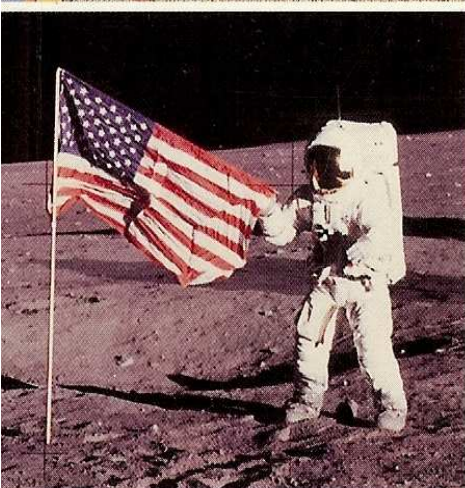
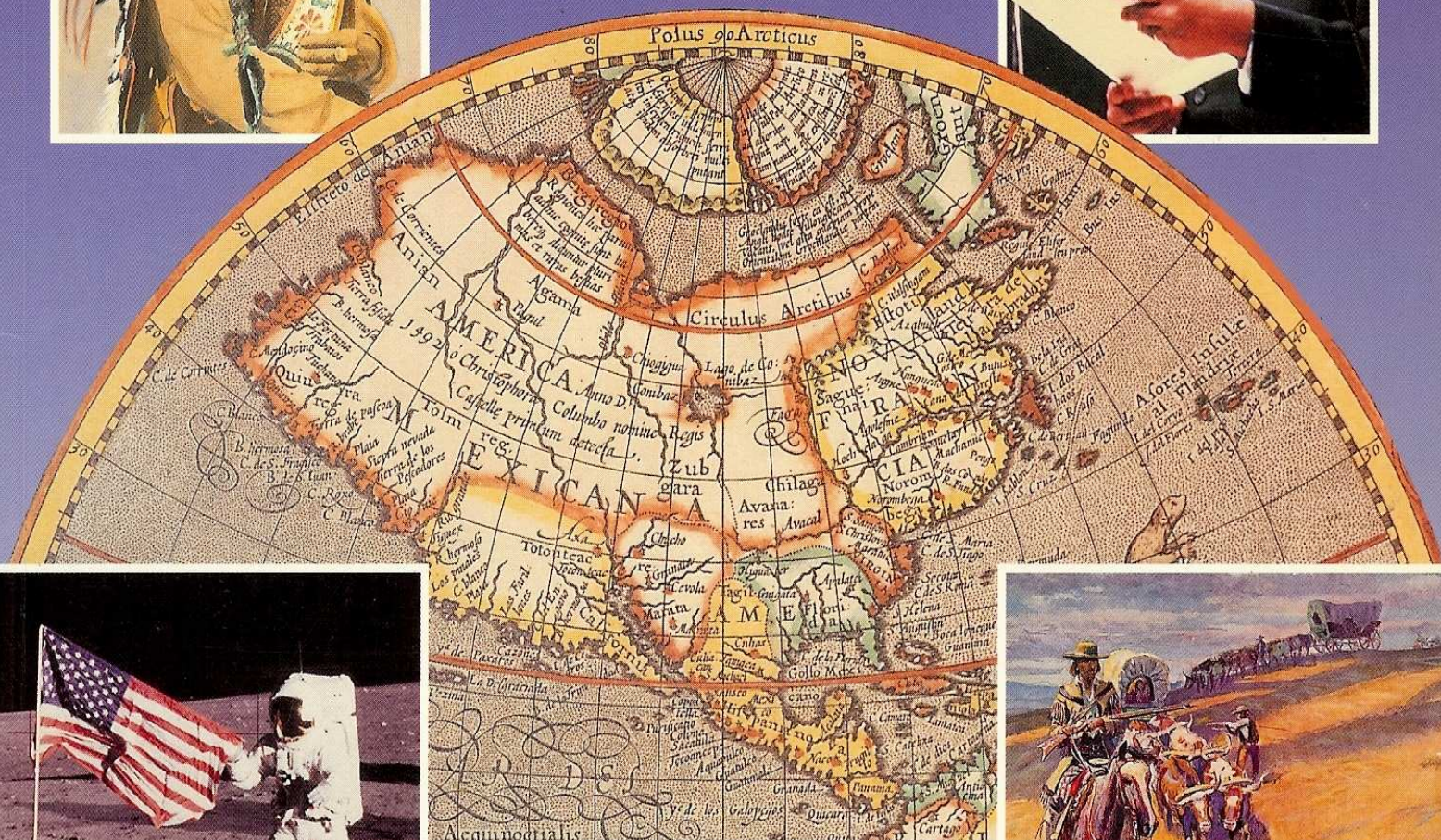
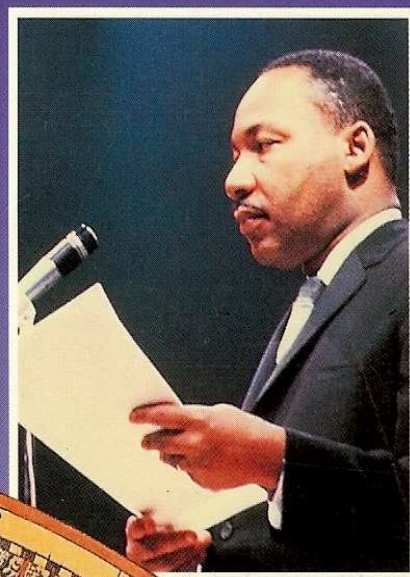


AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE USA



Bryn O'Callaghan

Longman 

Al Capone and the bootleggers

In 1919 the American people voted in favor of a new amendment to the Constitution. The Eighteenth Amendment prohibited the making or selling of alcoholic drinks in the United States. People who supported "prohibition" claimed that it would stop alcoholism and drunkenness and make the United States a healthier, happier country.

But many Americans were not willing to give up alcoholic drinks. Millions began to break the prohibition law deliberately and regularly. Illegal drinking places called "speakeasies" opened in basements and backrooms all over the country. The city of Chicago had 10,000 of them. New York had 32,000.

Speakeasies obtained their alcoholic drinks from criminals called "bootleggers." Bootleggers worked together in gangs or "mobs." The best-known mob was one in Chicago led by the gangster "Scarface" Al Capone.

Bootlegging was a dangerous business. Competition between rival mobs sometimes caused bloody street wars, fought out with armored cars and machine guns. The winners of the gangster wars became rich and powerful. They used their wealth to bribe police and other public officials to do nothing about their law-breaking. Al Capone became the real ruler of Chicago. He had a private army of nearly a thousand thugs equipped with machine guns. His income was over 100 million dollars a year.

By the end of the 1920s most Americans regarded prohibition as half scandal, half joke. The dis-



Prohibition. A carefully posed photograph showing federal agents examining some of the bottles of liquor they have discovered hidden in a coal steamer in New York harbor.

honesty and corruption which grew with it made them lose their respect both for the law and for the people who were supposed to enforce it. Prohibition was finally given up in 1933. But it had done the United States lasting harm. It made law-breaking a habit for many otherwise respectable Americans. And gangsters remained powerful. Many used the money they had made as bootleggers to set up other criminal businesses.