

THE AMENDMENTS

1900–1950: Amendments XVI–XXI

(See Amendments XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI)

This next group of amendments was ratified during the first half of the 1900s. This group of amendments also made specific changes to the American system.

The Sixteenth Amendment, ratified in 1913, gave Congress the power to establish an income tax. Before 1913, the only way the government made money was through *tariffs* (taxes on imports). With the Sixteenth Amendment, the government could now tax people's incomes. Each person was taxed according to the amount of money he or she made.

Also in 1913, the Seventeenth Amendment was added to the Constitution changing the way senators were elected. Article I of the Constitution stated that the senators were to be elected by the state legislatures. The Seventeenth Amendment allowed the American people to directly elect their senators, just like other elected officials.



Government agents destroyed alcohol outlawed by the Eighteenth Amendment.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, a movement in the United States to ban the use of alcohol was gaining strength. Many people saw the “evils of drinking” and felt that the production, sale, and use of alcoholic beverages should be prohibited. So, in 1919, the Eighteenth Amendment was ratified, and the United States entered the *Prohibition* Era.

Another reform movement sweeping the United States during this time concerned women and their right to vote. Previously, American women were not given the right to vote. The Fifteenth Amendment had given black males the right to vote. Women's groups had been fighting since the mid-1800s for suffrage, or the right to vote. In 1920,

with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, women were given the right to vote.

The Twentieth Amendment, passed in 1933, changed the dates when elected officials took office. In 1787 when the Constitution was written, travel was very slow, and news traveled even slower. Because of this, the president and Congress were given many months between their elections and the time when they were sworn in. The old officials were known as “lame ducks” because they did not have much time or power left. This amendment shortened the president's “lame duck” period from March 4 to January 20. Congress begins its terms and meetings on January 3.

Finally, also in 1933, the Twenty-first Amendment was passed repealing the Eighteenth Amendment. This amendment ended the Prohibition Era. The Eighteenth Amendment failed because of a lack of enforcement, and too many Americans were opposed to Prohibition.