



**PROHIBITION**  
A FILM BY KEN BURNS & LYNN NOVICK



# Teaching Prohibition

## An Online Professional Development Seminar

**Michael A. Lerner, Ph.D.**

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**AMERICA *in* CLASS<sup>®</sup>**

*from the* National Humanities Center

We will begin promptly on the hour.

The silence you hear is normal.

If you do not hear anything when the images change, e-mail Caryn Koplik [ckoplik@nationalhumanitiescenter.org](mailto:ckoplik@nationalhumanitiescenter.org) for assistance.

## GOALS

- To provide primary resources and discussion strategies that support the use of the Ken Burns-Lynn Novick film *Prohibition* in class

<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/prohibition/watch-video/#id=2082675582>

- Lesson plans:
  - law and individual liberties
  - politics of Prohibition
  - roots of Prohibition
  - immigration and Prohibition

<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/prohibition/educators/lesson-plans/>

- Understanding:

Prohibition was the defining issue of American culture and politics of the 1920s. It brings together most of the key issues of the period and sets the stage for many of the "culture wars" of the 20th (and 21st!) century.

## FROM THE FORUM

### Challenges, Issues, Questions

- Prohibition is hot topic among students.
- What were the roots of Prohibition?
- How did Prohibition affect the social, cultural and political arenas?
- How can we teach Prohibition without glamorizing the world of alcohol?
- How (or do we) alter the way we teach this subject in light of school alcohol awareness programs?
- What is the relationship between Prohibition and World War I?
- In what ways are the issues caught up in Prohibition still with us today?
- What does Prohibition tell us about the relationship between the government and the individual?
- How did Prohibition affect working people, the people who could not afford night clubs and speakeasies?
- How does Prohibition relate to the temperance movement of the 19th century?



## Michael A. Lerner, Ph.D.

Principal  
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Advisor to *Prohibition*

*Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City*  
(2007)

## Introduction

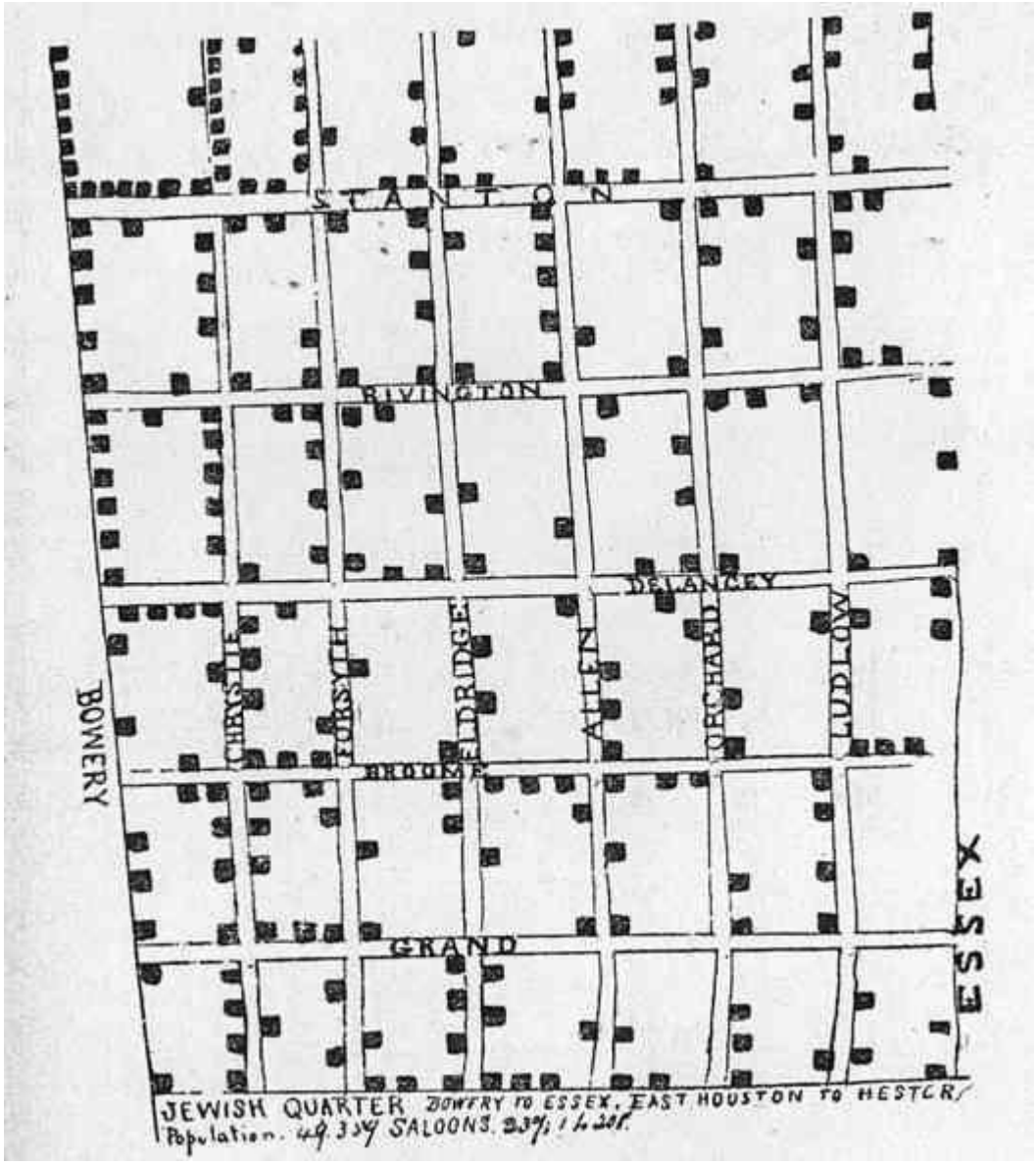
- Prohibition is about much more than alcohol.
- It offers a preview of the "culture wars" of modern America.
- It gives us insight into the ways modern America was changing in the 1920s.
- It highlights the "unintended consequences" of the well-meaning reforms.
- It allows us to consider the limits of reform and our relationship to the law.

They say that the English cannot settle any thing properly, without a dinner. I am sure the Americans can fix nothing, without a drink. If you meet, you drink; if you part, you drink; if you make acquaintance, you drink; if you close a bargain you drink; they quarrel in their drink, and they make it up with a drink. They drink, because it is hot; they drink because it is cold. If successful in elections, they drink and rejoice; if not, they drink and swear; they begin to drink early in the morning, they leave off late at night; they commence it early in life, and they continue it, until they soon drop into the grave. To use their own expression, the way they drink, is “quite a caution.” As for water, what the man said, when asked to belong to the Temperance Society, appears to be the general opinion, “it’s very good for navigation.”

## *How the Other Half Lives*, by Jacob Riis, 1890

All the evil the saloon does in breeding poverty and in corrupting politics; all the suffering it brings into the lives of its thousands of innocent victims, the wives and children of drunkards it sends forth to curse the community; its fostering of crime and its shielding of criminals--it is all as nothing to this, its worst offence. ...For the corruption of the child there is no restitution. None is possible. It saps the very vitals of society; undermines its strongest defences, and delivers them over to the enemy.

# Jewish Quarter Bars





# Make the Map all White



“One-fourth of all the people in the United States who live in saloon territory live in six cities—New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Boston, Cleveland.”

# “Pay Envelope,” advertisement

In WAR or PEACE  
**WHICH NEEDS IT MOST ?**



**SALOON  
KEEPER**

**HOME  
MAKER**

For the Money Represented by  
**Three Ten Cent Drinks  
a Day For a Year**

Even at “War Prices”  
Any Grocer In Your Town Will Give You  
the Following Groceries:

10 Fifty-pound Sacks of Flour	5 Pounds Tea
10 Bushels Potatoes	25 Cans Tomatoes
100 Pounds Granulated Sugar	10 Dozen Oranges
5 Pounds Salt	10 Dozen Bananas
20 Pounds Butter	30 Cans Corn
10 Pounds Rice	10 Pounds Beans
10 Pounds Oat Flakes	100 Cakes Soap
10 Pounds Coffee	1 Pound Pepper
	4 Gallons Molasses
	20 Gallons Oil

**AND THERE WOULD BE ENOUGH MONEY LEFT TO BUY  
A GOOD PRESENT FOR YOUR WIFE AND BABIES**

SERIES GA. NO. 1-15c 100: 40c 500: \$1.15 M; ATTRACTIVE QUANTITY RATES

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN ISSUE PUBLISHING CO., WESTERVILLE, OHIO

AUGUST  
26

IF

If Food will Win the War,— why waste 1,890,000,000 pounds of it yearly in beer?  
*(Computed from Hoover's monthly estimate.)*

If Money,— why let alcohol deprive us of over \$2,500,000,000 yearly?—*(Irving Fisker.)*

If Coal,— why forego the more than 60,000,000 extra tons of coal that coal operators declare we should get by closing the Saloons?

If Transportation,— why allow more than 100,000 cars to be given over to that worse than non-essential-Beer?

## *“A Glimpse behind the Mask of Prohibition,” 1915*

The leaders of the so-called prohibition movement know as well as you and I do that you can no more prevent an individual from taking a drink if he be so inclined than you can prevent him from scratching himself if he itches. They object to the existence of the saloon, not, bear in mind, to that of the badly conducted saloon, but to that of the well-regulated, decent saloon, and wherever they succeed in destroying the latter, their object, which is the manifestation of their political power, is attained. That for every decent, well-ordered saloon they destroy, there springs up a dive, or speak-easy, or blind tiger, or whatever other name it may be known by, and the dispensing of drink continues as merrily as before, doesn't disturb them at all.

# Hops telegram



10 0h mc 106 nl 3 ex 232 a

Sanfran Calif apl 27-17

Hohn E Raker, M of C Washn DC

RECEIVED  
APR 28 1917 - 1 210  
Am. 3/11/17  
RAKER

CALIFORNIA HOP GROWERS EARNESTLY PROTEST AGAINST THREATENED ACTION OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROHIBITING BREWING OF BEER AS NECESSARY WAR MEASURE HOPS ARE PERENIAL LIKE FRUIT ORCHARDS EXPENSIVE TRELLISSES, KILNS, COOLERS AND YEARS SUPPLY MATERIALS CONTRACTED FOR WOULD BE TOTAL LOSS GROWERS ABSOLUTELY RUINED CANT CHANGE TO OTHER CROP THIS YEAR THOUSANDS OLD PEOPLE AND CHILDREN EMPLOYED IN HOP YARDS WOULD SUFFER CANT MARKET CROP ABROAD ENGLAND NOW BREWING TEN MILLION BARRELS BEER PER YEAR FOR PUBLIC AND ELEVEN AND HALF MILLION FOR ARMY AND NAVY



(2ND SHEET

106NL3EX SANFRAN CAL WASHN DC )

1210

THIS STATEMENT ABSOLUTELY AUTHENTIC SITUATION HERE DOES NOT DEMAND RUIN OF HOP GROWERS AND BREWER WITH LOSS OF MILLIONS.

CALIF HOP BREWERS ASSN,

GEO HEWLETT, PRESIDENT.

Hohn E Raker, M of C Washn DC

Received, April 28, 1917

California hop growers earnestly protest against threatened action of federal government prohibiting brewing of beer as necessary war measure. Hops are perenial [sic] like fruit orchards. Expensive trellisses [sic], kilns, coolers and years supply materials contracted for would be total loss. Growers absolutely ruined. Cant [sic] change to other crop this year. Thousdands old people and children employed in hop years would suffer. Cant [sic] market crop abroad. England now brewing ten million barrels beer per year for public and eleven and a half million for army and navy. This statement absolutely authentic. Situation here does not demand ruin of hop growers and brewers with loss of millions.

Calif. Hop Brewers Assn,  
Geo Hewlett, President.

# *What Prohibition Has Done to America,* by Fabian Franklin, 1922

There has never been a time when deliberate disregard of law was habitual among the classes which represent culture, achievement, and wealth-- the classes among whom respect for law is usually regarded as constant and instinctive. ...It is universally admitted. Friends of Prohibition and enemies of Prohibition, at odds on everything else, are in entire agreement upon this.

## XVIII

Passed by Congress December 18, 1917. Ratified January 16, 1919.

After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.

## XXI

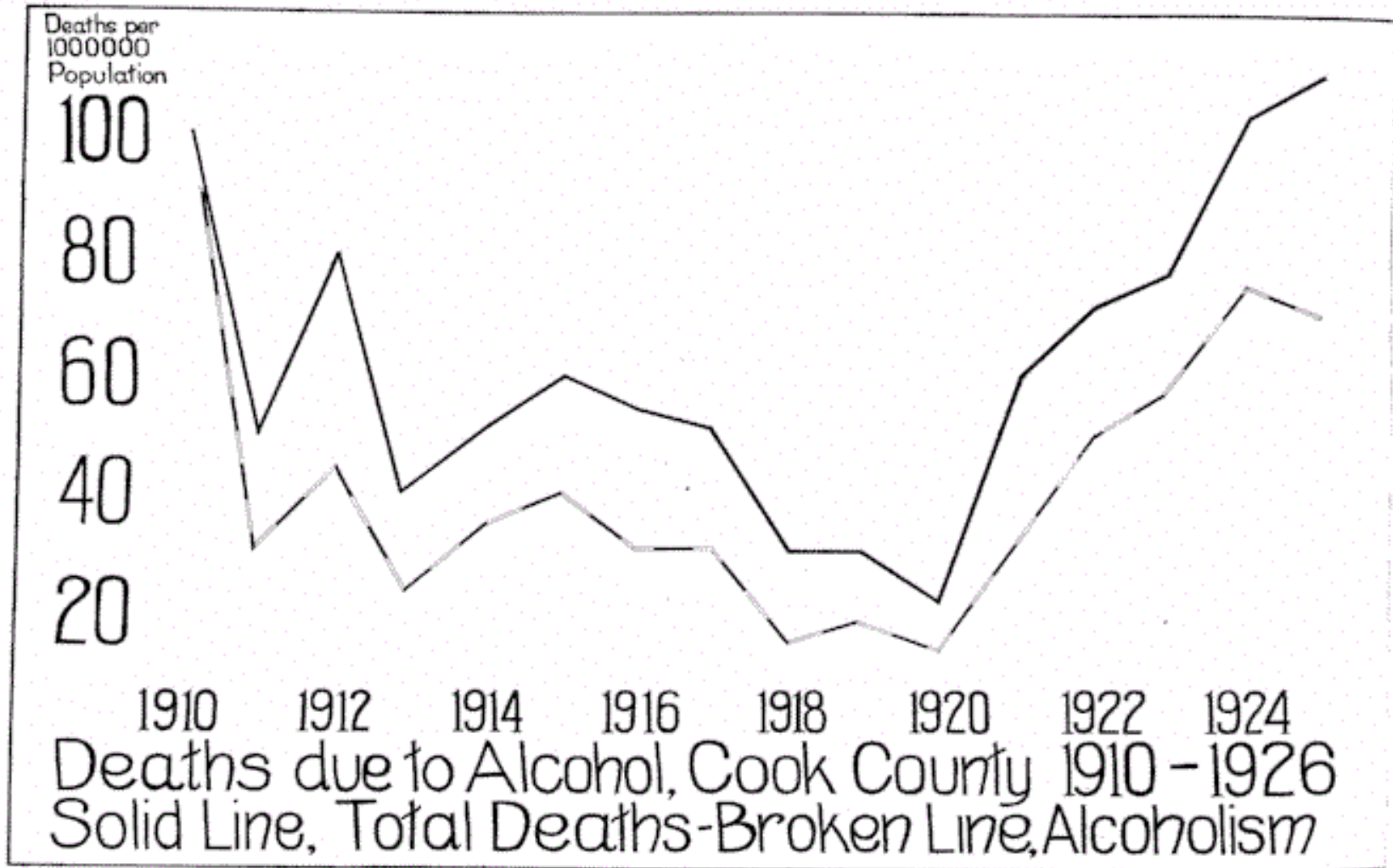
Passed by Congress February 20, 1933. Ratified December 5, 1933

**Section 1.** The eighteenth article of amendment to the Constitution of the United States is hereby repealed.

**Section 2.** The transportation or importation into any State, Territory, or possession of the United States for delivery or use therein of intoxicating liquors, in violation of the laws thereof, is hereby prohibited.

**Section 3.** This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by conventions in the several States, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission hereof to the States by the Congress.

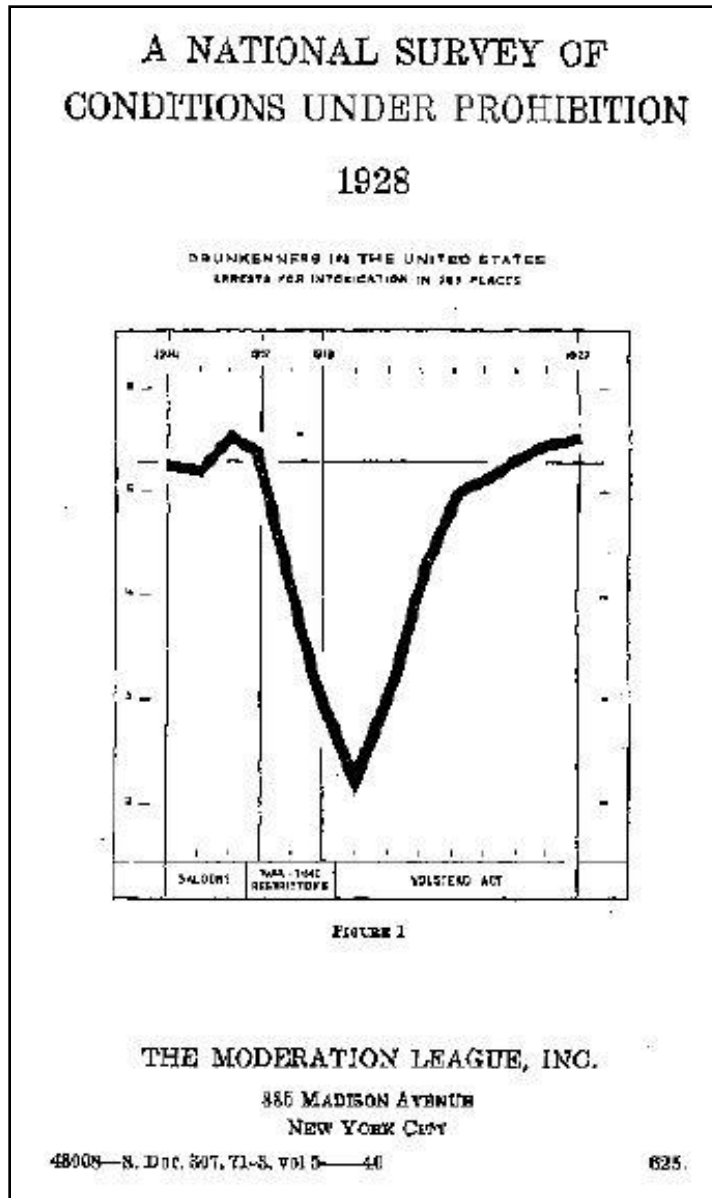
# Deaths due to Alcohol, Cook County, 1910-1926



92101\*-26 (Face p. 655.)



# A National Survey of Conditions Under Prohibition



“By far the most distressing result of the Volstead Act is the increase in drinking among boys and girls and young people generally.”

# Teaching Prohibition



**Prohibition NYC just before wartime, June 1919**



**Speakeasy**

The Prohibition law can be enforced and made substantially as effective as any other law in this city. We have never been able so far in this history of this city to prevent violation... of every law on the statute books, but we have been able to bring most lawbreakers to justice.... No reasonable citizen expects that any particular law can be completely enforced and this, of course, is true in respect to the Federal prohibition law.

Our great difficulty... is the fact that this law does not have the moral support of the general public. ...[I]n the minds of a very considerable number of our citizens, the law is oppressive and an unreasonable interference with what they claim to be their personal liberties.

The man who buys liquor when he is thirsty for it is not a criminal in the sense that a check forger or a thief is a criminal. No; such a man...is dissatisfied with a particular condition imposed upon him by society, and is making his protest against it by taking the matter into his own hands. As long as he is frank about it, and professes his dissatisfaction in words and votes as well as deeds, I have no particular quarrel with him. But he is a hypocrite of the worst sort if he drinks in secret and shouts in public for the virtues of prohibition.

I believe that the percentage of whisky drinkers in the United States now is greater than in any other country of the world. Prohibition is responsible for that.

...

At least \$1,000,000,000 a year is lost to the National Government and the several States and counties in excise taxes. The liquor traffic is going on just the same. This amount goes into the pockets of bootleggers and in the pockets of the public officials in the shape of graft....

I will concede that the saloon was odious but now we have delicatessen stores, pool rooms, drug stores, millinery shops, private parlors, and 57 other varieties of speak-easies selling liquor and flourishing.

I have heard of \$2,000 a year prohibition agents who run their own cars with liveried chauffeurs.

Testimony before the Committee on the Judiciary of the United States Senate (1926).

... in dealing with gigantic social evils like disease or crime, individual liberty must be controlled in the interest of the public welfare.

...

Limitation upon individual freedom in matters affecting society is the price that any people must pay for the progress of its civilization. Personal liberty can not rightly be claimed for practices which militate against the welfare of others or the interests of the community as a whole.

# “When is a Law Right?”

*Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 1929, page 1

A bill has been introduced into Congress proposing the payment of \$30,000 to the wife and children of Henry Virkula who was killed by a customs patrolman on the highway near his home in Minnesota. ...

While riding with his wife and children this man was fired upon and killed by the patrolman who mistakenly thought he was transporting liquor. As to whether or not the officer was justified in shooting is for the courts and not the newspapers to decide. But leaving that matter out of consideration the pitiful fact remains that an innocent man on the public highway was killed, a wife was made a widow and two children orphans. ...

In all the generations of our Christian civilization transporting liquor has never been looked upon as an atrocious crime even by sober-minded thinking people who did not use it themselves. But now, without realizing its consequences, we have permitted our lawmakers to make a felony of that which, in its nature, is not a heinous crime.

The tragedy under consideration is not the first one resulting from this mistake. Neither is it liable to be the last one. ... The root of the whole trouble is in the law itself - law at which a respectable portion of the people rebel.

# “Women Anti-Drys Launch New Drive”

*New York Times*, November 3, 1927

“They urge us to respect the Constitution, but which are we to respect—the old Constitution or the prohibition amendment? We cannot respect and obey both as they flatly contradict each other.”





I trust in the good sense of the American people that they will not bring upon themselves the curse of excessive use of intoxicating liquors, to the detriment of health, morals, and social integrity.

The objective we seek through a national policy is the education of every citizen towards a greater temperance throughout the Nation.

**Final Slide.**

**Thank you**