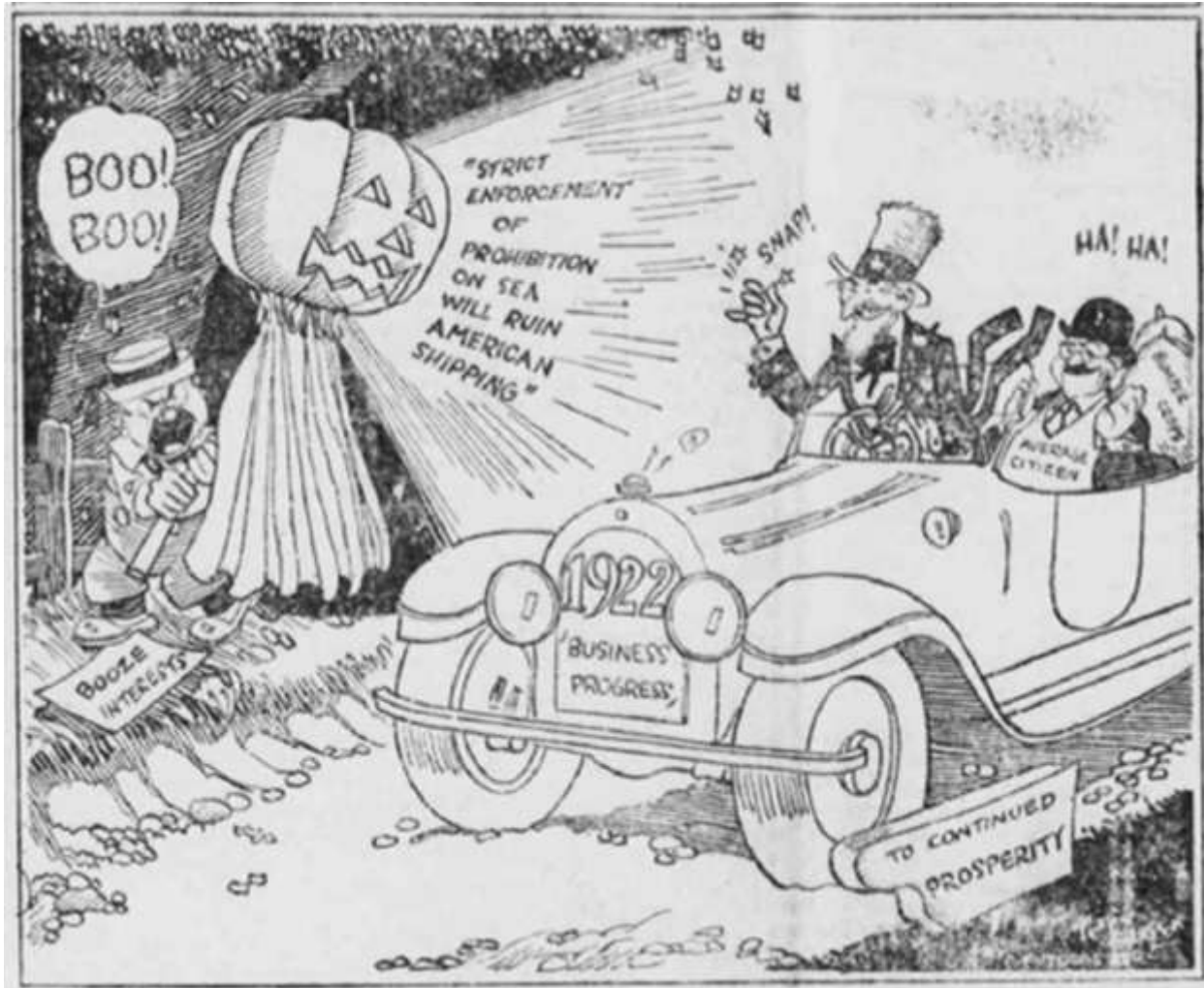
Blind pigs: speakeasies.

12 mile limit: offshore range in which the U.S. enforced Prohibition (later modified).

Farmer: Uncle Sam; U.S. government.



Courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
Jerry Slocum Mechanical Puzzle Collection



“Regular Hallowe’en Scare”

The North Platte Semi-Weekly Tribune
North Platte, Nebraska, October 17, 1922

Booze interests. Uncle Sam. Bumper crops [exceptionally large]. 1922 business progress. To continued prosperity.

In folklore, finger-snapping repels ghosts.

On October 5, 1922, U.S. Attorney General Harry Daugherty announced that it would henceforth be illegal for any ships, American or foreign, to carry or sell liquor within the three-mile limit of U.S. coastal waters. The U.S. Shipping Board opposed the move, arguing that foreign shippers would trade at Canadian instead of American ports. This concern was not shared by many Americans enjoying renewed prosperity and record agricultural yields in 1922.

Courtesy of Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers, Library of Congress. Cartoonist unknown; signature illegible.



“The Unhappy Couple”

Chicago Daily Tribune, September 21, 1925

Cartoonist: Carey Orr

The wife is depicted as a caricature of the female temperance activist of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Reproduced by permission of the Chicago Tribune. Digital image courtesy of ProQuest Historical Newspapers.



“Bullet Proof”

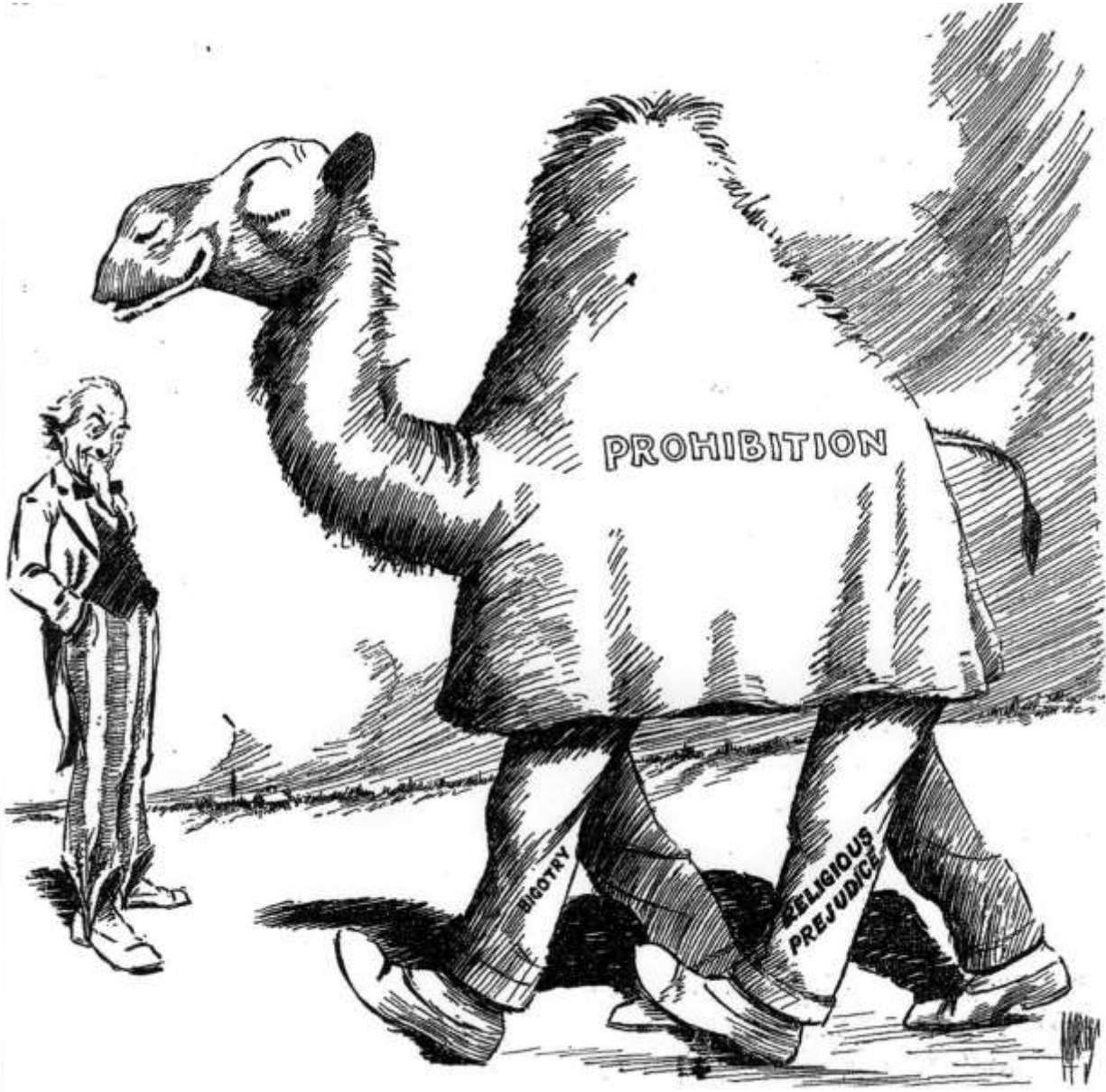
Chicago Daily Tribune, April 29, 1926

Cartoonist: Carey Orr

The law. Justice. Organized crime. Bootleg profits. Gang rule. Pardon. Bond money. Money to bribe politicians.
 Money to bribe jurors. Money to beat the law. Money to hire “best” lawyers.

“Organized crime” is depicted as an armored, hooded executioner with a bloody axe, wearing money bags.

Reproduced by permission of the *Chicago Tribune*. Digital image courtesy of ProQuest Historical Newspapers.



“What a Queer Looking Camel”

The New York Times, July 8, 1928

Cartoonist: Edwin Marcus

Uncle Sam. Prohibition. Bigotry. Religious prejudice.

The camel, which can subsist long periods without water, became a cartoon symbol for the dries (Prohibition supporters).

Prohibition opponents (wets) included many Roman Catholics, most notably the 1928 Democratic presidential candidate Al Smith, whose religion became a central issue in the campaign.

Reproduced by permission of the Marcus family. Digital image courtesy of ProQuest -Historical Newspapers.



“Some People Are Like That”

The Atlanta Constitution, July 4, 1929

Cartoonist: Brown

Public. Drys. Prohibition muddle swamp. Graft. Bribery. Crime. Contempt for law.

Permission request in process to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Digital image courtesy of ProQuest Historical Newspapers.



Untitled

The Washington Evening Star, January 6, 1930

Cartoonist: Clifford Kennedy Berryman

After 1928 the Prohibition debate became centered on the issue of enforcement. "If the law is upheld only by government officials," stated President Hoover in his December 1929 State of the Union address, "then all law is at an end." Responding to a last-ditch campaign by the dries, Congress had passed the Jones "Five and Ten" Act in March 1929, increasing the penalties for violating the Volstead Act (five years in prison and/or a \$10,000 fine), but the national will for aggressive enforcement had waned. After the stock market crash of October 1929, economic necessity brought the long-debated Smoot-Hawley tariff bill to the top of the priority list (it was passed in June 1930). There was no further federal legislation for Prohibition enforcement until its repeal in 1933.

Courtesy of the U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, Center for Legislative Archives.