

A New Prohibition

As the drinking age heads for 21, students—and colleges—wonder how to react.

Behold the landscape of student drinking, and how quickly it can change. At the University of Maryland there is a quiet, grassy lawn affectionately known as "La Plata Beach," although it's nowhere near any body of water. Until three years ago "the beach" was the site of raucous beer blasts every spring weekend, and the ground was worn as hard and smooth as sanded walnut from the poundings of countless staggering feet. There is the deluxe banquet room run by the university's food service, with its oh-so-tasteful wallpaper and sparkling chandeliers. It used to have sticky tile floors and ersatz disco décor when it was called The Pub, and freshmen used to top off orientation lectures there with a few cold ones. In the basement of the student union you'll find Dory's Sweet Shop, where the booziest thing you can buy is the rum cake. Once this was a bar called The Hole in the Wall, and it looked just the way you'd think. Goodbye to all that, to the years when "party" really was an *action* verb in College Park. For in 1982 the State of Maryland raised its drinking age to 21, and the campus taps ran dry.

Soon the drought will be spreading, as more and more colleges and universities crack down on campus drinking. Spurred by the current federal campaign to make all states raise the drinking age to 21, schools have begun to close campus hangouts, ban public keggers and otherwise restrict the possession and use of alcohol. In response, some about-to-be-underage students have taken to the streets in protest; many more have begun to take their liquor behind closed doors and down deserted country lanes. That's largely the way students used to drink before the liberated '70s—and not all of them, or the administrators either, are exactly delighted to get back to where they once belonged.

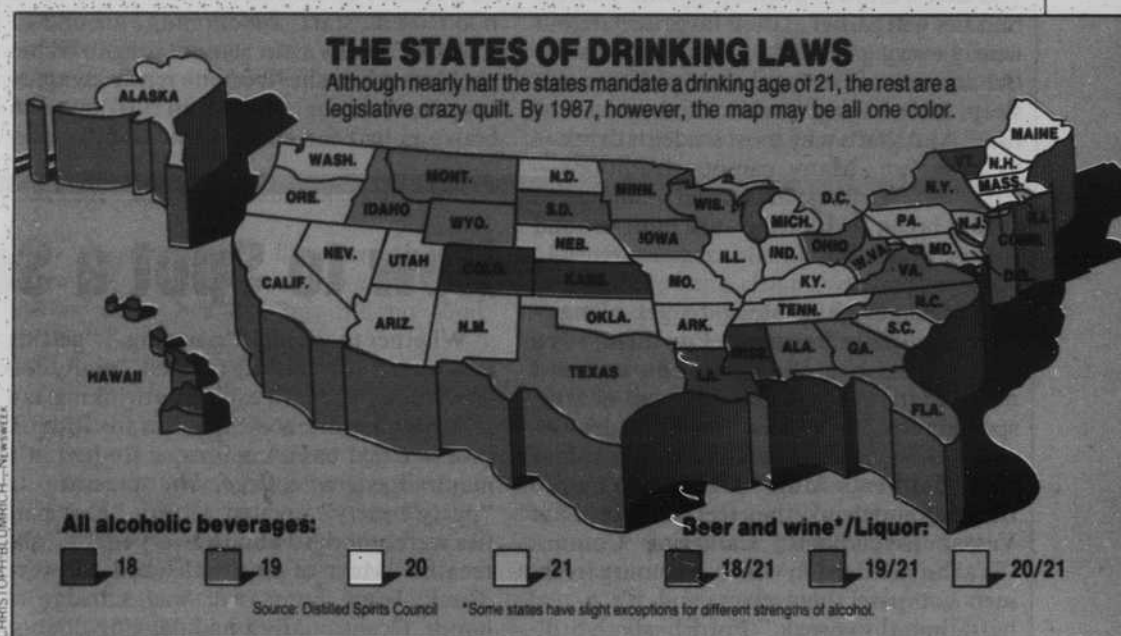
The new era of campus prohibition springs from the nationwide crusade against drunken driving. Drinking laws now vary widely from state to state (map), and students frequently drive across "blood borders" to carouse, sometimes becoming involved in accidents. That fact helped Mothers Against Drunk Driving and other lobbying groups to persuade Congress last year to pass a law that will penalize any state that doesn't raise its minimum drinking age to 21. Maverick states could forfeit millions

in federal highway funds; Texas, for example, stands to lose \$33 million if it doesn't comply by Oct. 1, 1986, and an additional \$66 million if it fails to act by Oct. 1, 1987. Some states may challenge the constitutionality of the law, but most are expected to go along sooner or later.

Federal transportation officials argue that this approach will save lives, and statistics do bear them out. Drivers in the 18-to-20 age group, for example, are twice as likely as the average motorist to be involved in an alcohol-related crash, and drunken-driving accidents are the leading cause of death in this age group. Critics of the new

The newly restrictive drinking climate has roused some students to put down their mugs and take up the cause. A year ago 1,500 students stormed an administration building at Notre Dame in response to a clampdown on dorm parties. Last fall students from all over Wisconsin staged a "drink-in" on the capitol steps in Madison. And in October an Illinois State march against city antidrinking ordinances turned ugly as 500 protesters blocked traffic, damaged police cars and staged an impromptu kegger for seven hours in the middle of U.S. Highway 51.

The battle comes at a time when drinking



law counter that its limits are arbitrary: drunken-driving accidents and fatalities involving people 22 to 24, for instance, are only slightly less common. Twenty-one may have been picked because, historically, it was the age of majority, but many rights and responsibilities, like voting, now begin much younger. A NEWSWEEK ON CAMPUS Poll indicates that students themselves are almost evenly split about whether there should be a national legal drinking age of 21. But many believe, like South Carolina sophomore Katherine Morgan, 19, that there's a coming double standard: "I could be married, have children, have had abortions, but I couldn't have a glass of wine at my own wedding. The message is, we're adult in one respect and childish in another."

seems to be especially popular—or at least especially noticeable—on campus. There is some debate among alcohol researchers as to whether college drinking is measurably greater now than it was a decade ago. But with drug use declining, drinking is undeniably a more fashionable and open part of college life. According to the NEWSWEEK ON CAMPUS Poll, 72 percent of all college students drink on occasion, more than a third at least once a week. As ever, beer remains the drink of choice—by a 2-1 margin over wine and alcohol. "The most visible, accessible and utilized drug on the college campus is alcohol," says Stephen Nelson, Dartmouth's director of student activities.

How important is booze to college life? "It's next to sex," jokes South Carolina