

*Routledge Advances in American History*

# **POLITICS, POLICE AND CRIME IN NEW YORK DURING PROHIBITION**

**GOTHAM AND THE AGE OF RECKLESSNESS, 1920–1933**

Francesco Landolfi



# Politics, Police and Crime in New York During Prohibition

This book aims to highlight the causes why the Prohibition Era led to an evolution of the New York mob from a rural, ethnic and small-scale to an urban, American and wide-scale crime.

The temperance project, advocated by the WASP elite since the early nineteenth century, turned into prohibition only after the end of WWI with the enactment of the Eighteenth Amendment. By considering the success that war prohibition made to the soldiers' psychophysical condition, Congress aimed to shift this political move even to civil society. So it was that the Italian, Irish and Jewish mobs took the chance to spread their bribe system to local politics due to the lucrative alcohol bootlegging. New York became the core of the national anti-prohibition, where the smuggling from Canada and Europe merged into the legendary Manhattan nightclubs and speakeasies. With the coming of the Great Depression, the Republican Party was aware about the failure of this political measure, leading to the making of a new corporate underworld.

The book is addressed to historians of New York, historians of crime and historians of modern America as well as to an audience of readers interested in the history of the Prohibition Era.

**Francesco Landolfi** holds a PhD in Historical Studies from the University of Florence, Italy. His research concerns the history of crime during the twentieth century, the rise of far-left/right terrorisms in Rome in the 1970s and the making of the Irish mob in Boston between the 1960s and 1990s.

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# Politics, Police and Crime in New York During Prohibition

Gotham and the Age of  
Recklessness, 1920–1933

Francesco Landolfi

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*To the memory of my grandmother Giuseppa “Emilia”  
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# Abbreviations

AAPA	Association Against the Prohibition Amendment
ACS	Archivio Centrale dello Stato
ASL	Anti-Saloon League
BDE	Brooklyn Daily Eagle
CC	County Court
CPCSM	Confino di polizia e confino speciali per i mafiosi
CTT	Criminal Trial Transcripts
DGAPGC	Direzione Generale Affari Penali Grazie e Casellario
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDR	Franklin D. Roosevelt
FDRPL	Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library
JHA	John F. Hylan Administration
JJC	John Jay College
JWA	James J. Walker Administration
LSL	Lloyd Sealy Library
MDAP	Manhattan DA's Papers
MGG	Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia
MI	Ministero dell'Interno
NANY	National Archives at New York City
NAR	North American Review
NCLOE	National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement
NYCDAS	New York County District Attorney Scrapbooks
NYHS	New-York Historical Society
NYMA	New York Municipal Archives
NYPD	New York Police Department
NYPL	New York Public Library
NYT	New York Times
OF	Official File
OM	Office of the Mayor
PG	Papers as Governor
PIA	Progresso Italo-Americano
PP	Paper as President
PPF	President's Personal File

xxii *Abbreviations*

SCRC	Special Collections Research Center
SSRCC	Social Science Research Council Committee
UCL	University of Chicago Library
USBA	United States Brewers' Association
WASP	White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant
WC	Westchester County
WCREA	Women's Committee for Repeal of the 18th Amendment
WCTU	Woman's Christian Temperance Union

# Introduction

In the Cambridge Dictionary, prohibition is defined as “a law or rule that officially stops something from being done.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is a global concept strictly connected to the law, or rather to the several typologies of civil and criminal laws that have followed throughout history. Moreover, it is important to add that, in many cases, prohibition laws relate to a ban concerning a specific individual freedom, by affecting (more or less strongly) the ethics of people in its traditions linked to the morality standards especially. There could be a prohibition connected to prostitution, a prohibition connected to gambling or a prohibition connected to drug use.

As far as the evolution of law enforcement and organized crime in New York City during Prohibition Era is concerned, it happened that between 1920 and 1933, the United States forbade the trade, sale, transportation and manufacture (but not the consumption) of any beverage having more than 0.5 percent of alcohol content through the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919. The reasons for that drastic and apparently unclear decision sank their roots in the early decades of nineteenth century, according to the positivist idea that the human being (especially the US citizen) could aspire to physical and mental perfection thanks to the systematic elimination of the so-called social evils, including drunkenness.<sup>2</sup> The first to talk about this were physicians, worried for the physical and psychological damage that alcohol abuse caused among the lower classes of seamen and soldiers. Then, the discussion expanded to protestant religion aimed at continuous human improvement, while in the late nineteenth century, the moral issue also extended to the questions about women’s suffrage and abolition of saloons as dens of iniquity for the working class.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the old small-town temperance movements and societies vanished in favor of the Prohibition Party (1869), which made the “dry” matter a new topic of political debate, no longer just moral. A few years later, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874 and the Anti-Saloon League (ASL) in 1893 denounced men’s violence against their wives or children and the average workman’s low productivity respectively because of the widespread abuse of alcohol, particularly now that in the US ports a huge amount

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of unskilled labor coming from Eastern and Southern Europe began to arrive.<sup>4</sup>

To the Washington federal authorities, the entry of the United States into WWI was an opportunity for testing temperance in politics through the wartime prohibition. Based on the outstanding results of prohibition on the American Expeditionary Force, the bulk of the Republican Party thought that the same result could have applied even to civil society. Following the enactment of the Volstead Act in October 1919, the ethical issue of temperance mixed strongly with politics by involving at the same time the multifaceted US society made of countryside and little towns, but also the modern and cosmopolitan metropolis. As far as New York City was concerned, the prohibition was never appreciated or even enforced because of the wide tolerance of local enforcement toward a citizenship oriented to the dialogue, coexistence, respect for others, freedom of thought and promotion of artistic fantasy through painting, architecture, technology, music, theater and cinema. No doubt, in a town usually led by the Democratic Party and its political machine (Tammany Hall), the political interference of Republicans from Washington and Albany in its citizens' daily routine was not very welcome. Furthermore, the social role of alcohol and the saloons were crucial for maintaining Tammany Hall patronage which, besides the Irish immigrants, was needed to move the crowded Jewish and Italian ethnic communities toward favoring the Democratic Party.

On the one hand, the saloon was banned by law, but, on the other hand, New Yorkers' demand for alcoholic drinks never stopped, and according to the laws of the market, it had to be unlawfully met by the local and interstate bootlegging. The old phenomenon of the neighborhood gangs in a town with 1,000 faces such as New York kept occurring periodically at least since the middle of the nineteenth century. However, during the Prohibition Era, urban crime became for the first time organized in a corporate way and so more dangerous for the local authorities' health, since the devious bribes of the "illegal enterprises"<sup>5</sup> replaced the fear and the outcry of death threats. The best example of that criminal escalation involved the Mafia and the Camorra. During the so-called "Roaring Twenties," these two mysterious conspiracies from the New York Little Italies turned into a new organized crime, by running disorderly and gambling houses, drug trafficking and alcohol bootlegging through the ownership of a new sort of saloon placed in any corner of the city: the speakeasies. According to the US criminologist Jay S. Albanese, lucrative racket gave the New York gangs the chance to "become more organized and competitive,"<sup>6</sup> as well as enhance themselves both in their number of affiliates and corruptive power to the local authorities.

In those years, the organized crime came close to the worlds of business in getting municipal contracts, justice or law enforcement through an "hidden alliance of rich and respectable businessmen, politicians, and

criminals,”<sup>7</sup> so starting a “symbiotic relationship binding upperworld and underworld figures.”<sup>8</sup> By quoting the sociologist from the Chicago School Charles Tilly, in history any state body changes according to the conflicts carried out against other state bodies. So even organized crimes follow the same way: “The trimmed-down argument stresses the interdependence of war making and state making and the analogy between both of those processes and what, when less successful and smaller in scale, we call organised crime.”<sup>9</sup> In this case, the Castellammarese War (1930–1931) was the turning point for the making of the Italian-American Mafia, founded on the involvement of the Democratic politics by Tammany Hall through the support of political candidates, including, for instance, the district leader Albert J. Marinelli. While the Great Depression raged, *La Cosa Nostra* became a real “businessmen’s association”<sup>10</sup> made of 24 crime families in all the United States with its affiliates looking more like brokers from Wall Street or actors from Broadway rather than gangsters. Hence the need for mobsters to get in the world of power more easily through the right belief that “clothes send important message.”<sup>11</sup> This change of look is clearly visible in the style difference between the 1900s and 1910s and the 1920s gangsters’ mugshots, where the unmistakable marks of the fedora, tie and elegant coats were essential. The discrete metamorphosis of organized crime into the civil society revealed itself to the public opinion when, in the late 1920s, the Hollywood filmmaking started to portray crime through the new typology of the gangster movies, along with their message about a charming “mythology of crime.”<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the evolution of organized crime, another topic concerned the structural development of both local and federal enforcement. Between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, indeed, the New York and US police institutions faced a deep change. On the one hand, the New York Police Department (NYPD) tried to improve its efficiency through the division of its uniformed force into skilled squads for the prosecution of specific crimes. Detective Lieutenant Joseph “Joe” Petrosino was the first to guess the importance of special forces in NYPD with the establishment of the Italian Squad in 1904, and it was then followed by many others: from the terrorist attacks (Bomb Squad) to conspiracies (Gangster Squad); from compulsory prostitution (Vice Squad) to drug trafficking (Narcotic Squad); and from gambling (Gambling Squad) to the phenomenon of gangsterism in nightclubs or speakeasies (Warrant Squad and Gunmen Squad).<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the making of the first unit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) led to the growth of a series of other units divided according to the crime to be prosecuted such as, the Prohibition Unit (1920–1926) and the Bureau of Prohibition (1927–1933) for alcohol bootlegging.<sup>14</sup> As the US historian Lisa McGirr emphasized, the uncontrolled spread of lawlessness and bribery during the prohibition years was responsible for a

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side “birth of a qualitatively new and enduring role of the federal state in crime control.”<sup>15</sup>

According to the US economist Irving Fisher, prohibition was nothing more than a *Noble Experiment* and remarkable in theory, for it was founded on an ethical and positive project aimed at the steady improvement of the individual through the eradication of a social evil such as alcoholism.<sup>16</sup> However, Fisher was also aware that prohibition could have never been enforced in politics with the Eighteenth Amendment’s top-down strategy. Instead, it should have continued to be enforced by the old local option laws, according to the specific and more or less serious issues in each States, counties or towns.<sup>17</sup> The next year, the *New York Times* journalist Charles Merz considered the 1920s as *The Dry Decade* and the triumph of prohibition in politics, although he could not refrain from mentioning that, for instance, between 1920 and 1929 the federal statistics reported a significant increase of seizures of illicit denaturing plants, stills and fermenters from 32,862 to 247,242 (+752.4 percent).<sup>18</sup> In 1932, another newspaperman, the editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, Stanley Walker, defined the Prohibition Era as the *Night Club Era* lived by a “metropolitan anthropology” with angels and devils and revealed in the conflicting “felonious and gay life”<sup>19</sup> at the time. Later, in 1950 another US journalist Herbert Asbury said that prohibition was the *Great Illusion* about a social change founded on the best ethical principles but shown, over the years, as just a failure because of its unenforceability.<sup>20</sup> Finally, in 1962 the British historian Andrew A. Sinclair saw prohibition as the *Era of Excess* in which, on both “dry” and “wet” sides, the political struggle led to both the aggravation of the temperance belief through the fury in enforcing the “dry” laws and, at the same time, the escalation of criminal power thanks to the growth of the bootlegging racket. Therefore, “drys” and “wets” equally showed an “arrogant righteousness in victory,” not to mention that the Eighteenth Amendment could have flourished only “in those areas where there [we]re a strong religious and traditional sanctions against the use of liquor.”<sup>21</sup>

By describing the main subjects faced, I noticed that New York City (unlike other cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, Miami, Detroit, Los Angeles and most of all Chicago) has in those years a long series of singularities with reference to the topics discussed. The first of these peculiarities dealt with demography, for its five boroughs (the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island) configured as the first residence for millions of Irish, German, Chinese, Italian and Jewish immigrants since the mid-nineteenth century. Most of them decided to live in New York, populating a city that in 1930 reached almost seven million inhabitants, while Chicago got around half.<sup>22</sup> Second, to the prohibition advocates, New York was the nemesis of their anti-alcohol ideal, and for this reason, a “dry” change would have been seen as the highest ethical and political triumph against the New York Democratic Party, Tammany

Hall and its saloons. In the end, the spirit of rebellion by New Yorkers against the political coercions from Washington and Albany overcame the “dry” movement’s agenda, especially when the Superintendent of Anti-Saloon League William H. Anderson moved to New York in the late 1913 with the firm intention to get rid of drunkenness and ten years later was imprisoned at Sing Sing for forgery. At the same time, between the 1910s and 1920s, the number of nightclubs and speakeasies doubled from 16,000 to 32,000, namely about 15 percent of all the bars, saloons, nightclubs and speakeasies in the United States (219,000).<sup>23</sup>

New York was peculiar even for the history of US law enforcement, since its Police Department was one of the earliest to be set up (second only to the Boston Police Department), being founded already in 1845 in the likeness of the London Metropolitan Police in 1829.<sup>24</sup> Its evolution for quality and quantity enabled pioneering investigation methods such as the use of plain clothes officers during the undercover operations among the neighborhood ethnic gangs or the use of a criminal identification system through the fingerprinting process already in the early 1900s.<sup>25</sup> The quick improvement of police in upgrading transportations, through the establishment of motorized units such as the Traffic Division and the Motorcycle Squad, could be especially seen when crime got out of the ethnic slums of East Harlem, Lower East Side and Hell’s Kitchen to settle into the exclusive areas of Broadway, thanks to the alcohol bootlegging and the following working connection of three ethnic underworlds (Italian, Irish and Jewish) in just one Italian-American Mafia.<sup>26</sup>

During the decade that blessed modern gangsterism as a new way to conceive crime (never so linked with the civil society), the US historiography mostly focused on the case of Chicago and the character that best of all embodied the lawless era: Al Capone. New York continued to be in the historiographic background, even though the complexity of the criminal matter which revealed itself in the 1920s with the several gang feuds, the hustle and bustle into the nightclubs to the rhythm of jazz and the strategic place of its port as a key checkpoint for the interstate bootlegging. Therefore, I personally didn’t find historical studies emphasizing both the two topics of prohibition and gangsterism in New York through a relation of cause and effect. Some historians such as Mike Dash or David Critchley, for instance, highlighted the development of the New York Italian-American Mafia without, however, focusing on the meaningful financial role that booze had on the urban bandit’s metamorphosis.<sup>27</sup> In the same way, another historian such as Michael A. Lerner analyzed the prohibition issue concerning the cultural change in the New York citizenry, without dwelling enough on that society’s dark side embodied by the gangster that, for better or worse, to quote Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “geht immer noch um in den Träumen der Welt”<sup>28</sup> (is still living in people’s dreams), thanks to his macabre and legendary appeal.

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### Notes

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# 1 New York between Alcohol and Prohibition (1784–1896)

## The temperance context

It seems written in fate that New York had a close link with alcohol since its inception, when in 1609 the English navigator Henry Hudson, by landing in Manhattan Island, decided to offer intoxicating beverages to the Delaware Native American Tribe as a tribute to their hospitality. However, the latter, after trying the disastrous effects of drunkenness, started to call that area “Manahachta-nienk,” namely the “island where all became intoxicated.”<sup>1</sup> In the growing mercantile economy, trade in liquors kept growing in favor of the tavern keepers in New Amsterdam’s Dutch settlement in Manhattan, which was conquered by England in 1664 and reborn as New York. In this way, the citizenry began to be addicted to this good which, however, was forbidden from 1680 by local legislation to the African and Native American slaves for fear that alcohol could speed up the spread of crimes and riots.<sup>2</sup>

In the following decades until the half of the eighteenth century, rum became the favorite liquor especially for Dutch and English citizens, also because of the price that turned out to be cheap enough (25 cents per gallon) to be consumed at a wedding or funeral.<sup>3</sup> Even to celebrate the impending victory against Great Britain in the American Revolutionary War, at the end of 1783 the Governor of the State of New York, George Clinton, arranged a famous drinking party for his two prestigious guests, the General George Washington and the French ambassador. In fact, to a final check of £156, around half was spent to buy 135 bottles of Madeira, 36 of Port, 60 of English beer and 30 bowls of punch for the 120 people invited.<sup>4</sup> While New York was breaking free from the British occupation and Dr. Benjamin Rush was writing the oldest US book about alcoholic intemperance,<sup>5</sup> in the two-year period 1784–1785 the Commissioner of Excise of New York County, Abraham P. Lott, released 122 licenses for the opening of “Inn or Tavern”<sup>6</sup> for £2–3 within a city which had between 25,000 and 30,000 people. On the one hand, in 1791 the New York College of Physicians warned the Senate in Washington with regard to the imposition of higher customs duties for the spirits’ imports; on the other hand, the city’s upper middle

class was already used to moonshine sangria, honey distillates, peach and pear ciders, beer from pine sap and wine from elderberries, pumpkins, cornstalks, hickory nuts and birch bark.<sup>7</sup>

Although New York wasn't a big metropolis yet, its population of around 100,000 between 1810 and 1820 kept having big trouble with alcoholism, especially involving the Navy and medical elite.<sup>8</sup> In 1819, a testimony of the judge of New York County connected most of the "riots and disturbances"<sup>9</sup> among the sailors to the abuse of alcoholic beverages. In the same way, ten years later, Dr. David Hosack reported that about 40 percent of New York physicians were addicted to alcohol.<sup>10</sup> It was during this period that, in the Northeastern United States, temperance societies started making a case against alcoholism as the primary cause of body and soul's destruction and source of rising crime. A report by the American Temperance Society held that in 1820, out of 1,061 legal cases in the New York Court of Sessions, about 800 were related to alcohol intemperance.<sup>11</sup>

The phenomenon of alcoholism was more perceived in small towns rather than New York, where there was also concern about other social matters such as immigration, political corruption, crime and misery. It is no coincidence that the real first US temperance society was established in Saratoga, NY, already in 1808.<sup>12</sup> For instance, the negative effects of spirits were highlighted more easily in Troy, where a population of 20,000 in 1829 consumed 73,959 gallons of rum, or in Albany, where in the same year a population of 20,000 consumed 200,000 gallons of liquors.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in 1827 one of the first societies to organize was the New York State Temperance Society in Albany.<sup>14</sup> This impressive statistic was also explicable by the fact that a large part of the New York State population (living in New York City especially) refused to drink water for fear of catching cholera, which in the 1820s caused many victims.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, most people preferred to mix water with liquors such as brandy, both to purify it and to support digestion after meals. Clearly, in the long term, this choice would have produced adverse reactions upon the health of a future alcohol generation.<sup>16</sup> In 1827 there were in New York State 78 temperance associations, which became 300 two years later and 727 four years later.<sup>17</sup> An article published by the *North American Review* stated that in 1833 there were in New York State 1,158 temperance societies composed of 161,721 members, about a tenth of the state's total population in the face of 1,202 taverns and 131 distilleries.<sup>18</sup> Even in the same year the Committee of the New York City Temperance Society organized neighborhood watches from 30 to 80 people, seeking to avoid violence arising from excessive alcohol consumption.<sup>19</sup>

Even though, on the one hand, New York City kept seeing alcohol as a valuable good not to be missed (being a crucial trade center for liquor exportation between the Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean), on the

other hand Albany became the religious and political core of the struggle against the spread of alcoholism in the state.<sup>20</sup> In particular, even the spirits' merchants began to consider the "ardent spirits" as "needless" and "hurtful"<sup>21</sup> beverages. In 1835, a New York trader emphasized how the city population was gripped by alcoholism by turning good tradesmen and family men into poor wrecks.<sup>22</sup> In New York, the years between the mid-1840s and the mid-1850s had to be considered as the period where the moral issue of teetotalism (promoted by the first temperance societies) started to turn into a political problem on a state scale. There wasn't by the main temperance leaders, nor by the Whig Party and the future Republican Party, a will to promote a constitutional amendment in favor of alcoholic beverages' total prohibition. In this regard, even the dual difference of population density was a factor that should not be discounted. As early as in the half of the eighteenth century, a large part of the state population came through New York City and was mainly composed of immigrants from Ireland and Germany. As foreigners, it was clear that both Irish- and German-born considered whiskey and beer, respectively, as a good which, anyway, kept anchoring them to the homelands.<sup>23</sup> All this, however, wasn't a problem in the counties with low population, as they were made by a US born and Protestant majority, enemy of alcoholism as a social evil.<sup>24</sup>

In this period, the temperance associations became a social phenomenon so important that it started to play a political role in the election manifesto of Whig and future Republican parties, worst enemies of the Democratic Party which, in turn, used saloons and liquors as two tools of political battle, in order to proselytize in the city immigrant population.<sup>25</sup> Despite the political and economic resistance against the temperance bigotry, in 1841 there were in New York and Brooklyn 13,000 members of alcoholic temperance movements out of a total population of 360,323 inhabitants.<sup>26</sup> No doubt, however, temperance affairs in New York didn't start in the best way, since many members of those societies were former alcohol addicted who easily could have given in to temptation. So, it happened in Lower Broadway to one of the most important advocates of the Washingtonian movement, John B. Gough, who in 1845, according to his story, was deceived by an unknown person to drink a mysterious raspberry soda. It led Gough to drink alcohol further for several days.<sup>27</sup> Again in 1845 (meanwhile in 1842 the Order of the Sons of Temperance was founded in New York City), the Whig Party in Albany was able to enact a State Local Option Law on a share (five gallons) of liquor selling, which should have been applied to all the taverns, stores and hotels in New York State counties except New York City.<sup>28</sup> However, this law was repealed just two years later because it was considered by the New York District Court as unconstitutional.<sup>29</sup>

This first prototype of state prohibition law is interesting, since it shows some statistics about New York City and the alcohol matter.



Figure 1.1 The drunkards progress. From the first glass to the grave, 1846. Popular Graphic Arts, Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-32719.

According to an American Temperance Society member, John Marsh, between 1846 and 1847, 12,876 people were convicted for drunkenness and disorderly conduct out of a population of 371,223.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, no fewer than 4,000 houses kept moonshining and selling liquors to 30,000–40,000 customers.<sup>31</sup> The visit of Irish Catholic priest Father Theobald Mathew (who in these years began to be followed by a lot of Irish-born inhabitants) and the foundation in 1851 of another important temperance association, the Order of Good Templars, in Utica, NY, had a huge effect.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile the temperance societies, such as the New York Temperance Alliance, organized demonstrations in order to get the New York State Assembly to enact prohibition laws, which were able to remove both ballot boxes and New York City Democratic Party's conventions from the saloons.<sup>33</sup> For instance, during the local elections in 1856, 60 percent of ballot boxes (81 out of 132) in the Irish high-density urban areas were placed inside saloons, rum shops, beer parlors or groceries selling liquor.<sup>34</sup>

The first real attempt of New York State prohibition politics of the Local Option Law in 1845 was followed by a second bill in 1855, when the Whig-Republican politician Myron H. Clark was elected as Governor of New York State. Since 1852, he fought in the Senate for the

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enactment of a prohibition law.<sup>35</sup> Clark defeated his Democratic and anti-prohibition opponent Horatio Seymour who, in turn, vetoed a similar bill a year before by defining it as “unconstitutional, unjust and oppressive in its character.”<sup>36</sup> This law, named the Sunday Liquor Law, was applied from July 4, 1855, even though it was declared as unconstitutional by the State Court, since it was considered to violate individual freedom, contrary to the “sacred” property right.<sup>37</sup> The reaction of the citizenship was not long: 10,000 people quickly declared in front of the City Hall their dissent against the “tyrannical and unconstitutional”<sup>38</sup> Prohibitory Liquor Law.

As far as the New York local politics was concerned, Democratic Mayor Fernando Wood, while defending the compliance with the prohibition law at first, didn’t carry out checks on alcoholic situation of the Irish- and German-born residents,<sup>39</sup> nor did he worry about organizing a large-scale inspection in stores which sold spirits on Sunday:

It has been my constant effort to give New-York quiet, peaceful Sabbaths, consistent with the calmness and devotion which characterize a time dedicated to such sacred objects. The closing of the liquor-shops, and it may be said almost total abstinence has been obtained.<sup>40</sup>

Even during the first Sunday after his inauguration day in City Hall, 280 licensed liquor-selling stores stayed open.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, this trend wasn’t followed by his colleagues in cities like Brooklyn, Utica, Syracuse, Oswego and Rochester.<sup>42</sup> The urban press also joined the anti-prohibition block of the Democratic politics which, through the distribution by newsboys, expressed its dissent against such an unpopular law. According to the words of the Deputy Commissioner Daniel Carpenter, even the local police didn’t enforce it: “The crying of the Sunday papers ... met (as it was supposed it would) with much opposition, from the fact that the ordinance against it [liquor selling on Sunday] had never been enforced.”<sup>43</sup>

### **The saloons, Tammany Hall and the citizenship**

Between 1840 and 1850 in New York City, the temperance societies’ Protestant spirit intertwined with the Republican and Anglo-Saxon reality against the Irish mass immigration, which in those decades almost doubled the city’s population (from 371,223 to 629,810 inhabitants).<sup>44</sup> This is the context in which the Native American Party was founded in New York, agreeing with the Whig-Republic Party and the temperance societies about the issue of Irish and catholic immigration that, along with alcoholism, was considered as the new reason of the New York City decay, even more criminal and poor.<sup>45</sup> The trade of alcoholic

drinks was, indeed, a business which involved the merchant elite and the New York Democratic politics especially, both owners of most of the city taverns. In this regard, the question of alcoholism in New York State was an important aspect about the long political conflict between the State Republican Party (which referred to the State Assembly in Albany) and the local Democratic Party. The latter would be joined by the fundamental role of Tammany Hall, a society founded in 1783 into a tavern by an upholsterer assigned to afford "relief to the indigent and distressed members of the association ... and others who may be found proper objects of their charity."<sup>46</sup> About a century later, this turned into the main policy instrument for the New York Democrats through the spoils system and votes trading, which often happened inside taverns and saloons.<sup>47</sup> In this way, local politics was completely based on the involvement of several ethnic communities in the city, which could influence the outcome of elections with the help of 1,000 votes achieved thanks to free drinks for customers or sometimes brutally with threat and personal intimidation.<sup>48</sup>

Because of the high population growth in New York, as a result of the first huge Irish mass migration (which tried to avoid the Great Famine in 1846), the face of the multiethnic and varied urban center began to change politics. The development of the Tammany Hall's political machine and the exploitation of the Irish-born population fueled both the anti-British and anti-federalist feelings embodied by the New York State Governor.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, it's useful to remember that in the 15-year period between 1849 and 1863, four population riots took place. The Astor Place Riot in May 1849 (25 deaths, 120 injuries), the New York City Police Riot in June 1857 (53 injuries), the Dead Rabbit Riot in July 1857 (8 deaths, 100 injuries) and the New York City Draft Riot in July 1863 (120 deaths, 2,000 injuries) were all marked by the clash of a new poor, Democratic, migrant, Catholic and Irish urban reality.<sup>50</sup> This was turning against an old bourgeois, Native-Republican, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant metropolitan elite through actions of indiscriminate violence against the British-friendly information in theaters and newspapers, the interference of Albany Republican politics in the plans of New York City Democrats, fights for the control of upper world (between Metropolitan and Municipal Police) and underworld (between Bowery Boys and Dead Rabbits gangs), and finally the injustice of the draft, which during Civil War spared rich people through the payment of a fee and African-Americans, since they still weren't considered US citizens, but not the poor Irish immigrants.<sup>51</sup>

Even the prohibition law in 1855 was one of the reasons that led to the urban riots in the summer of 1857 and basically opposed two enemy police forces.<sup>52</sup> Between the 1840s and 1850s, as well as the demographic change, New York had a period of social and political upheaval occurring during the Second Industrial Revolution's shift from a market and

port city to an industrial and capitalistic metropolis. At the same time, the political gap between New York and Albany exacerbated, along with the new social control devices of the Police Departments. On the one hand, the Metropolitan Police led by the Street Commissioner Daniel Conover (delegate to the Republican Governor John A. King), and on the other hand, the Municipal Police controlled by the Democratic mayor Wood. He, along with the Dead Rabbits' Irish gang and the Municipal Police (born in 1845), created a perfect corruptive system and free from Albany laws.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, the prohibition law wasn't applied in New York City, since it stood against the economic interests of Democrats, the Irish underworld and large Irish- and German-born communities, which were 43 percent of the city's residents in 1860.<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, the criminal cases of drunkenness and disorderly conduct among the New York population continued to be rather common. In 1858, a paper by the Superintendent of Police F. A. Tallmadge reported that just between May and July, there were 19,902 cases concerning the Sunday Liquor Law violation, with further 3,903 cases of drunkenness and 2,438 cases of drunkenness and disorderly conduct, respectively, and with drinking peaks inside the Lower East Side's 4th (245 and 297) and the 6th (859 and 200) precincts.<sup>55</sup> In the middle of the nineteenth century, around 15 percent of Democratic politicians were also saloon-keepers, but at the same time, saloons were considered by Republicans as places of power for the gangs which, if necessary, could sell votes in exchange for a compliant policy to their business.<sup>56</sup> The free trade of spirits and the spread of saloons enabled this corruptive vortex that could have been damaged through the saloons' closing because of the enactment of a State prohibition law.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, also the compulsory prostitution grew, since in 1858, according to the *New York Times*, the city had a prostitute for every six/seven adult man. Statistically, there was one prostitute for every 117 people, a much higher average than other European cities such as Paris (1 out of 250) or Dublin (1 out of 220).<sup>58</sup>

The Five Points area (surrounding the intersection of Little-Water, Anthony, Orange and Mulberry Street within the Manhattan Lower East Side) was the New York most famous and, at the same time, wicked and dangerous place where alcohol, corruption, crime and poverty blended all together:

'The Five Points!' What does the name import? It is the synonym for ignorance the most entire, for misery the most abject, for crime of the darkest dye, for degradation so deep that human nature cannot sink below it.<sup>59</sup>

A testimony about this space is even given in 1842 by the British writer Charles Dickens in his travel diaries into the United States, where he

highlighted that “every house” in Five Points was “a low tavern.”<sup>60</sup> It is no coincidence that the Five Points were born around the *Old Brewery*, a brewery built in 1792 (called “the head quarter of vice and misery”<sup>61</sup> over time) which in 1837 turned into a “tenement-building”<sup>62</sup> for criminals. Then, around the half of the 1850s, it was the focus of the care and warnings by female temperance movements, mostly connected to the good deeds of the 218 New York Protestant churches,<sup>63</sup> a number that overwhelmed the Catholic churches amount (24) attended, however, by the same number of believers.<sup>64</sup>

Up to 1846, most of the New York population came from England, Scotland and Wales. Between 1820 and 1846, 880,343 migrants landed in New York, of whom 553,768 were British, and the biggest part of them decided to settle in that city, increasing the foreign-born population.<sup>65</sup> During the following years, Irishmen became about a fourth of the entire population, followed at a distance by the German community, while the urban foreign-born population passed from 36 percent (134,656 out of 371,223 in 1845) to 47 percent (383,717 out of 813,669 in 1860).<sup>66</sup> Migration wave by migration wave, between 1830 and 1865, New York and Brooklyn passed from 166,000 and 11,000 to 814,000 and 267,000 in just 35 years, respectively.<sup>67</sup>

On the one hand, after the Civil War, the connection with saloon, alcohol and Tammany Hall between 1870 and 1890 kept spreading, thanks to the monopoly of the Irish- and German-born votes by the local Democratic Party. On the other hand, the temperance movement’s desire to dream of a sober nation saw important developments with the foundation in Chicago of the National Prohibition Party in September 1869 and the entry of women into the prohibition matter through the founding in Cleveland of the WCTU in 1874. The latter organization, in particular, expanded in New York State within small towns such as Rochester at first and then also in Manhattan and Brooklyn in 1875, thanks to the work of Mary T. Burton (dean of the WCTU New York section) and William Jennings and Ellen Demorest, very close both to the WCTU and the New York Prohibition Party founded in 1886.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, in 1881, the temperance Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New York Noah Davis underlined that if the prohibition laws were really enforced in New York, the exponential growth of saloons and speakeasies would not have taken place. He unrealistically wished a metropolis such as New York could have become “dry” as Vineland, NJ, Greeley, Co or Batavia, Il, where the widespread alcohol sobriety drastically decreased misery, crime and the use of law enforcement.<sup>69</sup>

The ethical problem of the WCTU, the Prohibition Party and the Republicans started to evolve in a political attack against the Democrats and Tammany Hall especially, which for decades was the link between local Democratic politics and the large foreign-born population.<sup>70</sup> This time the prohibitionists didn’t just blame the drunk individual, but the

whole corrupted system which ruined him, starting with the places where everything went on, namely the saloons, substitutes of the old taverns and migrant-friendly shelters.<sup>71</sup> One Prohibition Party member, indeed, reminded that, around the latter 1880s, there were 35,000 saloons in New York State, each of which, through the propaganda spread by the saloonkeepers serving the Democratic Party, could handle about ten voters, adding up to a fourth of the votes in New York State.<sup>72</sup> As far as the New York Board of Aldermen was concerned, even the half of the latter (12 out of 24) in 1884 was composed of liquor dealers.<sup>73</sup> In addition, most of the Democratic Party's conventions and primaries (but also the Republican Party in a small way) took place in hotels, saloons or dance halls, and the most important Tammany Hall leaders politically formed into those social backgrounds.<sup>74</sup>

In 1887, a study by the Church Temperance Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church (founded in 1881) showed that out of 1,002 political events, 719 were organized inside saloons or in places very close to saloons, of which almost 70 percent were funded by the Democrat-friendly societies of Tammany Hall, Irving Hall and County Democracy.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, an article by the prohibition newspaper *The Voice* presented in 1889 the Tammany Hall, County Democracy and United Democrat's candidates for the State Assembly and the Board of Aldermen as a group of unreliable "brewer[s]," "friends of liquor traffic," "liquor-dealer[s]" and "saloon-keepers."<sup>76</sup> For instance, one of the most important leaders of Tammany Hall, Charles F. Murphy, was a saloonkeeper since 1879. His first saloon was at 19th Street and 2nd Avenue, where there was the seat of the *Sylvan Social Club*, a community center for young men from 15 to 20 years old. The second saloon was open four years later in 1883 at 23rd Street and 2nd Avenue. In 1886, Murphy inaugurated his third saloon at 19th Street and 1st Avenue. Finally, in 1890 his fourth saloon was open – they were always within the Lower East Side area – at 20th Street and 2nd Avenue, which became famous by the name of the *Anawanda Club* or the Tammany Hall headquarter.<sup>77</sup>

On the contrary, the President of the New York University Howard Crosby reiterated his Presbyterian conviction concerning that the "first cause of crime" was "the unrestricted sale of distilled liquors,"<sup>78</sup> since most murders took place next to saloons and were committed by drunkards. Also, stubborn Republicans fighting the spread of saloons opening organized a summit in the Metropolitan Opera House, which however ended in failure. On a waiting audience of 1,200, only 13 people showed up.<sup>79</sup> In the late 1880s, with a population of 1,206,299 (including 198,595 and 163,482 Irish- and German-born respectively), New York City had more than 10,000 places where alcohol was sold in saloons, hotels, licensed stores and speakeasies, and located especially within the 10th (591) and 17th (647) police precincts in the Lower East Side.<sup>80</sup> This was a huge amount if compared with the number of Protestant (355)

and Catholic (61) churches, synagogues (31) and public schools (121).<sup>81</sup> In the 1st and 2nd Assembly Districts, there were 1,583 saloons out of a population of 91,956 (an average of one saloon for every 58 inhabitants), while there were only 17 churches and 12 public schools.<sup>82</sup> If we also consider the Brooklyn municipality, which was separate from Manhattan until 1898, it comes to an impressive figure concerning crimes connected to intoxication: in 1887, out of a total population of 2,150,000 in Manhattan and Brooklyn, there were 32,242 arrests for drunkenness and 47,819 for drunkenness and disorderly conduct.<sup>83</sup>

Some years later, in 1892 the *Grand Sachem* of Tammany Hall Richard Croker defended himself and his society from the corruption charges by publishing an article in the *North American Review*:

The city of New York to-day contains a political organization which, in respect of age, skillful management, unity of purpose, devotion to correct principles, public usefulness, and, finally, success, has no superior, and, in my opinion, no equal, in political affairs the world over. I mean the *Tammany Democracy*.<sup>84</sup>

During the same years, Theodore Roosevelt, future Commissioner of the New York Police Department, considered in his diaries Assemblyman Thomas “Big John” McManus, a Tammany Hall politician representing a Manhattan district, an “unutterably coarse and low”<sup>85</sup> person and a former heavyweight boxer who owned a saloon.

### **The first Italian mass migration and the *padroni***

As New York Protestant journals such as *Puck* called Tammany Hall a tool in the hands of the Roman Catholic Church and Pope Leo XIII in to control New York City through the growing Irish-Catholic community, the city was getting ready to face a new mass migration era.<sup>86</sup> After the Irish and German communities’ assimilation into local public administration, Jewish and Italian ethnic groups grew. Between 1880 and 1920, they expanded exponentially in New York because of a dual “backward, unassimilatable, undesirable”<sup>87</sup> mass migration from Eastern and Southern Europe respectively. This was the extreme solution for millions of Italian and Jewish people, who were forced to get away from misery and unemployment in Southern Italy and the violence of the anti-Semitic *pogrom* in the Russian Empire after the murder of Tsar Alexander II in 1881.<sup>88</sup> Just between 1886 and 1898, for instance, 380,278 Jewish migrants landed in the New York port, of whom a fourth was composed of children under the age of 14.<sup>89</sup>

As far as the Italian immigration was concerned, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, 959,202 people arrived into the United States and in 1900, two years later that the New York municipality

(including Manhattan and Bronx neighborhoods only) included the Kings (Brooklyn), Queens and Richmond (Staten Island) neighboring counties, there were 218,412 Italian-born and Italian-Americans out of a full population of 3,437,202.<sup>90</sup> However, they were 30 percent of Italians living in the United States and the third widest ethnic group in New York State.<sup>91</sup> This was still a low number if compared to the Irish and German communities, which counted in New York 761,693 and 692,548 native and foreign-born, respectively.<sup>92</sup> As early as 1872, Charles Loring Brace described Southern Italians as an ethnic group settled in the Five Points area. People invented odd jobs in order to survive, such as selling statues or playing the “hand-organ,” very often together with monkeys, and were the “dirtiest population”<sup>93</sup> he had ever met. These kinds of charity seekers were defined by the *New York Times* as the “lazzaroni of ‘sunny Italy.’”<sup>94</sup>

Following the development of the Italian mass arrival in New York City, the supposed criminal nature and the deep illiteracy of the Italian migrants enlarged the cultural gap between them and Americans. In this way, for the foreign-born Italian, it was “harder to Americanize”<sup>95</sup> himself, since they were viewed as people flooded with superstition, poverty vices and ignorance and for this reason were reduced to a “primitive stage of civilization.”<sup>96</sup> The Italian crime statistics in New York City underlined between 1901 and 1908 a significant habit of committing offenses of personal violence, in particular concerning kidnappings (104 out of 393), violent assaults (2,102 out of 7,869) and rapes (233 out of 993).<sup>97</sup> This was a so stormy temper that was defined in an article in 1894 as “lazy, filthy, cruel, ferocious, bloodthirsty,” as well as “proud, and high-spirited, and, when ill-treated, are defiant and revengeful.”<sup>98</sup> It should be considered that these statistics were influenced by the prejudice at the time concerning the Italians as born criminals. The majority of Italian immigrants were, indeed, young men instead of women or older people and were more prone to break the law. Moreover, authors such as Edward Alsworth Ross or Ira Howert were conditioned by the negative stereotype which made the Italian as a nonintegrated individual in the US society. He was seen as a genetically inferior human being. Furthermore, a previous statistic by the *New York Times* showed that between August 1892 and April 1893, 52 assaults with knives, razors, axes, hatchets and revolvers between Italians occurred (around 5–6 attacks per month).<sup>99</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, Italian immigrants in New York were an “isolated community” because of the language matter which represented an “almost insurmountable”<sup>100</sup> cultural barrier. According to an 1894 report by US Commissioner of Labor Carrol D. Wright, in the New York slums, out of 12,012 Italian Inhabitants, 1,207 (10 percent) knew how to read and write in English, 2,776 (23 percent) were able to read and write in Italian, while the remaining 8,029 were completely

illiterate.<sup>101</sup> The difficulty in social integration for Italian immigrants living in Mulberry Bend or East Harlem (between 102nd and 116th Street on 2nd Avenue) could also be seen by the local law enforcement whenever an outburst took place in their own community, since the victim or his relatives preferred to get revenge personally rather than report the grievances to the police.<sup>102</sup>

Also, the revenge system was necessary because there was a big lack of linguistic communication between the Italian people and the officers, mostly of Irish descent. In this regard, it might happen that the ethnic clashes between Italians and Irish could be contained with the arrest of Italians only, even though the brawls broke out for an Irish challenge.<sup>103</sup> The morphology about the typical Italian inhabitant in New York Little Italy's tenements was observed by journalist Jacob A. Riis. According to him, the Italian "Mediterranean exuberance" found a compromise with their submission of living "in a pig-sty"<sup>104</sup> in Mulberry, Mott or Elizabeth Streets. These unhealthy houses were built without any security measures, a basis for crime, dirt,<sup>105</sup> unemployment and overcrowding, which Riis experienced by commenting on his entrance in a flat on 5th Avenue occupied by an Italian family: "Across the foul and slippery yard, down three steps made of chaired timbers from some worse wreck, was this" flat:

where five children slept with their elders. How many of those there were I never knew. There were three big: family beds, and they nearly filled the room, leaving only patches of the mud floor visible. The walls were absolutely black with age and smoke. The plaster had fallen off in patches and there was green mould on the ceiling.<sup>106</sup>

The criminal violence by the Italian immigrants (but not only Italian) came out in the easiness of brawl involvement in bars or saloons, where sometimes stabbings, shootings and, therefore, killings took place because of their habit in gambling with card playing.<sup>107</sup> In 1893, the city recorded 28,960 arrests for intoxication and disorderly conduct, with an impressive average of an arrested man for every 53 inhabitants.<sup>108</sup> These statistics increased if the 6th and 10th precincts of New York were analyzed, where a large part of Italian migrants lived in slums. Out of a population of 52,130 (13,126 Italian), there was an arrest for intoxication and disorderly conduct for every 16 individuals.<sup>109</sup> The biggest part of Italian people was unskilled labor and, by holding arduous jobs such as laborer or miner, he found refreshment from his daily work in the saloon.<sup>110</sup> Leaving their families in Italy and living in "wretched boarding-houses," the Italian working class considered the saloon as the only way to "escape the dreariness of the life."<sup>111</sup> Most of the working-age Italian people living in the slums held jobs such as laborer (1,504 people), tailor (358), longshoreman (224), bootblack (186),

shoemaker (147), barber (129), hod carrier (107) and fruit seller (106).<sup>112</sup> This statistic was confirmed about 15 years later by a Columbia University PhD dissertation on the heterogeneous population in Manhattan, where further considerations were offered about the Italian “sunny and peaceful temper” and at the same time showing “violence in quarrels.”<sup>113</sup>

Prohibitionists saw alcohol consumption and saloon attendance as a cause of street violence.<sup>114</sup> The Italians’ difficulty in integrating into American society was reflected in assault cases or even in murders between Italians or Italians and Irish.<sup>115</sup> In this regard, an article by the *New York Times* reported in 1884 a clash between Irish and Italian (armed with guns) bootblacks near Mulberry Street. In a short time, this brawl degenerated into a riot between these two ethnic communities in front of a lager-beer saloon owned by a man named Domenico.<sup>116</sup> Conflict between Irish and Italians in the workplace was also due to the interference of the Irish bosses with the Italian workmen, who refused to obey orders.<sup>117</sup> The same situation about working conflict happened also between the Irish and Italian longshoremen. The Italians, receiving a lower salary from their bosses, started to substitute for Irish workers.<sup>118</sup> By the early twentieth century, the yearly average earnings of a foreign-born Italian (\$526) was much lower than the foreign-born Irish (\$671), but always higher, just a tick, than a foreign-born Russian-Jewish (\$509) or an African-American (\$385).<sup>119</sup>

The finding that Irish people didn’t carry out weapons as opposed to the Italian (“the Italians and the stiletto are inseparable”<sup>120</sup>) is an example about how the latter community didn’t feel integrated into the New York society, unlike the Irish one that had the big advantage of speaking English and controlling the criminal justice system. Still, in 1910, in terms of language, the New York Italian community was the least integrated, since only 22.9 percent of families were able to speak English, a lower average than the city’s non-English-speaking foreign-born, which reached 42.6 percent.<sup>121</sup> If Irishmen for decades were professionally established in the body of local public administration, Italian people kept living in a reality made of lawlessness and alienation. A further example about a closer integration of the Irish community compared to the Italian one appeared in another violent episode that happened inside a saloon owned by an Italian, Michael Farrelli, who killed an Irish police officer, Patrick O’Keefe, after an argument over Sunday Excise Law violation.<sup>122</sup>

As already stated, the mass of the Italian migrants found unskilled jobs, unlike the Irish who monopolized the local administrative facilities also thanks to Tammany Hall: “Of the thirty-five leaders of Tammany, the men who compose the Executive Committee and decree its policy, an average of thirty are Irish Catholics.”<sup>123</sup> At the heart of this political alliance, there were the so-called “bosses,” *padroni* or “bankers” (very often saloon, bank or newspaper owners) who, in exchange for supporting election advertising for Democrats, demanded legal immunity