



# SODOM ON THE HUDSON:

Crime and Corruption in Prohibition Manhattan



New York City ignores Prohibition at the Puncheon Club in the late 1920s. *Image Courtesy of the '21 Club.*

The John L. Hatfield '67 Lecture of the Friends of Skillman Library

# SODOM ON THE HUDSON:

## Crime and Corruption in Prohibition Manhattan

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One of the unintended consequences of Prohibition was the creation in New York City of America's first organized crime syndicate, a bootleg gang led by an Irish dockworker, a Hells's Kitchen gang leader, and an Italian-born street thug. Ignored or scantily recognized by historians, this syndicate controlled the importation of illegal booze from Canada and Europe and built a multimillion dollar criminal empire whose sinister influence pervaded and corrupted city government, federal enforcement agencies, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Empire City's court system. In the 1920's, it was more powerful than the mafia, and one of its founders, Frank Costello, the so called "Prime Minister of the Underworld," went on to become the head of the New York mafia. The two other leaders of this criminal conspiracy were Owney "The Killer" Madden, owner of Harlem's Cotton Club and the most powerful man on Broadway, and "Big Bill" Dwyer, a popular Manhattan saloon-keeper who brought professional hockey to New York City. This is their story.

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