Nominate Your Poison:

Black conservative discourse on Prohibition in

*The New York Age*

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Abstract

This thesis explores black conservative views toward Prohibition in Harlem through an analysis of *The New York Age*. In doing so it aims to show that black conservatives responses to Prohibition were driven by their espousal of uplift ideology. It seeks to call into question attempts by earlier historians to accommodation black conservatism into the history of Prohibition as cultural battleground between two views of society – one conservative and in favour of Prohibition and the other more liberal and opposed to it.
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Introduction

Prohibition saw the production, sale and transportation of intoxicating liquors criminalised in the United States from 1920 - 1933. This was achieved through the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, in conjunction with the Volstead Act that made provision for its enforcement.¹ Prohibition coincided with the emergence of a dynamic black metropolis in the New York neighbourhood of Harlem. During, and as a result of Prohibition Harlem became a key space for the discussion of social ideologies and behaviours.

This thesis argues that black conservative discourse on Prohibition was driven by black conservative desire to produce and project positive perceptions of the black community within wider American society. Black conservatives formed an active educated elite within the black community. They believed that black society could be advanced, or uplifted, through black middle class emulation of and adherence to supposed white middle class values.² They specifically promoted the bourgeois values of education, separate gender roles, the church and family. In this thesis I argue that the black elite sought to disseminate this ideology to wider black society, specifically to the middle class, through the Harlem newspaper The New York Age. Furthermore, I locate and analyse the attitudes expressed by the Age on the issue of Prohibition as driven by this wider ideological project of uplift.

Prohibition transformed Harlem in ways that threatened the black elite’s project of uplift. Most obviously Harlem became the site of widespread disregard of the Prohibition laws. The presence of an illegal liquor industry encouraged and legitimised the growth of other criminal elements within Harlem. The *Age* reports increases in public and private behaviours that I interpret as in conflict with the bourgeois values being promoted. Within, cabarets, rent parties and private apartments, Harlem residents and visitors to the district engaged in the unrestrained interaction between the races and sexes, ‘objectionable’ dancing, prostitution, gambling and the like. Harlem also witnessed a night-time influx of white visitors. Whites were attracted to Harlem during the Prohibition because of both the availability of liquor and the popularisation of ‘black culture’ in white society. The perception of ‘black society’ that whites held, and that was promoted as part of this ‘Negro vogue’, dramatically conflicted with the image of black society the black elite wished to promote.

The efforts of the black elite were not aided by the array of literature concerning black life which fed the vogue. Popular works, of the vogue, such as Carl Van Vechten’s novel *Nigger Heaven*, took for their subject matter the most disadvantaged elements of black society. In depicting black life, artists relied heavily on the western trope of Primitivism. Black Americans, the vast majority of whom had never set foot outside the country, were cast as “barely civilized exiles from the jungle”. As David Chinitz has explained:

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The African American became a model of “natural” human behaviour to contrast with the falsified, constrained and impotent modes of the “civilized”. Blacks were perceived and represented by white society as uninhibited, sexually promiscuous, wild, dangerous and carefree. The desires of white visitors to Harlem were catered to in elaborate and predominantly white owned clubs and cabarets that provided black music, dancing and cabaret performances to white audiences. Also popular among white visitors were multiracial “Black and Tan” cabarets that were seen to offer a more ‘authentic’ foray into Harlem’s nightlife. The Black elite project of promoting an image of the black community as morally upright was, thus, made particularly challenging during Prohibition.

The majority of histories on the black community during Prohibition do not consider the attitude of black conservatives to Prohibition or the impact of Prohibition on black society. The Harlem Renaissance – the highbrow cultural movement of the black intelligentsia – forms the focus of the majority of scholarship on Harlem in this era. In these studies, of which David Levering Lewis’ *When Harlem was in Vogue* is a prime example, Prohibition appears only as an illicit backdrop of cabarets and speakeasies, to the meetings and in the works of black intellectuals, artists and musicians. In response to the top-down approach of Lewis and the like, efforts have been made by historians such as Cheryl Lynn Greenburg and Macy Sacks to convey the ‘real Harlem’, or that experienced by everyday people. Prohibition hardly emerges in

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5 Chinitz, “Langston Hughes, Primitivism, and Jazz”, p.62.
these accounts; rather the approach is generally a social history seeking to stress the poor social and economic conditions of blacks in Harlem. Historians that do consider Prohibition as significant to the history of Harlem have produced works that privilege white interactions with the black district. Chap Heap in *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*, looks at Harlem as part of a wider analysis of white encounters with socially marginalised districts. Heap writes of Harlem as a fashion that was for a time the object of “well-to-do white American” interest. Similarly, Kevin Mumford in *Interzones* looks at Prohibition as a catalyst for the emergence of interracial sex districts. More recently, Stephen Robertson in “Harlem Undercover: Vice Investigators, Race, and Prostitution, 1910-1930” has explored attempts by black and white conservatives, within the Committee of Fourteen, to police vice at a time when Prohibition pushed blacks out of the public eye and into private spaces for their leisure. Robertson’s focus is the black world that emerged in these new spaces, rather than the motivations of conservatives for wanting to police vice.

The historiography on black conservative attitudes to Prohibition is largely limited to Michael Lerner’s consideration of “Black Victorian” responses in the chapter “Hootch Joints in Harlem” from his book *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City*. Lerner argues that Prohibition illuminates a sharp divide in Harlem’s black community, between the conservative elite, who supported Prohibition, and a younger generation who objected to it as a moralistic intrusion into their lives. Lerner labels

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9 Heap, *Slumming*  
13 Lerner, *Dry Manhattan.*
these groups as “Black Victorians” and “black cosmopolitans”, respectively. According to Lerner the divide between these two groups is the key to understanding Harlem society in the 1920s. He argues,

The most immediate influence of the Prohibition debate in Harlem was the way it highlighted the growing gap between a traditional generation of post-Reconstruction leaders, who saw in Prohibition an opportunity for blacks to prove themselves as citizens, and a younger generation, more attuned to modern urban culture, who embraced the cultural rebellion of the Prohibition era as a sign of a less moralistic and possibly more tolerant nation.\textsuperscript{14}

In making this argument, Lerner seeks to prove that the divide between moralists and cosmopolitans in Harlem reflected a divide among American society generally. He states,

…what was at stake in the “noble experiment” was not something as simple as the right to have a drink, but a much more significant set of issues. The battle between the dry movement and wet New Yorkers was a debate about competing visions of American society. It revealed deep divisions within the United States over individual rights, personal liberty, and the limits of reform.\textsuperscript{15}

Throughout Lerner’s chapter, “Black Victorians” are firmly pitted on the side of the ‘drys’ in the battle against ‘wet’ cosmopolitans.

This thesis aims to contribute to the historiography on black conservative attitudes to Prohibition. It does so by considering the discourse on the issue in \textit{The New York Age} – a conservative black paper newspaper published Harlem. Lerner’s definition of

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, p.201.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 6.
“Black Victorians” as “the old guard of civic leaders, ministers, and moral reformers” applies well to the writers and financial backers of the Age.\textsuperscript{16} Age editor Fred R. Moore in particular conforms to Lerner’s definition. He was a renowned community leader, who in addition to heading business councils was involved in church organisations and local government. James Weldon Johnson, the prominent black intellectual and politician, worked as contributing editor at the Age between 1914-1923.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, politically Age writers shunned left leaning black activism in favour of the conservative values of the Republican Party and the promotion of middle class respectability. Financially the Age was backed by Booker T. Washington who was the leading figure in black conservatism.\textsuperscript{18} Despite the clear conservative bias of the Age Lerner does not utilise it, to any great extent, as an indicator of black conservative attitudes to Prohibition. He prefers to rely heavily on The Amsterdam News. It is surprising that Lerner chooses this approach given that the News is regarded as being sensationalist in nature and less representative of black elite opinion.\textsuperscript{19} I argue that in order to assess black conservative, or to use Lerner’s term “Black Victorian”, views on Prohibition the Age is a vital source. This thesis reassesses Lerner’s conclusions in light of my research into the Age.

In Chapter One I outline the importance of the Age as a source of black conservative discourse. I consider its wider values in order to ascertain the factors that influenced the paper’s attitude towards the dry movement, temperance, and the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment. Through this analysis I argue that black conservatives were

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p.201.
\textsuperscript{17} Sondra Wilson, \textit{The Selected Writings of James Weldon Johnson}, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p.5.
largely indifferent to the dry movement and Prohibition at the time it became law. By drawing this conclusion I call into question Lerner’s argument that “Black Victorians” supported the dry movement from its outset. I am therefore left to seek other motives for the *Age* in its decision to launch a campaign against violations of the Volstead Act in 1922. I argue that uplift ideology, with its desire to promote and protect the community, can be used to explain the *Age* campaign.

Chapter Two considers how uplift ideology shaped the *Age* campaign against the ill effects of Prohibition. In particular I show that the *Age* actively sought to shift, or ‘other’, responsibility of growing vice and crime in Harlem onto those outside the community. I consider why particular groups, namely whites visitors to Harlem, “foreign” bootleggers and government enforcement agencies were targeted. I show that this ‘othering’ of blame was motivated by uplifts emphasis on promoting a positive image of black society.

In Chapter Three I consider the methods used by the *Age* to remedy the growth of vice and crime in Harlem. I argue that *Age* writers blamed Prohibition for the degeneration of Harlem into a vice district. As such, I consider the ways in which they protested the law. Specifically I show how the methods available to them were limited by their adherence to uplift ideology. As such, they did not engage in “cultural rebellion” against Prohibition – that being breaking the Prohibition law. Rather, they launched a two-pronged attack that called for greater enforcement of the law as well as its modification to allow beer and wine. I show that the *Age* also actively promoted the repeal of Prohibition, as it became a political possibility. The evidence I put
forward in Chapter Three strongly counters Lerner’s argument that black conservatives were in favour of the Eighteenth Amendment until the end of the 1920s.

Ultimately this thesis draws out the underlying values of black conservatives in order to explain that their reaction to the transformation of Harlem during Prohibition was driven by the project of uplift. In doing so it seeks to reclaim the image of the black elite from Lerner’s characterisation of them as conservative for conservatisms sake. Thus, I show the falsity of trying to fit the black experience of Prohibition into a wider argument of dry conservatives vs. wet cosmopolitans
Chapter One

Straight Up:

Prohibition in Black Conservative Discourse

In the following Chapter I argue that black conservative opinion towards Prohibition was driven by their espousal of uplift ideology. I aim to show that the Age is a valuable source in gauging black conservative opinion towards Prohibition. I will go on to counter Lerner’s argument that black conservatives, as part of their emphasis on ‘respectability’ and racial uplift, had been “vocal supporters of Prohibition since the early years of the dry movement.”20 Uplift ideology espoused black middle class adherence to white middle class values as a means of securing black access to the American body politic. A constitutional ban on alcohol was not a value of the white middle class, rather its ratification is an example of how a minority can utilise political lobbying to pass a radical view into law.21 Thus, the promotion of dry ideology was not in keeping with uplift ideology. This is not to say that temperance – the regulation of ones own drinking – was not a value of middle class. It was, and as such was promoted by the black elite. A close reading of the Age reveals that black conservatives were in fact largely indifferent to the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919. Despite this, in 1922 the Age launched a vast campaign against Prohibition violations. The following chapter explores the fundamental values of the Age in order to reconcile its campaign against Prohibition violations with its initial apathy toward Prohibition itself.

Harlem, in the early decades of the Twentieth Century, was distinctive within America’s urban landscape. Blacks migrated from the American South, the West Indies, and within New York, all to this neighbourhood that was increasingly emerging as a dynamic black metropolis. Lerner employs a broad vision of moralists and liberals that does fit Harlem. The black population of New York City skyrocketed from 92,000 in 1910 to 328,000 by 1930, the majority of whom lived in Harlem. Such rapid population growth forced the physical boundaries of Harlem outward, so that by the end of the 1920s it encompassed over 184 blocks. The forces that drew blacks away from their hometowns and towards Harlem were varied; this accounts for the diversity that emerged within the area. Southern blacks moved north to escape the overtly racist south where lynching was disturbingly common and black disadvantage had been legally entrenched in Jim Crow segregation laws. The promise of a more liberal society in the north as well as increased job opportunities made New York an attractive place to resettle. Black migrants to New York were drawn to Harlem’s flat real estate market at the turn of the century which forced white homeowners to take on black tenants for the first time. As Greenburg explains, this made Harlem “simultaneously an attractive location and one of the few neighbourhoods open to them [black tenants].” Blacks already living in New York relocated uptown to Harlem from the overcrowded conditions in the middle and lower blocks of the West Side. The established black community in Harlem and migrants from the black middle class viewed with concern the impact that migrating blacks of

22 Lerner, Dry Manhattan, p.308.
25 Sacks, Before Harlem, p.9, 12.
26 Ibid, p.15.
27 Cheryl Greenburg, “Or Does It Explode?”, p.15.
lower socioeconomic status would have on the already lowly image of blacks held by wider society.\(^{29}\) Despite the significant economic and social differences that existed among the city’s population, Harlem became the dominant symbol, to the rest of America and internationally, of black urban life in the 1920s.

In response to this, the black elite aimed to promote a positive image of the race to mainstream America in order to counter popular opinion that blacks were racially inferior. Their prime objective was to remove the reason for their own exclusion from American society. Negative stereotypes of blacks were permeated throughout America in newspaper editorial cartoons, advertisements and literature.\(^{30}\) Stereotypes of blacks were regionally varied but generally depicted the race as unintelligent, unattractive and dangerous. The ‘urban negro’ in particular was portrayed as unrestrained, criminal and sexually promiscuous.\(^{31}\) Educated blacks attempted to define themselves against these stereotypes by adopting elements of white middle class culture. Essentially, conservative blacks were attempting to replace race with culture as the factor that determined their status.\(^{32}\) It was within white notions of social, economic and cultural achievement that uplift sought the progression of the black race.\(^{33}\) It is essential to identify, as Gaines does, that “uplift ideology was not simply a matter of educated African Americans’ wanting to be white”. Instead, it had a definite objective of disproving the prevalent notion of inherent racial inferiority.\(^{34}\) Similarly, Vogel describes uplift as seeking to “ground the struggle for racial equality and the struggle against white supremacy in the material and moral achievements and

\(^{29}\)Sacks, Before Harlem, p.4.
\(^{30}\)Ibid, p.55.
\(^{31}\)Ibid, p.3.
\(^{32}\)Gaines, Uplifting the Race, p.3.
\(^{33}\)Ibid.
\(^{34}\)Gaines, Uplifting the Race, p.3.
possibilities of the black middle class". While different, politicised, methods to bring about social change were employed by other individuals within the black community, uplift was the preferred method among black conservatives. Educated blacks pushed their uplift agenda through black media. In this way, uplift ideology underpinned the thinking of black conservatives in the 1920s.

Lerner makes reference to the black conservative emphasis on ‘respectability’ but does not adequately distinguish it from conservatism more generally. He is quick to discount it as just another element of conservative thought, rather than a genuine tactic for improving the social and political position of blacks. Lerner states,

The most immediate influence of the Prohibition debate in Harlem was the way it highlighted the growing gap between a traditional generation of post-Reconstruction leaders, who saw in Prohibition an opportunity for blacks to prove themselves as citizens, and a younger generation, more attuned to modern urban culture, who embraced the cultural rebellion of the Prohibition era as a sign of a less moralistic and possibly more tolerant nation.

This is another example of Lerner’s over simplification of black conservatives. He once again attempts to position them on the side of the moralists in his distorted division of American society into two camps; the conservatives in favour of Prohibition and the cosmopolitans against it.

In determining black conservative attitudes towards Prohibition, Lerner examines the Amsterdam News. He chooses not to consider the New York Age in any great detail.

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Lerner, Dry Manhattan, p.201.
From his research he claims that “Black Victorians” supported the dry movement. Lerner writes,

Harlem’s Black Victorians, the old guard of civic leaders, ministers, and moral reformers, had been vocal supporters of Prohibition since the early years of the dry movement. In the pages of the *Amsterdam News*, Harlem’s leading newspaper, they promoted the temperance ideal both to Harlem residents and to the paper’s substantial national readership.\(^{37}\)

The evidence that Lerner refer to does not adequately support his argument that ‘the old-guard’ supported Prohibition from its outset. Copies of the *Amsterdam News* prior to 1922 have not survived in the historical record, meaning Lerner refers primarily to sources written three years after the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment and two years after the Volstead Act was passed. In fact, none of the primary sources that Lerner uses to support his claims predate 1920. Lerner’s broader argument that “Black Victorians” called for The Volstead Act to be enforced because they ideologically supported the dry movement from its outset is therefore unsubstantiated by his evidence.

The *Age* provides a more valuable source of black conservative opinion on Prohibition. Issues of the *Age* survive from the time of Prohibition’s ratification and it is more representative of, to use Lerner’s term, “Black Victorian” opinion. Lerner’s definition of “Black Victorians” as “the old-guard of civic leaders, ministers and moral reformers” can be applied to the educated black elite who wrote for and funded the *Age*. The *Age’s* editor, Fred R. Moore, conforms to Lerner’s definition of the “Black Victorian”. Jervis, while describing him observes:

\(^{37}\) Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.201.
Moore, a self-made man, was a good example of the old-style newspaper editor, full of fight, right-mindedness, and stern Victorian sermons.\textsuperscript{38} Moore, in addition to his role as editor, was served as Republican Alderman for the Nineteenth District in Harlem.\textsuperscript{39} Hence he also accords to the “civic leader” requirement of Lerner’s definition. Both the Age and Moore were closely associated with the prominent conservative race leader, Booker T. Washington.\textsuperscript{40} Washington, who had an undisclosed financial interest in the Age, had encouraged Moore to take over a share in the paper, and subsequently its editorship, from T. Thomas Fortune in 1907.\textsuperscript{41} The renowned black poet, educator and journalist James Weldon Johnson was another member of the black elite who worked at the Age, contributing editorials between 1914-1923.\textsuperscript{42} His editorials emphasise the conservatism of the paper and its emphasis on advancing the public image of blacks. It is evident that the political and social composition of the Age was extremely close to Lerner’s definition of “Black Victorian”. Accordingly, in seeking to understand the attitudes of black conservatives towards Prohibition a consideration of the Age is vital.

A close examination of articles that appeared in the Age highlight the values that the black elite wished to propagate to the wider black community. An understanding of these values is vital when considering the black elite’s reaction to Prohibition. Age writers believed they had a responsibility to promote the uplift of the race through the black media. James Weldon Johnson voiced this view in an Age editorial:

\textsuperscript{38} Jervis, \textit{This Was Harlem}, p.65.
\textsuperscript{39} “Alderman Fred R. Moore Vindicated by Big Majority”, \textit{New York Age}, 19\textsuperscript{th} September 1931.
\textsuperscript{40} Thornbrough, ‘More Light on Booker T. Washington and the New York Age’, p.34.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid} p.35.
\textsuperscript{42} Wilson, \textit{The Selected Writings of James Weldon Johnson}, p.5.
Negro weeklies make no pretense at being newspapers in the strict sense of the term. They have a more important mission than the dissemination of mere news…They are race papers. They are organs of propaganda.\footnote{James Weldon Johnson, “Views and Reviews”, \textit{New York Age}, 22\textsuperscript{nd} October 1914 quoted in Lawrence Oliver, Terri Walker, `James Weldon Johnson’s New York Age Essays on The Birth of a Nation and the “Southern oligarchy”’, \textit{South Central Review}, 10, n.4 (Winter 1933), p.1.}

\textit{Age} articles emphasised the uplift agenda of black conservatives, as such they can be used to locate the nuanced differences between white conservatism and black conservatism. The most obvious of these differences is the social mobility agenda that underpinned uplift ideology and black conservatism. It was by no means conservatism for its own sake.

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The \textit{Age} promoted the normative American middle-class ideals of patriotism and gender roles throughout its coverage of black involvement in the war effort. This was part of wider attempts to promote a positive image of the black community. On January 4\textsuperscript{th} 1919, under the headline “The Past and the Future,” a summary of the past year appeared. According to the article, the year 1918 “marked a perceptible growth in the status of the Negro race in public esteem”.\footnote{“The Past and the Future”, \textit{New York Age}, 4\textsuperscript{th} January 1919.} Such growth was seen as one of the most significant achievements of the year. Particular emphasis is given to the black contribution to the war effort, which was covered throughout 1919. The pride of the black community in their role in the war effort is evidenced in the crowds that watched the parade of service men and women through Harlem that the paper covered extensively, accompanied by large-scale pictures in February 1919.\footnote{“How They Viewed the Parade in Harlem, \textit{New York Age}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} February 1919.} This overt adoption of nationalist wartime ideology underscores the black conservative desire to
be included within definitions of the American nation. The bourgeois patriarchal ideals of the protection of women and children by men, and the nurturing role of women as wartime nurses are particularly evident in the Age’s pieces on the war effort. Therefore, in its coverage of the war effort the Age promotes normative ideas of nationhood and gender roles as a means to reposition the image of black society.

Within the Age and among black conservatives generally the production of ‘high culture’ was promoted as a way of uplifting the Race. The Harlem Renaissance, that began in Harlem in 1919 and involved the production of works of literature, music and art by black intellectuals, was itself initially framed within white notions of what constituted cultural value. Johnson reflected the black conservative consciousness when he commented; “[nothing could] do more to change the mental attitude and raise his status than a demonstration of intellectual parity by the Negro through his production of literature and art”. Through plays, music and literature, blacks aimed simultaneously to demonstrate their ability to produce works of ‘high culture’ and to protest against negative stereotypes of blacks in works produced by whites. The black written, produced and performed play The Problem was, for example, billed as “an answer to” the overtly racist film The Birth of a Nation. One of the leading intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance, W.E.B Du Bois, directly linked the derogatory depiction of blacks in Birth of a Nation with the increase in lynching that occurred in the years after its release. Hence the desire to counter the impact that

47 Vogel, The Scene of the Harlem Cabaret, p.4.
racist images had on the everyday lives of blacks was part of the motivation of Harlem Renaissance intellectuals and artists. Lester Walton, writing for the *Age*, epitomised the seemingly contradictory way in which the Harlem Renaissance appealed to white notions of cultural value in order to foster racial solidarity among blacks when he wrote “the stage must play its part in awakening within us a stronger sense of race consciousness.”

Perhaps paradoxically, the Harlem Renaissance distinguished blacks from the white middle class they so wished to emulate. However, by forging for themselves a new and quintessentially black cultural identity within the arts, they were able to promote their position within wider society.

The black middle class were protective of their community and resisted portrayals of New York, specifically Harlem, as inherently immoral and crime ridden. The *Age’s* editorial page on December 5, 1921, discussed the question “Is New York Immoral?” It put to readers:

> Many people living outside the confines of New York harbour the impression that immorality is the prevailing feature of the great city.\(^{53}\)

Such views, the editorial goes onto argue, were perpetuated by New York’s tabloid newspapers, which “pay more attention to the crimes committed than to the constructive features of city life”\(^{54}\). According to the *Age*, “this is not an altogether true or a fair estimate to place on the morals of the majority of the race…most of the people are right living and clean thinking”\(^{55}\). The *Age* identifies its purpose as challenging the stereotypes of New York and the black community as immoral by focusing instead on the achievements of the race. Black conservatives attempted to


\(^{52}\) “Is New York Immoral?”, *New York Age*, 5\(^{th}\) December 1921.


\(^{54}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{55}\) *Ibid.*
separate themselves from those blacks involved in immoral or illegal activities in order to prevent the race from being judged by the actions of a minority. Arguing that Harlem was essentially moral was a crucial tactic in the black conservative project of uplifting the race.

Uplift ideology also underpinned the Age’s stance on leisure activities. In June 1922, under the headline ‘The Pursuit of Pleasure’, the paper expressed concern with the growth in venues, such as poolrooms, designed for the pursuit of leisure. This concern was founded on the belief that recreation detracted from more productive activities, such as study and work that were viewed as vital to the progress and improved perception of the black community. According to the Age, leisure activities should be a reward for hard work rather, than something to be pursued for their own sake. The editorial begins:

> The need for periodic relaxation and occasional diversion for the workers and students has always been admitted by those who have studied the workings of the human machinery, both physically and mentally. The old adage that “all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy” contains the germ of a lasting truth. On the other hand all play and no work at all is not good for any boy or girl either.

As well as being a distraction from work and study, the newly opened cabarets and poolrooms were seen as a threat to the morality of the black community due to the ‘tone of entertainment’ they presented. The emphasis the black community placed on respectability meant such ‘morally questionable’ venues were perceived as a threat to their wider project of uplifting the race. Readers were encouraged by the Age to spend

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their free time in “the acquisition of useful knowledge or… in beneficial exercise in the open air” rather than in “badly ventilated rooms and unprofitable conversation” of poolrooms.\textsuperscript{58} An underlying desire for uplift was therefore the central focus of Age propaganda.

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Blacks were not significantly involved in the dry movement and the push for national Prohibition. Lerner does not distinguish between temperance, the dry movement and Prohibition, and these omissions render his argument unconvincing. Lerner argues that ‘Black Victorians’ supported the push for prohibition despite the racist nature of much of the dry movement. He states: ‘The fervent support for Prohibition demonstrated by figures like Miller, McKinney, and Grey contrasted sharply with the racist reputation of much of the dry movement.’\textsuperscript{59} Although related, the concepts of temperance, the dry movement and Prohibition were distinct. For example, supporting the self-regulation of one’s own drinking or being temperate did not equate to support for a constitutional ban on alcohol. Conservative blacks, in keeping with their adherence to white middle class values, promoted temperance. This did not mean, however, that black conservatives involved themselves with the dry movement’s campaign for national Prohibition. The limited studies that has been conducted on blacks and the temperance movement suggests their involvement was not widespread and peaked in the mid nineteenth century, prior to black emancipation.\textsuperscript{60} The main temperance organisations at the turn of the century, namely the Women’s Christian

\textsuperscript{58} “The Pursuit of Pleasure”, \textit{New York Age}, 17\textsuperscript{th} June 1922.
Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Anti-Saloon League, were both unappealing and inaccessible to blacks. These organisations generally promoted white supremacy and were entwined with nativist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan.\textsuperscript{61} The politicalisation of the dry movement at the turn of the century, apparent in the dominance of the Anti-Saloon League over the WCTU and the shift from community based temperance to national prohibition, further distanced blacks from the movement. Black conservatives, therefore, supported temperance but were by no means connected to the dry movement or the push for Prohibition, as Lerner suggests.

The reaction of the \textit{Age} to the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment suggests that black conservatives viewed the arrival of Prohibition with a sense of cautious optimism. On the editorial page of the \textit{Age}, on January 25\textsuperscript{th} 1919, under the headline “The Country goes Dry” the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment is reported as a victory for temperance groups such as the WCTU and Sons of Temperance.\textsuperscript{62} It is apparent from the tone of this article that the paper is reporting rather than celebrating or condemning the news. While hopeful that the ‘noble experiment’ would prove a success, the writer notes that Prohibition presents an “arduous task requiring tact and vigilance on the part of those entrusted with the execution of the law”.\textsuperscript{63} In particular, the opinion piece identifies the challenges authorities would face in addressing the manufacture of moonshine as well as the misuse of medical whisky once the law goes into effect. Another concern highlighted in the editorial is that Prohibition would lead to an increase in the use of illegal drugs as a substitute for alcohol. The article concludes ambivalently:

\textsuperscript{62} “The Country Goes Dry”, \textit{New York Age}, 25\textsuperscript{th} January 1919.
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid.}
The abolishment of the liquor traffic by a great nation like the United States is in the nature of an experiment; while the results on the whole should be beneficial, the uprooting of the habits of a lifetime cannot be accomplished without some friction. A great deal depends upon how genuine the resolution for abstinence will prove. Whether it is merely a flash of puritanical hypocrisy or a deep-seated revolt against the evils cropping out of the liquor traffic and saloon rule of the great cities, time will show.\textsuperscript{64}

From the tone of the text it can be suggested that black conservatives should not be labelled as passionate supporters of Prohibition from its outset.

The limited coverage of the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment by the *Age* suggests it identified drinkers as a group separate from its ‘respectable’ readership. Prohibition, according to the *Age*, would not significantly impact upon the lives of the largely temperate black middle class and their experience of New York. As temperance was an ideal promoted by blacks as part of wider attempts to prove their respectability, once it became law its use as a signifier of status was reduced. Those upset by the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment are reported by the *Age* as “the bibulous” or those who drank excessively.\textsuperscript{65} Under the headline “Prohibition on Broadway,” Johnson dismisses fears put forward by the President of the Bowman-Kerr-Morgan Hotel Corporation, John Bowman, that Prohibition would result in New York losing its excitement and appeal, with far reaching negative economic effects for the city.\textsuperscript{66} The *Age*, in refuting Bowman’s claims, casts the drinker as part of a wealthy outside set who came to New York to spend conspicuously for “pleasure, eating and drinking”. The editor argues “there are very few citizens of this great city

\textsuperscript{64} “The Country Goes Dry”, *New York Age*, 25\textsuperscript{th} January 1919.
\textsuperscript{65} Johnson, “Prohibition on Broadway”, *New York Age*, 25\textsuperscript{th} January 1919.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
who do not believe that its prosperity is based on something more than the money spent by the people who come here to get a drink. Therefore, the position taken by the Age reveals that drinking and the pursuit of leisure were not behaviours the Age sought to promote as valuable elements of New York society.

After remaining predominantly silent on the issue of Prohibition since the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in January 1919, the Age began a vast anti-bootlegging campaign in September 1922. The campaign was not driven by support for the dry movement or a belief in the wisdom of Prohibition. Rather, it was a characteristically black conservative response to the impact of the dry laws on Harlem. Under the headline “Harlem’s ‘Hooch’ emporiums a menace to welfare of city,” the Age reported on the growing number of cigar stores, delicatessens and drug stores on Lenox Avenue which illegally sold alcoholic beverages. Lenox Avenue was one of the main streets in Harlem and a centre of community activity. The black middle class objection to speakeasies in Harlem emerged from their fear that such venues would inflict serious damage upon the image of the black community as a whole. The article states:

The increasing number of such stores on Lenox avenue operating apparently under police protection have resulted in the bringing to this street the worst element of colored people, who by their loud and profane language are lowering the tone of Lenox avenue as a residential street and thus decreasing the rental value of its apartments.

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67 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
This concern regarding the impact of speakeasies on rental values, emphasises that black conservatives had a tangible financial interest in keeping vice away out of Harlem. The bourgeoisie value of the accumulation of wealth and its investment in property formed a significant part of the black conservative uplift ideology. In this way, the Age campaign against speakeasies was driven by uplift ideology and its essential objective of promoting a positive image of the black race through adherence to middle class values.

Uplift ideology underpinned the black middle class at the time of the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment and in the initial years of Prohibition. It was Uplift, rather than any authentic confidence in the ideological underpinnings of Prohibition, that motivated the black response to the dry laws. The role of uplift in shaping black conservative attitudes has been downplayed in the existing literature. Lerner in particular understates the importance of uplift in determining black attitudes to Prohibition when he equates adherence to the ‘respectable’ ideal of temperance with support for the Eighteenth Amendment. Through my analysis of the black conservative newspaper the New York Age, it becomes apparent that the black middle class was largely indifferent to the Prohibition debate. This approach was in line with their desire to present their readership and community as respectable citizens who, as non-drinkers, would remain unaffected by Prohibition. The anti-bootlegging campaign launched by the Age in 1922 cannot therefore have been driven by an ideological support for Prohibition; rather it was a quintessentially black conservative response, underpinned by uplift ideology, and reactive to the impact of Prohibition on the black community in Harlem.
Chapter Two

Shaken and Stirred:

The Impact of Prohibition on Harlem and the Age Response

The following chapter examines the transformation of Harlem under Prohibition and how the Age responded to that change. It reveals how the Age shifted blame for the growth of vice and crime in Harlem onto those outside of the black community. Specifically, the Age held government enforcement agencies, white bootleggers and those involved in the phenomenon of slumming responsible for the widespread violation of the Volstead Act, and the subsequent growth in criminal and culturally subversive elements within Harlem. By introducing this argument, I challenge Lerner’s assertion that black conservatives held black ‘cosmopolitans’ liable for the ill effects of Prohibition. The research outlined in this chapter proves that blacks conservatives at the Age continually downplayed black involvement in the Harlem subversive culture. This approach by the Age emphasises that uplift ideology underpinned the black conservative response to Prohibition.

Ironically, the impact of Prohibition on Harlem was the opposite of what dry advocates had intended – Harlem became awash with liquor. The Age began to report on the widespread availability of liquor in Harlem in September 1922. Its initial report on the “Harlem Hooch Situation” informed readers that, “intoxicating beverages of all sorts are openly dispensed in cigar stores, delicatessen shops, drug stores, and other places”. ‘Hooch’ or ‘hootch’ refers to hard liquors. The Age also provided readers

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70 “Harlem’s “Hooch” Emporium A Menace to Welfare of City”, New York Age, 16th September 1922.
with specific information on the methods used by bootleggers to dispense liquor and the prices they charged. One story read:

For twenty cents you can get a shot of alleged corn or gin that is warranted to rival the kick of a Georgian mule. Forty cents will get you a four ounce vial, and 75 cents (six bits) is all that you need to become possessor of a half pint. Similarly, the use of codenames by bootleggers and their customers was publicised. Age writers continually emphasised the large number of venues selling alcohol, reporting for example that “there are 162 places on Lenox and Seventh avenues, between 128th and 145th streets, where drinks may be secured as easily as before prohibition [sic]”. In this way, the Age was pivotal in drawing attention to the flagrant violation of the Volstead Act within Harlem.

Within Prohibition Harlem, the Volstead Act was systematically violated and the Age was not alone in recognizing these violations. According to jazz critic George Hoefer:

Liquor could be purchased at all the spas [elite clubs] if the customer had the price, which was high. It could also be obtained at one hundred lower-rank Harlem cabarets, perhaps five out of seven cigar stores and luncheonettes, and at numerous “buffet flats” sprinkled around in the apartment houses.

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72 “Furniture, Shoes, Clothes Used to Camouflage Hooch Selling”, New York Age, 30th September 1922.

73 See for example, “Furniture, Shoes, Clothes Used to Camouflage Hooch Selling”, New York Age, 30th September 1922. or “Harlem’s “Hooch” Emporium A Menace to Welfare of City”, New York Age, 16th September 1922.

74 “Harlem the Hooch-Seller’s Paradise, By The Evidence”, New York Age, 21st April 1923.

In addition to purchasing liquor, Harlem residents played a role in its supply. As one resident recalled, “washtubs, bathtubs, and basements became breweries”. Harlemites also routinely opened their homes up as ‘buffet flats’ where entertainment and alcohol were provided, or hosted rent parties that were open to the general public and charged admission. Jazz pianist Willie the Lion Smith, who often performed at rent parties, recalled the scene as follows:

They would crowd a hundred or more people into a seven room railroad flat and the walls would bulge – some of the parties spread to the halls and all over the building…Everybody was always in the best humour – the eggnog bowl would get as many as twelve pints of whisky poured into it in an hour.

It is evident from these testimonies that Prohibition did not produce the desired effect of drying out Harlem. In fact, in the words of the Age, the effect of Prohibition was to “make liquor flow where it never flowed before”.

Writers at the Age directly linked the lack of Prohibition Enforcement with increasing crime and “objectionable behavior” in Harlem. According to the paper, the “Harlem Hooch Situation” was damaging to the “physical and moral health” of the community. In May 1922 it reported:

The increase of crime generally and the lowering of the morale of this section has been in proportion to the increase of the places which sell these drinks.

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77 Smith, Music on My Mind, p.156.
78 “Wide Open Harlem”, New York Age, 2nd September 1922.
79 “Harlemites Make Protest Against Reopening of the Cabaret in Lafayette Bldg.”, New York Age, 7th July 1923.
80 “Harlem the Hooch-Seller’s Paradise, By The Evidence”, New York Age, 21st April 1923.
The increase in public drinking among women – prior to Prohibition women were not admitted to saloons – was one consequence of Prohibition that particularly concerned black conservatives.81 Women who drank in speakeasies were purportedly at risk in two ways – their physical health could be damaged by the poisonous nature of hooch, and so too their mental health, as drunkenness was said to leave them vulnerable to rape. As a 1923 report stated:

This [women frequenting speakeasies] constitutes a dangerous menace to the moral and physical health of the community. Cases have been known in which women, sometimes young girls, have become so intoxicated or doped from the effects of the drinks taken in these backrooms as to become practically helpless…And it is more than probable that some of these girls and women have became [sic] victims of a much more serious crime – their condition would make them easily overcome by men inspired with brutal lust.82

Having been driven into the realm of the illicit, the moral codes that underlay the regulation of public drinking prior to Prohibition no long applied. The ‘Harlem Hooch Situation’ posed, therefore, a direct threat to the uplift project of the Age.

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The reaction of the Age to the impact of Prohibition demonstrates how black conservatives sought to blame those outside the black community for the failure of Prohibition in Harlem. This was achieved through a tactical campaign against widespread violations of the Volstead Act. In this campaign, Prohibition agents, white

82 “Harlemites Make Protest Against Reopening of the Cabaret in Lafayette Bldg.”, New York Age, 7th July 1923.
bootleggers and white visitors to Harlem were all held responsible for the degradation of Harlem into a vice and leisure district. An analysis of the Age campaign serves to counter Lerner’s argument that:

Black Victorians levelled harsh criticism against African Americans who refused to abide by the Volstead Act, condemning them as ‘race traitors’. \(^{83}\)

Lerner’s interpretation of the black conservative reaction is once again overshadowed by his desire to fit Harlem into his wider argument of conservatives pitted against cosmopolitans in the Prohibition era. He subsequently fails to acknowledge the significance of uplift ideology in black conservative thought. The following provides a clear example of Lerner’s attempt to equate black conservatism with white conservatism – thus ignoring the distinctive uplift aspirations of black conservatism. He argues:

The disparity between what the Black Victorians hoped for from Harlem residents and how they actually lived their lives revealed the old guard’s resistance to the vast cultural changed ushered in by the 1920s. They reacted to the intemperance of the era with a paternalistic fury similar to the anger expressed by white temperance reformers at the failure of the dry agenda. Just as William Anderson of the Anti-Saloon League had lashed out at the social behaviour of immigrants and Catholics, Black Victorians now assigned blame for the failure of the Volstead Act in Harlem to the unwillingness of the African-American community to discipline itself. \(^{84}\)

Lerner does not account for black conservatives’ aversion to allocating blame to blacks for the emergence of criminal elements in Harlem because of their acute concern with promoting their community as law abiding and temperate.

\(^{83}\) Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.203.

\(^{84}\) *Ibid*, p.204.
Throughout its campaign, the *Age* described the situation in Harlem using language that emphasised the active role of outsiders in bringing vice to Harlem. Accordingly, the increase in hooch joints on Seventh Avenue is reported by the *Age* as an “invasion” by outside forces.  

Metaphors of disease and contamination were also adopted to ‘other’ the problem of vice in Harlem. Hooch sellers, for example, were purportedly “infesting the neighborhood”. In line with their objective to blame outside forces, the paper editorialised that:

> It is not only an attraction of vicious characters of all sorts who are drawn to the district by such immunity, but the merely giddy and thoughtless amusement seekers of both sexes who are gathered into the crowd and contaminated by the contact.

Therefore, *Age* campaign propagated that outside forces were responsible for importing vice into the community, in order to protect the perceived morality of the black community.

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As part of its effort to shift blame the *Age* held government enforcement agents partly responsible for the open violation of the Volstead Act. It suggested bribery, corruption, and incompetence were widespread among those charged with enforcement of Prohibition. Initially this was the New York City Police, State Prohibition Agents and the Federal Bureau of Prohibition. After the repeal of state

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85 “Visitors In Harlem Made Curious By Sight of Men Posted in Windows As Lookouts For The Many Hooch Joints”, *New York Age*, 4th April 1924.
87 “Wide Open Harlem”, *New York Age*, 2nd September 1922.
enforcement laws in 1923, the *Age* focused its attacks to Federal forces.\(^88\) The *Age* reported on a meeting hosted by Fred R. Moore at which ministers and women discussed the “Crusade Against ‘Hooch’”, and alleged:

> Conditions are so open and unbridled that it would be impossible for policemen not to be aware of them, and that it would be easy to suppress them if proper action was taken by the officers.\(^89\)

Similarly, an *Age* editorial entitled “Shall Hooch Hounds Rule?” suggested,

> It is the boast of bootleggers who run a chain of fake delicatessen, stationary and cigar store that they have influence enough in the Prohibition Enforcement office of the district to bring about the discharge of an officer or secure his transfer to less productive assignments if he gets too gay. The hooch hounds have no objection to paying for protection but there are certain rules the receiver of graft must strictly adhere to or else.\(^90\)

The *Age’s* most potent tactic in suggesting police corruption was publicising the addresses where hooch was allegedly sold and naming the bootleggers thought to be behind the illegal venues. It would print, for example, “Moe Immerman, operating the delicatessen at 519 Lenox Ave” was alleged to supply hooch.\(^91\) The message sent to those responsible for the enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment was clear - if evidence could be so easily obtained by the *Age* where officials having such difficulty enforcing the law? Systemic Police corruption was the answer offered by *Age* editors. The following statement, which appeared together with the addresses of

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\(^{88}\) Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p. 240.

\(^{89}\) “Ministers and Women join Crusade Against Hooch”, *New York Age*, 21\(^{st}\) October 1922.

\(^{90}\) “Shall Hooch Hounds Rule?”, *New York Age*, 24\(^{th}\) November 1923.

\(^{91}\) “Federal Attorney Act to Curb Activities of Harlem’s Hooch Hounds”, *New York Age*, 12\(^{th}\) July 1924.
eighty-two venues where hooch was allegedly sold, is an example of the *Age*’s blunt tone in making accusations of corruption within enforcement agencies:

> How long are hootch sellers to be allowed to defy decency? Illicit hootch-sellers operate openly and brazenly in Harlem. Law enforcement officers are not only defined, but it is openly charged that the bootleggers have complete control of official activities through large sums paid in bribery. Is this true? If not, why is it that Loui, Moe, Hyman, “Chief”, Dominique, Tony, and the other Harlem bootleggers are so bold in their illicit liquor selling?92

The *Age* utilised their publication of alleged police corruption in an attempt to further minimise black responsibility for the supposed deterioration of Harlem.

Beyond bribery, *Age* journalists accused enforcement agencies of purposely pushing vice and crime out of white districts and into Harlem. In September 1922 the *Age* editorialized: “The city administration seems to have given over this section of the town for the exploitation of vicious practices in the way of open drinking, gambling and other violations of the law.”93 Black conservatives argued that the Volstead Act in particular was far less enforced in Harlem than in the rest of New York, stating: “Those who have the interest of Harlem and the Negro race at heart…should see that the law against the sale of intoxicating beverages is enforced in this section of the city, at least as effectively as in other sections.”94 The *Age* fervently argued that Federal and city authorities ignored growing crime in Harlem in an editorial piece from January 1924. Under the headline “Crime and Hootch” attention was drawn to an outbreak of “cutting and slashing and shooting and stabbing, together with

92 “How Long Are Hootch Sellers to Be Allowed to Defy Decency?”, *New York Age*, 1st December 1923.
93 “Exploiting of Vice”, *New York Age*, 9th September 1922.
94 “Harlem the Hooch-Seller’s Paradise, By The Evidence”, *New York Age*, 21st April 1923.
robberies and holdups” that swept through Harlem on New Year’s Eve as a result of the “unlimited sale of hooch”. Despite this outbreak of crime, the Age noted that the divisional chief of New York informed the Prohibition Commissioner “this New Year was the dryest [sic] in the history of New York”. It was, the Age highlighted, as if Harlem did not exist in the eyes of Prohibition enforcement authorities.

While Lerner contends that Prohibition enforcement in Harlem did not differ for the rest of New York, I would argue that the transformation of Harlem during Prohibition suggests that it was neglected in comparison to other sections of the city. According to Lerner, “Harlem was neither ignored nor specifically targeted” in Prohibition enforcement. In making his argument Lerner relies on statistics of police arrests in Harlem. This is a problematic approach given that, for example, a low number of arrests could simultaneously suggest the existence of a law-abiding community or one that is over run by crime but subject to little policing. Heap, however, asserts that one of the primary factors that drove white visitors to Harlem was the lower levels of Prohibition enforcement. He writes:

In comparison with the speakeasies of Greenwich Village and Towertown, however, those located in Harlem and Bronzeville often proved to be even more reliable providers of bootleg liquor, since local enforcement authorities were usually content to allow such illicit activities to flourish in black neighbourhoods.

Furthermore, policing illegal drinking in Harlem was complicated by the fact that enforcement agents were overwhelmingly white. This often made gaining access to

95 “Crime and Hootch”, New York Age, 12th January 1924.
96 Ibid.
97 Lerner, Dry Manhattan, p.223.
98 Heap, Slumming, p.76
the numerous number speakeasies and buffet flats that were hidden within the black community exceptionally difficult.\textsuperscript{99} Hence Harlem was particularly affected by the impact of increased vice and crime during the Prohibition era New York because of the lax enforcement of the Volstead Act.

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The \textit{Age} also shifted blame onto bootleggers; its campaign was labelled a “campaign against bootleggers”.\textsuperscript{100} According to the paper, bootleggers were the greatest threat to the physical and moral health of the Harlem community. While the term bootlegger could encompass an array of Volstead Act violators, from Ministers who illegally sold sacramental wine to families who supplemented their incomes by selling home brews, the \textit{Age} constructed bootleggers as a group of highly organised outsiders who sought to exploit the black community for financial gain. In September 1922, the \textit{Age} printed a letter that the editor Fred R. Moore had received from “The Bootleggers’ Ring”. The letter was written in response to the paper’s publishing of addresses in which hooch was being sold. It began:

Dear Sir: I note with precarious interest your front page spread concerning the bootleg traffic in Harlem. Now this has got to be stopped as it brings about many losses to the white people in [this] section who have invested large sums of money in bootleg and they are in no mood to lose out without a bitter fight against those instrumental in our downfall [sic].\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{100} “Ministers Approve Campaign of the Age Against Bootleggers”, \textit{New York Age}, 7\textsuperscript{th} October 1922.
\textsuperscript{101} “The Bootleggers’ Ring Sends Death Threat to the Editor of Age”, \textit{New York Age}, 23\textsuperscript{rd} September 1922.
Fred R. Moore in his editorial response to the bootleggers’ letter chose to reference the above section of the letter and thus emphasise that the Bootleggers’ Ring represented white interests. In a further attempt to other the problem of Prohibition violations, the Age continually targeted Italian and Jewish bootleggers. While Italian and Jewish bootleggers did dominate Harlem’s trade in illegal liquor, the Age inferred that all violators were either Jewish or Italian, observing: “It is a conspicuous fact that these violators of the law are practically confined to two classes – the Jewish and Italian bootlegger.”\(^{102}\) Criticism of these bootleggers often involved the adoption of racist stereotypes. An example of this is the description of Jewish bootleggers as “cheap Jews”. By targeting bootleggers from outside the black community the Age sought to externalise the problem of Volstead Act violations and endeavoured to maintain the respectability of the black community.

Bootleggers were presented to Age readers as inherently ‘evil’ people whose criminality went well beyond the illegal supply of alcohol. As well as being described as “dishonest and unprincipled”, bootleggers were continually dismissed as less than human “Hooch Hounds”.\(^{103}\) In an article from April 1923 it was reported: “Harlem hooch hounds apparently are beginning to realise that if they do not find a kennel of safety somewhere they are eventually to be kennelled by the police officers and the Federal authorities.”\(^{104}\) The Age sought to emphasise that by supplying liquor bootleggers caused more damage than simply violating the Volstead Act. It asserted:

> The filling of the demand for strong drinks has developed a new class of criminals, mostly foreigners. Smuggling of liquor by sea and air, robbery of

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\(^{102}\) “Bootleggers Boast Of Immunity Won By Large Bribes Paid Officers”, New York Age, 4\(^{th}\) October 1924. For Jewish and Italian prominence in Harlem liquor trade see: Heap, Slumming, p.76.

\(^{103}\) “Shall Hootch Hounds Rule?”, New York Age, 24\(^{th}\) November 1923.

\(^{104}\) “The Age’s Fight Against Hooch Hounds at Last Showing Tangible Result”, New York Age, 19\(^{th}\) April 1924.
warehouses and private vaults, the shooting and stabbing of guards and enforcement officers are some of the crimes growing out of prohibition [sic]. Besides these, the bribery and corruption of public officials, forging of permits for withdrawals are alleged in many cases.  

The Age’s characterization of bootleggers as violent and immoral was conveniently bolstered by Moore’s publication of the death threat he received from the “The Bootleggers’ Ring”. As Jervis Anderson has speculated, the letter may have indeed been forged by Moore to further demonise the bootlegger. The immorality of bootleggers was reiterated in news reports such as “Bootlegger Evicts Hardworking Couple to Sell More Hooch”. Similarly, instances where bootleggers ensured their own escape but left their employees to face the law were also reported. By portraying bootleggers as inherently immoral, the Age attempted to assert the morality of the black community in contrast to the immorality of the bootlegger.

In a more specific attack against bootleggers, the Age opposed the form of alcohol bootleggers sold. Referred to variably in the Age as ‘hootch’ or ‘hooch’, the alcohol sold by bootleggers was generally made from distilled industrial alcohol to which colours and flavours were added so that the beverage resembled some form of liquor. The Age defined hooch as “the term used to embrace various poisonous compounds vended in the name of liquor.” Although this description is clearly hyperbolic, hooch was indeed often poisonous. The distilling process, utilised by bootleggers, sometimes failed to remove the poisons that were added to industrial alcohol by the

106 Jervis Anderson, This was Harlem, a cultural portrait, 1900-1950 (New York: Farrar Starus Giroux, 1982), p.148.
government in an attempt to discourage its use in the production of alcoholic beverages. It was illegal hooch rather than alcohol that the Age was fervently opposed to, claiming “not only is the sale of liquor forbidden by state and federal law, but the stuff sold by the bootleggers is not even honest liquor.” In October 1923, under the headline “Shall Hooch Hounds Rule” the Age editorialised that:

The white men becoming millionaires by selling denatured alcohol are nothing short of murderers. Under no consideration would they consent to drink what they permit others to put into their system.\(^{110}\)

As well as the risk hooch posed to the physical health of those who consumed it, there was a purported effect on mental health that went beyond normal intoxication. Numerous stories in the Age reported that hooch drinkers had suffered psychological episodes or otherwise behaved out of character as a direct result of their hooch consumption. One example concerned a woman who, after obtaining a drink from an Eighth Avenue grocery store, lost consciousness and awoke in the psychopathic ward of a local hospital.\(^{111}\) Similarly, a “drink crazed policeman” was reported to have indiscriminately started shooting at a passersby after consuming “hooch”.\(^{112}\) The belief that hooch could induce insanity was shared by a Harlem fire marshal who claimed a spate of fires had been lit by pyromaniacs that where “crazed with the vile hooch”.\(^{113}\) Evidently, the Age targeted bootleggers not only because they sold alcohol but also because the alcohol they sold was considered a potential menace to physical and mental health of its drinkers.

\(^{110}\) “Shall Hootch Hounds Rule?”, New York Age, 24\(^{th}\) November 1923
\(^{111}\) “Furniture, Shoes, Clothes Used to Camouflage Hooch Selling”, New York Age, 30\(^{th}\) September 1922.
\(^{112}\) “Ministers Approve Campaign of The Age Against Bootleggers”, New York Age, 7\(^{th}\) October 1922.
\(^{113}\) “Hooch-Crazed Fiends Set Incendiary Fires, Charges Fire Marshal”, New York Age, 15\(^{th}\) November 1924.
The *Age* repeatedly presented blacks that purchased hooch as the victims of unscrupulous bootleggers. This approach allowed the paper to further its argument that the social problems arising from Prohibition in Harlem were exclusively the work of those outside of the community. Blacks who purchased hooch were invariably described in the *Age* as weak, foolish and naïve; they were also characterized as lower class. In keeping with this construction, bootleggers were said to be “catering to the weakness of the lower class Negro”.¹¹⁴ The paper inferred that the onus for breaking the law was on the bootlegger when it editorialised that:

> One of the worst features of this development is the bringing to Harlem of an objectionable class of men, a group whose only thought is the making of a dollar through the pandering to the worst desires of certain elements of the community. This pandering, it is pointed out, leads to the debauching and debasing of not only the vicious element, but entraps and besmirches many whose weaknesses of moral fibre makes them unable to resist contaminating surroundings.¹¹⁵

This paternalistic approach was typical of the black elite class. In line with uplift ideology the *Age* sought to emphasise class divisions over racial ones. Subsequently, the *Age* argued that lower class blacks were vulnerable to involvement in crime and vice in the same way the lower class of any race were. To further shift the blame from the black drinker, the paper chose to highlight that hooch was particularly addictive. It reported:

> It is asserted by well-informed people that there are hundreds of persons who were not addicted to the use of intoxicants prior to the Volstead Act, who are

now patronizing and spending more than they can afford to spend, the unprincipled bootlegger who sells whatever kind of liquor he can get hold of, regardless of its purity [sic].\textsuperscript{116}

In an attempt to maintain the respectability of the black community, the \textit{Age} propagated images of immoral bootleggers who took advantage of lower class blacks.

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White visitors to Harlem were another group the \textit{Age} targeted in an attempt to other the negative impact of a lack of Prohibition enforcement away from the black community. Spurred by the Negro Vogue, whites flocked to Harlem during the 1920s to either catch a glimpse of, or become entwined with, ‘black culture’. In seeking recreation within a community on the fringes of mainstream society, white visitors to Harlem involved themselves in a practice know as ‘slumming’. Prior to the ‘Negro Vogue’ of visiting Harlem, New Yorkers had gone slumming in the bohemian culture of Greenwich Village and the opium dens of China Town.\textsuperscript{117} However, the history of slumming goes back to well-to-do classes visiting lower class areas in Victorian England.\textsuperscript{118} Slumming was based on the widely held assumption that the moral constraints of the white middle class did not apply in these fringe communities.\textsuperscript{119} It was therefore inextricably linked to the imagining of ‘the other’ in modernist western literature and art. The prevalent stereotype that blacks were not bound by the restrictions of bourgeoisie morality – that they were primitive, sexually promiscuous, wild and carefree – was a key trope in the Negro Vogue that, together with the availability of alcohol, made Harlem an alluring place to go slumming. Given the

\textsuperscript{116} “Ministers Approve Campaign of the Age Against Bootleggers”, \textit{New York Age}, 7\textsuperscript{th} October 1922.
\textsuperscript{117} Heap, \textit{Slumming}, pp.3-5.
\textsuperscript{119} Heap, \textit{Slumming}, p.3
Black conservatives emphasis on promoting images of black respectability it is unsurprising that they were fervently opposed slumming in Harlem. As David Chinitz has explained:

Atavistic conceptions assume and imply an inherent disparity between whites and blacks, dooming the latter to an irrevocable, if supposedly enviable, Otherness.\(^\text{120}\)

Irrevocable Otherness was the very definition of blackness that black conservatives continually opposed through the pursuit of white middle class notions of morality. *Age* editors openly opposed slumming in Harlem in editorials such as “Is Harlem to be a “Chinatown” that reads:

Is North Harlem to be known as a community of homes, or one of the city’s chief slumming centers as “Chinatown and the Bowery? …To others who make the charge that The Age is trying to make a “Sunday School out of Harlem” we say that if stamping out hootch joints and closing up some of the undesirable cabarets is “making a Sunday School out of Harlem” we plead guilty.\(^\text{121}\)

The practice of slumming in Harlem offended black conservatives because it assumed a degree of underlying moral laxity within the black community. In response to this, slummers became the targets for the *Age*’s anti-bootlegging campaign – allowing the paper to simultaneously oppose the Negro Vogue definition of blackness and conveniently shift the culpability for increasing vice in Harlem onto whites.

The cabarets visited by slummers, whether segregated or mixed, white owned or black owned, were more than “the bait to draw jaded white pleasure seekers to

\(^{120}\text{Chinitz, “Rejuvenation Through Joy”, p.64}\)

\(^{121}\text{“Is Harlem to be a ChinaTown?”, New York Age, 27th October 1923.}\)
northern territory.” More importantly, they became sites of cultural production for black performers who challenged conservative ideas of morality. As Vogel argued, this posed a threat from within the black community to uplift ideology. The black artist Bessie Smith performed to cabaret audiences lyrics such as the following:

Once I lived the life of a millionaire,
Spending my money, I didn’t care
I carried my friends out for a good time,
Buying bootleg liquor, champagne and wine…
Then I began to fall so low…
Nobody knows you when you’re down and out

Similarly the popular cabaret song *Hard Hearted Hannah* threatened the middle-class concept of inherent female morality. The lyrics included:

They call her Hard Hearted Hannah,
The vamp of Savannah,
The meanest gal in town;
Leather is tough, but Hannah’s heart is tougher,
She's a gal who loves to see men suffer!
To tease 'em, and thrill 'em, to torture and kill 'em,
Is her delight, they say,
I saw her at the seashore with a great big pan,
There was Hannah pouring water on a drowning man.

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122 “Writing up Harlem”, *New York Age*, 22nd February 1930.
By producing works that subverted middle class values, black artists directly rejected uplift as the most effective method to improve their status. Langston Hughes summarises the attitude of these black artists towards black conservatives, proclaiming:

Let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing the Blues penetrate the closed ears of the colored near-intellectual until they listen and perhaps understand...We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame.126

In this way, black artists represented a significant threat to the uplift ideology that the Age unwaveringly subscribed to.

Uplift views on the subject of sexuality faced a challenge from both patrons and performers in Harlem’s cabarets and clubs. In describing the cabaret performance at Harlem’s racially mixed Lenox Club, a Daily News reporter commented:

You will not enjoy it if you blush at the dancing in the revue that suggests the end to which dancing [is] originally dedicated.127

Similarly, patrons on the dance floors of racially mixed “black and tans” challenged uplift ideology’s emphasis on sexual restraint. At these venues, behaviour ranged from dancing with bodies pushed together to actually “going through the act of sexual intercourse in view of others”.128 Prostitution also flourished in Harlem’s clubs and

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127 “Harlem Breakfast Caps Gotham Night”, Daily News, 31st October 1929, New York, quoted in Anderson, This was Harlem, p.169.
The emergence of a number of homosexual “black and tans” was another phenomenon that subverted uplift notions of sexuality. The Age perceived clubs and cabarets as potentially jeopardising black conservative ideology. Therefore, they were ignored in keeping with its aim of exclusively promoting the ‘positive’ elements of black society.

The black conservative writers of the Age opposed slumming and attempted to other the problem of Prohibition violations and vice by blaming Harlem’s white-owned cabarets. Connie’s Inn, a cabaret located in the basement of the Lafayette building off Seventh Avenue, was targeted by the Age. It was owned by Connie Immerman, who the Age claimed was behind several illegal hooch joints. Connie’s was reportedly “the swankiest of all the Harlem places”. It catered specifically to whites wishing to be entertained by black performers. Performances were typical of Harlem’s clubs catering to white audiences, relying on definitions of blackness that combined romanticised visions of the antebellum South featuring characters such as ‘jocular mammys, shiftless urban dandies, and alluring jezebels’, with the stereotype of blacks as sexualized ‘primitives’. Objections were also made to the type of white patrons Connie’s did admit. The Age argued that blacks were being excluded in favour of “slummers”, sports, “coke-addicts,” and high-rollers of the white race who came to Harlem to indulge in illegal recreations and associations.” In 1924 Fred R. Moore advanced an Age campaign to deny Connie’s Inn a dance hall and cabaret license. In his statement to the Commissioner of Licenses, Moore claimed:

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130 Ibid, p.81.
132 Heap, *Slumming*, p.191
133 “Harvest of Hooch Crimes In Harlem Keep Policemen Busy”, *New York Age*, 12th January 1924.
Liquor was being sold, or has been sold in the Inn, and that gunmen, thugs, thieves and prostitutes from other sections of the city made the place their regular resort.\textsuperscript{134}

Targeting Connie’s Inn was yet another means by which black conservatives could charge others with the importation of crime and vice to Harlem. It also reflected their abhorrence towards the prevalence of racist performances and practices within the black metropolis of Harlem.

An analysis of the \textit{Age} campaign shows that Black owned cabarets were not targeted to the same extent as white owned venues. In fact, the \textit{Age} was highly supportive of back cabarets as prominent examples of the business acumen of the black community. Although many black owned venues were spaces that allowed or even promoted subversive activity, both in terms of Volstead Act violations and other vices, the \textit{Age} preferred to restrict their assertion of blame to white slummers. Black conservatives downplayed vice in black cabarets and suggested that on the rare occasion that vice did exist, it was either initiated or encouraged by whites. According to the \textit{Age}: 

\begin{quote}
The cabarets and nightclubs run by colored proprietors are orderly and decently conducted, despite the efforts of occasional white visitors to induce the staging of forbidden performances.\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

This counters Lerner’s claim that black conservatives were unequivocally opposed cabarets, whether black or white owned.\textsuperscript{136} The \textit{Age}’s attitude towards black owned cabarets is explained by uplift’s emphasis on the need to support black businesses as a means of economic development within the black community. In a report on the

\textsuperscript{134} “Asks Refusal of License to Connie’s”, \textit{New York Age}, 7\textsuperscript{th} June 1924.
\textsuperscript{135} “Giving Harlem a Bad Name”, \textit{New York Age}, July 23\textsuperscript{rd} 1927.
\textsuperscript{136} Lerner, \textit{Dry Manhattan}, p.211.
establishment of the Colored Cabaret Owners’ Association, the role of black-owned cabarets in positively influencing the community was stressed:

There are some fifteen owners enrolled in the organization, and they employ about two hundred people…Seventy per cent of the employed personnel is married, averaging about five persons to a family, a total of about seven hundred people actually supported and cared for by the cabaret business. The bulk of this cash is spent with Harlem merchants.  

The Colored Cabaret Owners’ Association was a group established by black cabaret owners to regulate the conduct of their venues “with a view to eliminating all objectionable features”. Although the organisation was essentially a public relations body, the Age drew upon the group as evidence that, although vice was present in black owned clubs, owners were actively attempting to remove it.

The impact of Prohibition on Harlem posed a direct threat to black conservatives and their uplift ideology. The open violation of the Volstead Act within the black community threatened uplift’s emphasis on adherence to the law. Subversive elements that challenged black middle class values flourished at private parties, mixed cabarets and among black artists, writers and performers. However, the Age response to Harlem’s transformation under Prohibition seemingly ignored the possibility of black responsibility. This was necessary so as not to compromise the positive image of the black community that the Age sought to promote. In fact, the Age chose to ‘other’ all responsibility for the situation in Harlem, onto those from outside the community. Government enforcement agencies were blamed for their failure to enforce the law.

137 “Harlem Cabaret Owners Association Formed For Regulating of Cabarets”, New York Age, 26th May 1923.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
Similarly, the *Age* manufactured the character of ‘evil foreign bootleggers’ and again shifted blame. Slumming whites and the white owned cabarets were a convenient target for the *Age* because they were an easily identifiable external group whose presence in Harlem fostered both the perpetuation of black stereotypes and undesired subversive elements within black culture.
Chapter Three

On The Rocks:

Remedies for a Failed Experiment

When the Age linked vice and crime in Harlem to Prohibition it saw two options to remedy the situation –improved enforcement of the Volstead Act and/or its modification to legalise beer and wine by defining them as non-intoxicating. Calling for greater enforcement and pushing for the modification of the law formed a two-pronged attack against Prohibition. While the Age did not want the Eighteenth Amendment to remain a part of the Constitution, it did not consider repeal politically viable in the short-term. The political difficulties associated with the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment were acknowledged by both wets and drys as it required a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress. The continued political influence of the Anti-Saloon Legal furthered the myth that repeal was impossible. In combatting the adverse effects of Prohibition the Age moved between its two tactics throughout the period 1922-1925. This highlights that the primary motivating factor for the Age campaign was a desire to improve and attempt to remedy conditions in Harlem. From 1926 onwards, the failure of enforcement to quell the illegal liquor trade in Harlem lead the paper to focus solely on amendment of the Volstead Act. As the decade progressed the political and social climate changed, making repeal a political possibility. The Age supported the movement for repeal from the moment it became a viable option because it held Prohibition responsible for the social degradation of Harlem. In this way, my argument directly challenges Lerner’s understanding of black conservative attitudes and responses to Prohibition. In particular, I argue against Lerner’s assumption that black conservatives called for the enforcement of the
Eighteenth Amendment because they supported Prohibition. By highlighting the similarities between the Age campaign and that of organised anti-prohibition groups, I question Lerner’s perspective that black conservatives opposed repeal until the end of the 1920s. According to Lerner, repeal signified that “The Black Victorians had been silenced”.  

This chapter argues that black conservatives, together with other groups who recognised the failure of Prohibition, were in fact vindicated by repeal. The Age campaign was a direct reaction against the negative impact of Prohibition on Harlem. Repeal was therefore supported by the Age as the ultimate solution to a failed experiment.

The Age held Prohibition responsible for the social predicament Harlem found itself in as a result of a thriving illegal liquor industry. According the paper, the legal liquor industry had had a far lesser impact on the community than the Eighteenth Amendment. In response to this, they became openly critical of Prohibition as soon as its destructive impact was revealed. In 1922 it suggested,

The supply of intoxicating liquor, formally confined to the saloons and family liquor store, was a comparatively harmless traffic in a legitimate product, beside the illicit flood of noxious beverages sold to all comers in all sorts of places without regulation or legal restraint.

The Age also firmly believed that Prohibition did not represent the will of the people, but rather was the result of an unfortunate political circumstance. In particular, it argued that people in the North had not been in favour of Prohibition. In an editorial on the “Truth About Prohibition”, the editor suggested,

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140 Lerner, Dry Manhattan, p.225.
141 “Hooch and the Churches”, New York Age, 30th September 1922.
The fact is that the present prohibition [sic] amendment was based upon the action of a large number of Southern States, who felt that the economic value of the Negroes as workers would be increased by the adoption of a local prohibition policy that would affect black men only, leaving sufficient loopholes, so that the whites could obtain their accustomed portion of corn juice.\textsuperscript{142}

This, the editorial continued, combined with the political lobbying of the Anti-Saloon League, resulted in the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment,

The white sentiment of the South on this question was backed up by the growth of prohibition in the West and the propaganda of the anti-saloon people, who were keen to avail themselves of advantaged offered by the situation.\textsuperscript{143}

Dry forces had also, according to the same editorial, benefited from the passing of wartime restrictions on alcohol manufacture that had paved the way for continued regulation. The general public and liquor interests were charged with not taking the possibility of Prohibition seriously enough to have mounted an effective opposition campaign.

The necessities of the war also added to the favourable sentiment, which finally succeeded in carrying the amendment, aided by the incredulity of the liquor interests and the indifference of the general public, who never believed that prohibition [sic] would become a fact.\textsuperscript{144}

While openly critical of the Eighteenth Amendment, the \textit{Age} did not initially entertain the political possibility of repeal. In fact, it questioned the logic of those who did,

\textsuperscript{142} "Truth About Prohibition", \textit{New York Age}, 6\textsuperscript{th} January 1923.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
The question immediately arises, how does Judge Talley propose to abolish a law that has become part of the constitution [sic] and the enforcement of which is made obligatory by an act of Congress.\textsuperscript{145}

This reflected the significant political and legal obstacles that had to be overcome before repeal could become viable. Although the \textit{Age} regarded the Eighteenth Amendment as deeply problematic, it considered the political possibility of repealing the law highly unlikely.

In addition to its criticism of the Eighteenth Amendment, the \textit{Age} attacked the Volstead Act by constructing it as dry fanaticism. While the Eighteenth Amendment had outlawed the manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating liquors, it was the Volstead Act that defined ‘intoxicating liquors’ as anything with an alcohol content above 0.5\%.\textsuperscript{146} Wayne Wheeler, the driest of the drys and the head of the Anti-Saloon League, drafted the Act. The \textit{Age} criticised it as extremism in an editorial from May 1922. Under the headline “Rational Enforcement” the editor argued:

\begin{quote}
Like all sudden reforms the anti-saloon forces went to extremes…Instead of allowing a reasonable latitude in the sale of non-intoxicating beverages like beer and wines, the law sought to make America dry to the degree of aridity.\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}

This radicalism had, according to the \textit{Age}, fostered criminal elements and increased the popularity of hard liquor. The editorial continued,

\begin{quote}
This drastic measure worked only to the advantage of the bootlegger and the illicit distiller. While beer and wines were driven from ordinary sale, the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{145} “Ridicule of Prohibition”, \textit{New York Age}, 8\textsuperscript{th} August 1925.
\textsuperscript{146} Lerner, \textit{Dry Manhattan}, p.27.
\textsuperscript{147} “Rational Enforcement”, \textit{New York Age}, 27\textsuperscript{th} May 1922.
procuring of whiskey and other liquors has been easy at a price. The filling of
the demand for strong drink has developed a new class of criminals.\textsuperscript{148}
The \textit{Age} linked the Volstead Act with crime, and hence claimed that the alteration of
the Act would prove an effective solution, stating
\begin{quote}
What is needed to secure a workable system of prohibition is a rational
enforcement act, that will permit the use of beers and wines that are not
regarded as intoxicants.\textsuperscript{149}
\end{quote}
In contrast to the complex political requirements for repeal, the alteration of the
Volstead Act required only a simple majority in both houses.\textsuperscript{150} The \textit{Age} advanced the
alteration of the Volstead Act as an achievable means by which the mistake of
Prohibition could be rectified.

In focusing on the alteration of the Volstead Act the \textit{Age} were in line with others who
similarly acknowledged the ill effects of the law. For most of the 1920s the prevalent
view was that repeal would prove impossible because of the numbers required in
Congress and the political influence of the Anti-Saloon League. As Lerner reveals,
even by the late 1920s,
\begin{quote}
Prohibitionists could still threaten legislators with enough dry votes to bounce
them from office...As a result, many politicians continued to vote dry, not
because they believed in Prohibition, but because they still feared the Anti-
Saloon League.\textsuperscript{151}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{150} David Kyvig, \textit{Repealing National Prohibition} (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2nd ed, 2000),
p.54. \\
\textsuperscript{151} Lerner, \textit{Dry Manhattan}, p.230
\end{flushright}
Both wets and drys stressed the hopelessness of the repeal cause. Archibald Stevenson, a New York Attorney who viewed Prohibition as an intrusion on states rights, used the following metaphor to characterise the situation.

The mechanism controlling the amending power of the Federal Constitution is very much like the ratchet on a cogwheel. The wheel may be turned conveniently in one direction, but it cannot be reversed.\textsuperscript{152}

The author of the Eighteenth Amendment, Morris Sheppard, similarly stated:

There is as much chance of repealing the Eighteenth Amendment as there is for a humming bird to fly to the plant Mars with the Washington Monument tied to its tail.\textsuperscript{153}

More hopeful opponents of Prohibition still maintained that repeal was unlikely in the short-term. Stuyvesant Fish, the Treasure of the New York division of the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment (AAPA), presented a comparatively optimistic view that, “the purging of the Constitution of the prohibition amendment will take time and may have to be left to out children’s children to work out”\textsuperscript{154} As a result of this acknowledgement, those against Prohibition focused, in the early 1920s, on altering the definition of intoxicating to allow for the consumption of beer and wine.\textsuperscript{155} The Age therefore, in calling for the legalisation of beer and wine, reflected the approach of the wider anti-Prohibition movement that attempted to make achievable progress in countering the negative effects of Prohibition.

Although the Age opposed the rigidity of the Prohibition laws, it argued, for much of its campaign, that they should be respected and enforced so long as they remained

\textsuperscript{152} Kyvig, Repealing National Prohibition, p.53.  
\textsuperscript{153} Okrent, Last Call, p.330.  
\textsuperscript{154} Kyvig, Repealing National Prohibition, pp.54-55.  
\textsuperscript{155} Kyvig, Repealing National Prohibition, p.54.
law. This approach is reflective of uplift ideology’s emphasis on respect for the law, the constitution, and adherence to proper political and legal processes. According to the *Age* “every citizen should abide by existing laws as a duty of good citizenship”. In promoting this ideology the *Age* drew upon the help of church leaders, suggesting that, “every pastor and every church member should insist that the law be enforced so long as it remains a law, whether he is in favour of prohibition or not.” Rev. William Hayes was among several church leaders who agreed to this proposition. In a letter to the editor, he reiterated such sentiments stating,

> Prohibition is the law of the land, and like every other law it should be obeyed so long as it is the law. If people do not want prohibition, there is an orderly method by which the law may be amended…No one has the right to violate a law simply because that particular law is not to his liking.

During the election campaign for Governor of New York, the *Age* endorsed Col. William Haywood, with the succinct statement,

> Our Choice For Governor, Col. William Haywood

> “No law however is too great or too important not to be changed if it is changed by orderly processes of a free people operating under their own Constitution. And no man or woman is too good not to obey that law as long as it is on the statue books” – William Haywood U.S Attorney, Southern District of New York.

The *Age* reiterated its position in a 1925 editorial that attacked other newspapers for making light of Prohibition, “let the newspapers treat the subject of prohibition [sic] more seriously and create respect for the law, even if they feel compelled to work for

156 “‘Hooch’ and the Churches”, *New York Age*, 30th September 1922.
158 “Ministers Approve Campaign of the Age Against Bootleggers”, *New York Age*, 7th October 1922.
159 “Enforcing Prohibition”, *New York Age*, 24th May 1924.
its repeal”. The black conservative belief that the Eighteenth Amendment should be respected and enforced was also closely tied to its strong opposition towards a seeming Southern disregard for the constitution amendments that guaranteed black voting and citizenship rights. Therefore, it is critical for historians to distinguish between supporting the enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment and agreeing with its existence. The Age did the former but not the later.

It is evident that Lerner does not acknowledge that uplift ideology dictated that the law must be upheld regardless of the perceived merit of any particular law. This nuance within black conservative thought was fundamental in shaping the Age campaign against Prohibition. As a result, the Age protest serves to undermine Lerner’s broader argument that,

Prohibition, and the rebellion against it, had been a struggle over the direction American society would take for the rest of century. Lerner’s interpretation allows no space for black conservative opposition. He projects the view that those opposed Prohibition represented a “cultural rebellion” against those who favoured it. He claims,

As their rebellion moved from simple everyday acts like making their own wine or drinking and dancing in speakeasies to more focused wet activism in the realm of politics, New Yorkers helped steer the nation away from the moral absolutism of the drys and toward both a more tolerant view of American society and a more practical understanding of the relationship between the government and its citizens.

161 Lerner, Dry Manhattan, p.308.
162 Ibid.
Lerner’s aim of making his “cultural rebellion” argument relate to Harlem explains his attempts to suggest that, despite the evidence, black conservatives were in favour of the Eighteenth Amendment and opposed to its repeal. In fact, calls for greater enforcement of Prohibition by the Age, went hand-in-hand with criticism of it. This seemingly contradictory approach reflects that paper was motivated by the practical objective of addressing the crime and vice situation in Harlem. With repeal inconceivable in the short term, the Age looked to greater enforcement as a rational method to quell the illegal liquor trade. Calls for enforcement, together with calls for amendment, were part of a two-pronged attack by the Age throughout the period 1922-1925. The duality of this approach was outlined in an editorial from May 1924 entitled “Enforcing Prohibition”,

> While the drastic features of the Volstead act [sic] may be inconsistent with the best interests of the community, because they encourage bootlegging and the manufacture of poisonous substitutes for real liquor. The only feasible way to right these evils is by enforcing the act [sic] until better means are provided. In the meantime a referendum should be submitted to the people in order to get a popular expression on the subject of prohibition [sic] and the best way to enforce it.\(^{163}\)

Therefore, believing in the impossibility of repeal and the difficulties of amendment, the Age encouraged greater enforcement of the Volstead Act as the most expedient method to remove the social harm Prohibition had inflicted.

The Age campaign against Prohibition violations was motivated by a genuine belief that greater enforcement would improve conditions in Harlem. After the initial exposé

\(^{163}\) “Enforcing Prohibition”, *New York Age*, 24\(^{th}\) May 1924.
of various hooch joints, the *Age* published a series of editorials to take stock of the situation. Their view was initially positive. In an editorial entitled “Harlem Bootleggers Perturbed” bootleggers were said to be “disturbed at the publicity given to their operation through recent publication in The *Age*. The reporting of widespread violations had purportedly made it to those in charge of enforcement. The *Age* editorialised,

> The action of The *Age* in giving publicity to the conditions that so offended public decency in Harlem is recognized by the officials who have looked into the matter... The result of this investigation should bring about an improvement in conditions.

Indeed, a week after the above editorial, improved conditions were reported as police stationed officers in many of the places mentioned by the *Age*. In some cases, the *Age* reported, this had lead alleged bootleggers to close their doors.

> The furniture dealer, who dispensed a high-grade of furniture polish under a liquor label, or a low-grade of liquor under a furniture polish label, held an auction of the few pieces of furniture and left for drier fields.

The *Age* named the locations where hooch was sold in a concerted effort to encourage enforcement and hence reduce the crime and vice that emerged around the illegal sale of alcohol in Harlem.

The *Age* campaign against Prohibition was heavily influenced by the disturbing social conditions within Harlem. If one method proved ineffective in lowering vice and crime this was swifty acknowledged and a new approach was taken. By early 1923, the naming of venues had not had the positive impact on Harlem that the *Age* had

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164 “Harlem Bootleggers Perturbed”, 7th October 1922.
165 “Police Cooperation”, *New York Age*, 21st October 1922.
166 “‘Bootleg’ Trade Hampered”, *New York Age*, 28th October 1922.
hoped for. Under the headline, “Harlem “Hooch” Situation Attains Former Proportions” the continued dire nature of the situation was acknowledged,

Despite the campaign conducted by The New York Age and several other organizations a few months ago against the sale of illicit liquor, commonly known as “hooch” in Harlem, which was being done so openly on Lenox avenue [sic], this sale goes on unchecked.\textsuperscript{167}

The article goes on to reveal the vicissitudes in the fight against hooch,

Through the expose by The Age and an investigation by Deputy Inspector McGrath, and a group of prohibition [sic] officials, this sale was checked somewhat, but evidently the traffickers of “hooch” no longer fear prosecution.\textsuperscript{168}

The situation had reportedly degenerated further by April 1923, with the opening of several small ‘cafes’ that joined the already huge number of delicatessens, newspaper stands and stationery stores that illegally sold liquor in Harlem.\textsuperscript{169} In response to this, the \textit{Age} chose to focus on alternate ways to win its battle against the hooch situation. It recognised when its methods needed to be reassessed.

The opposition of the \textit{Age} to Prohibition is further evidenced in their support of the repeal of New York’s state law for the enforcement of Prohibition, the Mullan-Gage Law. The Mullan-Gage Law was the state level equivalent of the Volstead Act. It made enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment a duty of state authorities. Like the Volstead Act it outlawed the manufacture, sale and transportation of beverages with an alcohol content above 0.5%.\textsuperscript{170} It was repealed by the New York State Legislature

\textsuperscript{167} “Harlem “Hooch” Situation Attains Former Proportions”, \textit{New York Age}, 17\textsuperscript{th} February 1923.
\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{170} Lerner, \textit{Dry Manhattan}, p.77.
in 1923. This was achieved through the Cuvillier Bill, and the signature of New York Governor, Al Smith. The *Age* saw the repeal as a positive step towards the implementation of a workable enforcement law, such as one that would allow for the consumption of beer and wine. According to the *Age*, the repeal of the law was “a candid admission of its failure”.\(^{171}\) Through editorials the *Age* opportunistically encouraged a similar repeal of the Volstead Act, suggesting,

The Volstead act [sic] should likewise be repealed and a rational regulation of the liquor traffic adopted that would permit the use of beer and wine.

Unfortunately for the *Age* campaign, the repeal of the state enforcement laws did not lead to the drafting of a new state level enforcement law; rather state authorities were unobligated to enforce Prohibition, leaving the mammoth task of enforcement to a small number of federal Prohibition agents. Despite this, the support the *Age* gave to the repeal of the Mullan-Gage Law highlights that they were in favour of reforming the dry laws.

In the aftermath of the Mullen-Gage repeal, the *Age* exploited state level political opposition to Prohibition to urge federal politicians to modify the Volstead Act. It outlined its approach in an editorial entitled “Sanity in Prohibition”, sparked by comments from Senator James Couzens of Michigan who had acknowledged the failure of Prohibition enforcement and the acute need for reform.\(^{172}\) The *Age* praised him for having “the courage to take issue with the radical policy of the Volstead act [sic].” Senator Couzens proposed that the definition of “intoxicating” be moved from 0.5% to 5%, which in effect would lead to the legalisation of beer. The *Age* suggested

\(^{171}\) “Repealing a Dead Law”, *New York Age*, 12\(^{th}\) May 1923.

\(^{172}\) “Sanity in Prohibition”, *New York Age*, 21\(^{st}\) July 1923.
that the dire situation in Harlem necessitated the legalisation of stronger beverages, namely wine, in order to disenfranchise the bootlegging industry. It editorialised,

To those familiar with the widespread manufacture and sale of poisonous alcoholic decoctions…this suggestion by Senator Couzens appears to be the most sensible solution of a vicious situation. He might even have gone further and advocated the allowance of wine with meals, which would not be in the nature of an intoxicating beverage. The use of beer and wine as beverages is a practice warranted by long usage and based on sound hygienic principles.\footnote{\textit{Sanity in Prohibition}, \textit{New York Age}, 21\textsuperscript{st} July 1923.}

Therefore, when the opportunity presented itself the \textit{Age} pushed for the modification of the Volstead Act. It was unwaveringly committed to measures it thought would prove most effective, thus while encouraging the legalisation of beer the \textit{Age} also pushed for the legalisation of wine.

The \textit{Age} expressed great enthusiasm for innovative and effective methods of Prohibition enforcement such as the padlock method. Padlocking venues where liquor had been sold was an approach developed and implemented by the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Emory C. Bucker. It involved the Bucker’s office collecting evidence against venues and then filing for injunctions against them. Padlocking saw venues closed for up to one year.\footnote{\textit{Lerner, Dry Manhattan}, p.154.} This method bypassed the corruption of the Police Department and the Bureau of Prohibition. The owners of Padlock venues were prevented from leasing their property for the duration of the padlock injunction. The \textit{Age} considered padlocking a sensible solution. In the editorial “Padlocks Promised for Harlem” the benefits of the new method were explained,
Under the padlock injunction system now being tried by Mr. Buckner the proceedings are shortened and action more summary. No time is wasted in waiting for the case to come to trial, but upon proof of the violation of the law an order is issued for the padlocking of the place for a certain period, running from one to twelve months. This operates to close up the joint as soon as the order is signed by the judge.\textsuperscript{175}

The editorial reveals that support for the padlock was based on its promised effectiveness at curbing the damaging hooch trade,

Action of this sort by the United States authorities will help to make the campaign stated by The Age more effective and stop the sale of poisonous liquor in Harlem. The determination of the United States Attorney to extend the operation of the padlock injunction to Harlem is a most hopeful sign, and ample evidence will be found to close all the booze joints whose addresses have been published from time to time in this paper.\textsuperscript{176}

Age support for the Padlock was heightened by the continued failure of political efforts to amend the Volstead Act. As Kyvig argues, in the aftermath of a failed attempt to pass a bill legalising 2.75\% beer, the political lobby to repeal prohibition languished over the period 1924-1926.\textsuperscript{177} As such, Age support for the padlock provides another example of their focus on the most expedient methods of effecting change in Harlem.

The success of padlocking was short-lived, and in response the Age shifted its campaign to focus on the source of bootleggers’ alcohol. Despite the widespread padlocking of venues in Harlem, the Age reported that “Bootleggers are as active as

\textsuperscript{175} “Padlocks Promised For Harlem”, \textit{New York Age}, 28\textsuperscript{th} March 1925.
\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{177} Kyvig, \textit{Repealing National Prohibition}, p.61.
they ever were, closed in one place they immediately open up in another location.”\textsuperscript{178}

The article explained the failure of padlocks to have a long-term impact,

Hooch joint operators in Harlem are continuing their operations with all the former seeming disregard for law restrictions, although the number of padlock injunctions granted by Federal Judges are increased in number. The real condition is that when a joint is closed at one address by the padlock process the same operator and his employees promptly open up the same business, frequently on the same day, in a different location.\textsuperscript{179}

This forced the \textit{Age} to suggest other ways of hindering the bootlegging industry. It outlined the need to focus on the original source of bootleg liquor, ‘industrial’ alcohol plants. The \textit{Age} expressed its new position within a discussion on “Stills and Padlocks”, noting,

The United States Attorney in this district has tried to curb the sale of liquor by the use of padlocks on places selling it and by the seizure of stills and stocks of liquor. His zeal is to be commended, but the results have been inconsiderable…What is needed is to stop the traffic at its source. Stop the leakage of grain alcohol, denatured or not, from industrial plants, or the manufacturers who withdraw it, ostensibly for legitimate uses, and prevent its diversion for bootleg purposes.\textsuperscript{180}

This shift was an acknowledgement of the failure of previous efforts at enforcement. This acknowledgement was further reflected through the transformation of \textit{Age} reports on the violations in Harlem- from this point the paper no longer included the address lists that had been a feature since the beginning of its campaign.

\textsuperscript{178} “Bootleggers Are As Active in Harlem As They Ever Were”, \textit{New York Age}, 27\textsuperscript{th} June 1925.
\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Ibid.}
In 1926 the political movement against Prohibition began to gain momentum. The position of the *Age* continued to mirror that of the organised anti-Prohibition groups. Early in the year a Joint Legislative Committee of Congress met to discuss the impact of Prohibition and proposals for modification of the Volstead Act. A significant portion of the evidence presented to the Joint Legislative Committee reflected the complaints of the *Age*. Ardent Anti-Prohibitionist, Attorney Julian Codman, declared that,

> [The Volstead Act] has done incredible harm instead of good; that as a temperance measure it has been a pitiable failure; that it as failed to prevent drinking; that it has failed to decrease crime; that, as a matter of fact, it has increased both; that it has promoted bootlegging and smuggling to an extent never known before in the history of the world; that it has spread illicit distilling over this country until no part is free from the taint.\(^{181}\)

Throughout the hearing groups opposed to Prohibition, such as the AAPA, argued only for modification of the Volstead Act, as opposed to tackling the Eighteenth Amendment. This was because repeal was still considered a political impossibility. Those in charge of Prohibition enforcement testified in regards to the difficulties they faced while attempting to enforce the act. The Assistant Secretary of Treasury in Charge of Prohibition, General Lincoln C. Andrews, acknowledged the existence of widespread corruption and the impossibility of enforcement under the current budget. Similarly, District Attorney Buckner admitted the failure of current enforcement

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methods. He put forward the modification of the Volstead act as a possible solution. Those representing dry interests argued for stricter enforcement as a means of defeating the bootlegging industry, and its associated impact. Wayne Wheeler in his speech to the Committee contested, “the very fact that the law is difficult to enforce is the clearest proof of the need of its existence.” The debate therefore revolved around how best to ease the social harm Prohibition had inflicted – whether it was greater enforcement or a more lenient definition of intoxicating that would prove most effective. The Senate Committee ultimately rejected the proposal to amend the Volstead Act. However the proceedings had succeeded in extending debate over Prohibition from exclusively the political arena, to the public arena.

The Age was firmly behind the anti-Prohibition groups in asserting that it was a modification of the law as opposed to greater enforcement that was necessary. In assessing the two options the Age editorialised,

Gen. Andrews the treasury official in charge of enforcement wants to put more teeth in the law, so as to get quicker verdicts and heavier sentences of its violations. On the other hand, Dr Empringham of the Church Temperance Society…has been converted to the idea of modifying the law so as to permit the use of beer and wines. In this position he has the support of a number of bishops and priests as well as outstanding citizens.

The Age also supported the proposal presented to the subcommittee that referendums on Prohibition to be held by individual states. Under the headline “The Public and Prohibition” it editorialised,

182 Kyvig, Repealing National Prohibition, p.62.
183 Kyvig, Repealing National Prohibition, p.61
184 “To Change the Volstead Act”, New York Age, 13th February 1926.
The legislatures in all the states where there is any question as to the practicability of enforcing prohibition, and this would include all of them, should unite in submitting the question of modification or repeal to a vote of the people. This would advise the Congressmen to vote as they drink, knowing that they have a majority of the voters with them.

The black conservative writers at the *Age* therefore utilised the paper to highlight the failure of Prohibition enforcement and publicise the need to modify the law.

The *Age* was resentful of the dry lobby; politicians and officials who continued to ignore the harm caused by Prohibition. It boldly questioned the nobility of the ‘noble’ experiment, describing the American people as “helpless subjects in the practical workings of prohibition.” Age editorials expressed frustration at the slow progress that was being made in the movement to alter the Prohibition laws. They argued that while debate over Prohibition continued, “the only people contented with the law appear to be the bootleggers and the Anti-Saloon Leaguers.”

The hopelessness of Prohibition was further emphasised in a piece that underscored its failure in other countries, namely New Zealand, Canada, Turkey, Russia, Norway and Sweden. The *Age* revealed that overseas governments, in contrast to the United States Government, had the good judgement to recognise the failure of Prohibition and react accordingly. While highlighting and chastising the hypocrisy of Prohibition, *Age* editorials became increasingly sarcastic in tone,

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The United States still continues its efforts to enforce the noble experiment of preventing drunkards by abolishing drink, or at least only allowing bootleggers and moonshiners the privilege of catering to alcoholic thirsts.\textsuperscript{187} This frustration was also directed towards those who continued to entertain the possibility of enforcement. The \textit{Age} openly mocked plans to enforce Prohibition over New Years’ Eve 1927,

It was officially denied by Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Seymour Lowman that New York City would be allowed to run “high, wide and open.” What the report failed to state, according to the Prohibition chief, was that there are some three thousand night clubs in New York and ten enforcement agents.\textsuperscript{188}

The definitive failure of Prohibition was acutely apparent to the \textit{Age} and as such it firmly rejected any attempt to indulge the government in its experiment.

As the political movement against the Prohibition laws progressed, the \textit{Age} simultaneously looked to practical methods that would immediately counter the problem of physical poisonings caused by badly distilled alcohol. A report presented to the New York Major by the city’s Chief Medical Examiner, in February 1927 revealed the extent to which the city’s illegal alcohol supply was contaminated with poisons and the harm caused as a result,

Because of the poor and poisonous quality of the liquor, steps are recommended to be taken as promptly as possible to remedy this public health

\textsuperscript{187} “Waning of Prohibition”, \textit{New York Age}, 24\textsuperscript{th} November 1928.

\textsuperscript{188} “Liquor in the Holidays”, \textit{New York Age}, 31\textsuperscript{st} December 1927.
menace. The mortality from this cause is declared greater than the vehicular accidents and the illuminating gas poisoning cases combined.\footnote{\textit{“Study of Poisonous Liquor”}, \textit{New York Age}, 19\textsuperscript{th} February 1927.}

Faced with the risk of poisoning, drinkers increasing sought the services of chemists to test their illegally obtained alcohol. The \textit{Age} supported this behaviour as a sensible way to reduce poisonings. In an editorial on drinking over the holiday season it ridiculed the Prohibition Commissioner James Doran for opposing alcohol testing, stating,

As a measure of Christmas cheer, he [Commissioner Doran] warned the chemists making such tests that they were in danger of losing their alcohol permits.... This measure would work to the advantage of the unscrupulous bootlegger, who diverts denatured alcohol to furnish his stock of guaranteed pre-war goods. A paternal government does not propose to afford protection to the bootlegger’s customers, even to save them from poisoning.\footnote{\textit{“Liquor in the Holidays”}, \textit{New York Age}, 31\textsuperscript{st} December 1927.}

The \textit{Age} did not want to indulge the government in its Prohibition experiment any further and therefore endorsed harm minimisation as a short team solution while political process for amendment continued.

The \textit{Age} encouraged the movement against Prohibition that emerged within the Republican Party. While greater opposition towards Prohibition existed within the Democratic Party, black conservatives felt unable to support the Democrats because of their promotion of racist policies in the South. Lerner, in his grand-narrative where he constructs dry conservatives pitted against wet cosmopolitans does not allow for the impact issues apart from Prohibition had on restricting the avenues available or not to available blacks in their opposition to Prohibition. That the \textit{Age} supported the
movement against Prohibition but not the democratic candidates who shared their perspective is revealed in its commentary on the 1928 Presidential campaign. In this campaign the openly wet Democrat New York Governor Al Smith ran against the incumbent republican and dry supporter Herbert Hoover. While endorsing Hoover, the Age acknowledged that Smith’s position against Prohibition was commendable. However, it contested that the democratic party as a whole could not be trusted to ensure black interests. It emphasised this interpretation in a cartoon that depicted Smith addressing the people of Harlem. He declares: “I’m for you Harlem, and I’m for gin”. Yet standing in the background, behind a curtain, are Southern Democrats. The caption reads, “Gov. Smith May Love His Harlem Brethren, But His Southern Henchmen Will Have The Last Say.”191 The Age focused its energies on the promotion of anti-Prohibition politicians within the Republican Party, because of Democratic support for openly racist policies in the South.

Republican politicians who distanced themselves from the dry cause were commended by the Age. Joseph Frelinghuysen of Former Senator for New Jersey, for example, had been an early supporter of Prohibition but had turned against the dry movement. He was endorsed by the Age in his campaign for senator as follows,

The colored voters of New Jersey should have no difficulty in making a choice among these three candidates for the nomination...His [Frelinghuysen’s] decision that the question of prohibition should be submitted to the people is in keeping with the trend of the times, which has demonstrated the futility of

191 Holloway, Cartoon, New York Age, 20th October 1928.
the present effort to enforce an unpopular measure which has not the backing of public sentiment behind it.\footnote{192}{“A Prohibition Referendum”, \textit{New York Age}, 17\textsuperscript{th} December 1927.}

Similarly, at the state level, the \textit{Age} applauded the Republican parties’ abandonment of the dry cause. Under the headline “Republicanism Revived”, it reported that at the recent Republican State Convention the Party had abandoned its dry position,

The policy of deferring to the fanatical prohibitionists was thrown overboard and the party platform frankly conceded the failure of the Eighteenth amendment [sic] as a temperance measure and declared for the repeal of the dry law. This was the logical prelude to the nomination by acclamation of Charles H. Tuttle for Governor, with greater enthusiasm than has been seen or heard at any Republican convention for a good many years.\footnote{193}{“Republicanism Revived”, \textit{New York Age}, 4\textsuperscript{th} October 1930.}

The \textit{Age} appalled the move,

It shows the picture of Republicanism revived and reinvigorated by the stimulus of a strong candidate and clear cut issues of good government, divorced from the advocacy of a doubtful experiment, however noble in purpose.\footnote{194}{\textit{Ibid.}}

Encouraging Republican politicians to recognise the failure of Prohibition was the most pragmatic political method through which the \textit{Age} attempted to facilitate a change to the dry laws.

In the 1932 Presidential election campaign, the \textit{Age} sought to push the view that Hoover had accepted the failure of Prohibition, noting that: “President Hoover’s most significant statement in his speech of acceptance…was that his “noble experiment” on
National Prohibition had been a failure. The article expressed a distinct sense of frustration that it had taken Hoover so long to realise his mistake, continuing:

Four years behind Alfred E. Smith, Mr Hoover now favors change in the Eighteenth Amendment, giving each state the right to deal with the liquor problem as it may see fit.

Hoover lost the election in a landslide to Democratic candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had more ardently endorsed repeal as part of his ‘New Deal’ of economic and social reform. While Hoover suggested the issue of Prohibition should be put to referendum, the Democrats were favoured immediate repeal. Despite its long history of Republican support, the Age reflected upon Hoover’s loss with scathing criticism of his inaction over Prohibition,

Noble as the purpose may have appeared at one time, it failed to account for the vagaries of humanity and of necessity failed. The President who counted it as a political asset, however, while shrewd enough to regard it as an experiment was not acute enough to recognise its failure, even after his own commission reported it.

Therefore it is evident that the black conservative writers at the Age encouraged the movement against Prohibition as soon as it emerged within the Republican Party.

The Repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment was inevitable within the new Congress. It was submitted to the states for consideration, in the form of the Twenty First Amendment, in February 1933. As individual states began to ratify the Amendment,
the Age remained fervent in its opposition to dry organisations that worked against repeal, attacking their hypocrisy in statements such as the following,

    The Methodist Temperance Board and other militant dry organisations have yet to answer why they favour the enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment which deprives Americans of their personal liberty, but have never moved a finger to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which deprive Americans of their full rights of citizenship. 200

Among discussions concerning how best to regulate alcohol after repeal the Age presented a clear position in favour of limited regulation. This strengthens the arguments that their initial calls for the legalisation of beer and wine, rather than repeal, has been the result of political impossibility of stronger reform, rather than support for the Eighteenth Amendment. In critiquing a proposal forwarded by John D. Rockefeller Jr. that hard liquor should be tightly regulated in the post-Prohibition era, the Age revealed its pragmatic motivations for having opposed prohibition. It stated,

    The vital part of the report [Rockefellers’] was in the general principles set forth at the outset: “At all costs – even if it means a temporary increase in alcoholic consumption – bootlegging, racketeering and the whole wretched nexus of crime that developed while the Eighteenth amendment was in force must be wiped out.” This is a consummation devoutly to be wished, and it cannot be accomplished by making the restrictions on the sale of liquor too rigorous. True temperance in the use of stimulants can only be brought about by time and education devoted to the control of human appetites. Prohibition has been tried but enforcement failed.

200 "The Negro and Repeal", New York Age, 8th July 1933.
This underscores that the black conservative writers at the *Age* desired a genuine solution to the problems caused by Prohibition. Repeal represented the ultimate solution.

The *Age* clearly did not perceive the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment as a silencing of their vision for society. Contrary to Lerner’s argument, Prohibition did not form a part of the value system of black conservatives. In responding to the impact of Prohibition on Harlem, the *Age* was driven by a desire to counter any elements that threatened their social aspirations for Harlem. Prohibition, because it fostered criminality, vice, subversion and illness, was a direct threat to the uplift project of black conservatives. Thus, the *Age* supported any method it considered helpful in countering the negative effects of Prohibition. Initially, it saw a two-pronged attack of greater enforcement together with the modification of the Volstead Act as the most viable option. This was a direct reflection of the political climate of the time and was in line with the approaches taken by other groups who were against Prohibition. As the repeal movement gained momentum the *Age* actively supported its growth within the Republican Party and attempted to influence the public against Prohibition. The *Age’s* approach to repeal once again counters Lerner’s assumption that the black experience of prohibition can be easily transferred to his wider argument that Prohibition, and any opposition to it, was a clear-cut battleground between dry conservatives and wet cosmopolitans over the values that would motivate American society as a whole. It highlights that the *Age’s* response to Prohibition, effectively the response of black conservatives, was at its core pragmatic. Prohibition had lead to a perceived moral degradation of the social landscape of Harlem and therefore the only absolute solution was its repeal.
Conclusion

Through my analysis of the *New York Age* – a rich and vital source of black conservative discourse – it is apparent that the black conservative response to Prohibition was driven by their desire to propagate a positive image of the black community to wider society. In doing so their ultimate goal was the *uplifting* of the blacks community in wider society.

The extent to which the uplift project permeated black elite thought and behaviour is revealed in the *Age*. Whether in the promotion of the black contribution to the American war effort, or by preaching the benefits of hard work over leisure, the *Age* reveals that uplift ideology was more than Lerner’s interpretation of it—a simple adherence to white middle class values. Rather, it was a tool used strategically to advance the black community.

By highlighting the values of black conservatives, I challenge Lerner’s characterisation of them as purely conservative. I move beyond Lerner’s simplistic vision of Harlem as a one-dimensional battleground between “Black Victorians” who keenly supported Prohibition, and black cosmopolitans who opposed it. In this way, I reach conclusions that extensively differ from Lerner’s own interpretation.

Specifically, my research calls into question Lerner’s assumption of black conservative support for the dry movement from its outset. Lerner’s unsubstantiated argument in this regard, has far reaching consequences for his analysis of black conservative opinion and behaviour during Prohibition.
In writing on the *Age* campaign against violations of the Volstead Act, I explore a valuable source of black conservative opinion that has been previously ignored. In doing so, I argue that as a result of black conservative adherence to uplift ideology, they seek to remove any notion of black involvement in the social degradation of Harlem. My analysis of the campaign highlights that black conservatives sought to maintain an image of black society as ‘respectable’ by ‘othering’ blame for increased vice and crime in Harlem onto groups exclusively outside the black community. These groups included government enforcement agents who were presented by the *Age* as inherently corrupt, and foreign bootleggers who were described using racial stereotypes to further alienate them from the black community. Finally, white slummers and those who catered to them were attributed particular blame because their presence gave credence to the negro vogue definition of blackness as morally lax, unrestrained and overly sexualised.

My research also reveals that black conservatives were involved in the political movement against Prohibition. This is counter to Lerner’s argument that they opposed any notion of repeal because Prohibition was in line with their ideology. The *Age* shows opposition to the Eighteenth Amendment from the moment it begins to negatively effect Harlem’s social landscape. A familiarity with uplift ideology is vital to understanding their simultaneous calls for the enforcement of existing Prohibition laws, while working towards their amendment. It also explains that they were limited in who could they could politically support; they felt uncomfortable supporting the Democratic Party because of their blatantly racist policies in the South. As such, they
supported the somewhat ‘wetter’ Republican Party. This they did ardently through the promotion of wet ideology within the Republican Party.

In relation to previous studies of Harlem, my research is distinctive because it examines an element of the black elite that gets lost between high brow cultural histories of the Harlem Renaissance and histories from below which privilege everyday life in Harlem. These histories exclude a consideration of the ideologies that drove black conservatives; this is what I examine in order to better understand the relationship between Prohibition and Harlem.

When writing histories of Prohibition, it is necessary to be cautious of developing grand meta-narratives and frames of analysis. Within these, social histories are often manipulated in order to strengthen these grand narratives. This is a particular issue in histories that are concerned with shifting national identities. Lerner clearly seeks to use Prohibition to explain the wider shift from conservative America, epitomized by President Hoover, to a more liberal society under President Roosevelt. In doing so, he ignores the complexities of groups that do not conform to his interpretation of the ‘American Story’.

When examining black history, it is vital to understand the underlying value systems of black communities that are often distinct from wider societies. When attempting to write comprehensive histories of historical phenomena like Prohibition, historians must be willing to accommodate the nuances and contradictions inherent in these unique social histories. If they do challenge the meta-narrative, as my research into the Age does, the met-narrative itself deserves re-examination.
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