

# **Framing the Temperance Movement The Success of the 18th Amendment**

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## **Abstract**

The Temperance Movement in the United States is often viewed much differently from other historical social movements. Due to the failure of national prohibition, there has been a tendency to forget about the movement's significance and simply consider it a historical anomaly. In reality, however, the Temperance Movement was incredibly strong and widespread, despite facing opposition. While supporters of the movement were largely driven by religious motivations, opponents relied on economic and constitutional arguments. In this paper, we examine the shifting media discussion of the arguments for and against the Temperance Movement over time. We ultimately find that religious arguments for temperance remained predominant over the course of the movement but that moral, social, and medical arguments for it grew at the turn of the 20th century. The opposition's arguments were consistently underrepresented in the media, perhaps explaining the eventual support for national prohibition.

Keywords: temperance, prohibition, framing, alcohol policy, content analysis

## **Introduction**

We study the effects of policy framing in the Temperance movement leading up to the ratification of the 18th amendment. The arguments used in favor of prohibition employed strong episodic frames that shifted the blame for the consequences of alcohol consumption to individuals. We document these trends with a content analysis of over 2,000 stories published in the Baltimore Sun and the Nashville Tennessean beginning in 1830 and up to the ratification of the 18th Amendment in 1919. Our findings indicate the relative strength of the pro-Temperance frames compared to the frames utilized in favor of the status quo ultimately allowed for the success of the Temperance movement in implementing nationwide alcohol prohibition.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section gives historical background to contextualize the movement, and a discussion of the overall success of the Temperance movement. The following section discusses our data collection methods and development of keyword searches to analyze the relevant arguments and associated public policy frames used by the media. We then discuss our findings and analyze the Temperance movement in the context of public policy framing theory in the following sections.

## **Background and Relevant Literature**

The Temperance Movement in the United States started picking up in the late eighteenth century when Benjamin Rush, a notable physician and Founding Father, published his pamphlet titled *An inquiry into the effects of ardent spirits upon the human body and mind*. He argued that excessive alcohol consumption produces illness along with many undesirable social consequences (Harding 2009, 1284). Rush, like other physicians at the time, was trying to raise awareness of the medical and physical dangers of alcohol. Though some of his findings were ultimately not accurate, like the notion that alcohol consumption caused epilepsy, this scientific

and medical publication, amongst others, had widespread impacts and contributed to the beginnings of a formal temperance movement (Hill 2004, 8).

Rush's work came at a time when alcohol was especially prevalent and there were many widely held misconceptions on its consumption. While estimates for the average person's alcohol consumption at the time varied significantly, the most conservative figure is 2.3 gallons of distilled spirits per person per year (Hill 2004, 7). Drinking was a central part of culture, and many people falsely believed that liquor was healthy, or at least not harmful. Despite the science-based nature of Rush's attempt to challenge these views, he knew that a strictly scientific and medical approach would not be sufficient to convince people to change their behavior. To solve this dilemma, Rush collaborated with clergy and shaped the alcohol issue into one of not just scientific but also moral and religious significance (Harding page 1284).

This set the foundation for decades of passionate engagement from the Protestant religious community on the alcohol question. Many temperance organizations arose, including the American Temperance Society, later named the American Temperance Union, that had primarily Protestant leadership. The leaders of these groups tried to radically reshape people's thinking on alcohol by claiming it was a sin that distanced them from God. Their views were inspired by the Second Great Awakening, a religious revival that advanced the idea that salvation could be achieved by improving one's behavior (Hill 2004, 9). These ideas resonated with people, and the temperance organizations behind them were successful in shaping alcohol policy at the state and local levels.

As time went on, the Temperance Movement expanded its support base beyond Protestants and became more than just a religious crusade. Women, even without having the right to vote, became one of the most mobilized groups. They argued that alcohol has a number

of harmful effects on families. They did not want their husbands wasting money on alcohol or losing their jobs or perhaps even becoming abusive due to drunkenness. In the 1870s, many new women's organizations were founded. Most predominant among them was the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), led by Frances Willard. The WCTU successfully fought for prohibition laws and other reforms and convinced schools nationwide to implement educational programs about alcohol (Harding 2019, 1292). One of the organization's most notable figures, Carry Nation, would walk into saloons with a hatchet and vandalize property as a statement against alcohol and the often shady practices of saloons.

Many saloons, at this time, had a reputation for bribing public officials and allowing illegal activities such as gambling and prostitution to occur (Hill 2004, 15). Many people from suburban and rural America saw these occurrences happening in saloons in the cities, and they began to associate the perceived immoral behavior at saloons with the values of urban residents more broadly, including newer immigrants. In this way, many of those who held anti-immigrant biases became staunch supporters of prohibition (Hill 2004, 16).

Over time, more social groups and organizations aimed to tackle the issues with saloons and to achieve the ambitious goal of passing federal legislation on prohibition. The Anti-Saloon League (ASL) rose to prominence, and it was able to skillfully navigate political institutions to advance its agenda. Following pressure from the ASL, a majority of states had imposed restrictions or prohibition on alcohol (Harding 2009, 1293). However, the ASL sought to have an even greater impact, and it strategically threw its support behind "dry" candidates for Congress who would support federal prohibition, eventually leading to the passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment (Harding 2009, 1294).

## **Frames and Actors**

The Temperance movement was mostly comprised of middle class, Protestant Americans who organized themselves in both political and non-political groups starting with the American Temperance Society founded in the 1820s. The Protestant Church in the mid 1840s also began opposing the liquor industry due to its association with corruption, gambling, crime, and prostitution. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the moral and religious arguments for temperance and prohibition were fueled by concerns of industrialization, labor, and the growth of cities (Timberlake 1963, 29). Increasing immigrant populations, especially non-Protestant, heavy drinking Europeans, fueled the Temperance movement, as prohibition was used as a tool to dissuade immigrants.

In addition to moral and religious concerns, the Temperance movement was also fueled by new scientific findings and their implications on social life. Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many studies were conducted that not only condemned intemperance as disease, crime, poverty, and suffering inducing, but also condemned moderate drinking. Studies showed correlations between moderate drinking and higher death rates, narcotic effects in brain activity, depressing physical activity and child development (Timberlake 1963, 39-46). The WCTU began identifying alcohol as a poison in their publications and temperance education and by 1920, the American Medical Association discouraged the use of alcohol as a therapeutic agent and as a beverage (Timberlake 1963, 47-49)

These scientific findings allowed the Temperance movement and its proponents to frame intemperance as a social and economic problem. They argued that even moderate alcohol use, especially with increased urbanization and industrialization, posed risks to worker productivity and general safety. These concerns lead Henry Ford, John D. Rockefeller, and other prominent businessmen at the time to make substantial financial contributions to the Temperance movement

(Hill 2004, 21). Employers and business owners adopted increasingly strict sobriety and temperance policies in the workplace in order to prevent accidents and promote safety (Timberlake 1963, 68).

Industrial temperance required sobriety for the sake of safety and efficiency but many also believed diverting resources from the alcohol industry and towards prohibition would “raise the standard of living and increase national prosperity” (Timberlake 1963, 77). Further, many industries stood to gain from the downfall of the alcohol industry, like Welch's Juice Company and CocaCola, and threw their support behind the Temperance movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some Temperance proponents also argued that the fall in crime, poverty, and disease associated with prohibition would ultimately lead to lower public taxes as it would cost less to operate prisons, police forces, hospitals, and other social systems (Timberlake 1963, 77). However, many argued the loss of government revenue from alcohol taxes would offset any of the social benefits gained from prohibition. The alcohol industry also employed many people and was linked with other industries and prohibition would necessarily have negative impacts for those individuals and industries (Timberlake 1963, 78).

The moral and religious arguments for prohibition and temperance would likely have been unsuccessful without the support of the scientific, social, and economic arguments supporting the movement. The Temperance movement was largely promoted and backed by religious organizations, particularly the Protestant Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, citing the eternal consequences of intemperance and the associated social losses. Further, scientific evidence began disproving the idea that alcohol was necessary and beneficial. This prompted groups like the WCTU to label alcohol as poison which through their educational efforts likely scared children into sobriety. Organizations like the Anti-Saloon League supported politicians and other

organizations that promoted the “dry” cause with funding from wealthy industries and business men, as well as grass-roots funding from their middle-class supporters.

The “wet” cause argued against temperance and prohibition often citing the associated economic loss of shutting down the alcohol industry. Further, a federal ban on alcohol would curtail the alcohol tax and diminish available government revenue. But perhaps the strongest argument against prohibition, which likely postponed the movement’s success, was the strong history and culture of drinking in America. The prohibition movement had to overcome the American right of indulging in alcohol and did this by combining religious, moral, scientific, social, and economic arguments with strong organizations like the Anti-Saloon League to support the “dry” cause and “dry” government officials. The association between saloons and crime, corruption, and prostitution also minimized the efficacy of saloon owners and supporters, the main proponents of the liquor industry and anti-prohibition.

We examine these frames as presented by supporters and opponents of the Temperance Movement in the United States, starting from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and ending with the passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and evaluate how the Temperance movement ultimately, even if briefly, proved to be successful by appealing to moral, religious, scientific, social, and economic arguments to support federal prohibition.

### **Data Collection**

The first step in our analysis is to examine the prevalence of different frames in news stories from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. To do this, we first read through a number of newspaper publications from this time period on the alcohol issue and gathered terms that were commonly used in regard to temperance. To test if the language surrounding the Temperance Movement changed over time, we divided our period of focus into shorter time

frames and browsed a large sample of articles from each, comparing the commonly used terms. The difference in terms referring to the Temperance Movement for each time frame was not substantial enough to warrant adjusting our keyword searches over time. We then used our final list of terms to search through historical editions of the Baltimore Sun and Nashville Tennessean using the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database and found many articles that included them. We chose these newspapers because they were two of the major newspapers from the time period that consistently published articles about temperance. Our searches limited the occurrence of what we call “false hits,” or articles unrelated to temperance, by excluding several specific terms that frequently appeared in articles unrelated to our topic. The excluded terms were identified through a trial and error method in which keyword searches were adjusted so as to minimize the number of false hits. For example, many foreign countries were excluded so as to limit our results to only articles covering the Temperance Movement in the United States. The specific search terms are included in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Search Terms Used to Identify Temperance Movement-Related Stories, 1830–1920.

Time Frame	Search Terms
1830 - 1919	(alcohol OR spirits OR liquor OR "strong drink") AND (temperan* prohibit* OR teetotal*) AND NOT (advertisement OR hall OR China OR Germany OR England OR Russia OR Canada OR Scotland OR Edinburgh OR Ireland OR Sweden)

With the results of these searches, we then measured how frequently prohibition and temperance-related articles were covered in the Baltimore Sun and the Nashville Tennessean as the Temperance Movement progressed by each decade. The Baltimore Sun was founded in 1937, so the measure of articles in the first decade of our study likely underestimates the prevalence of



Temperance related publications at the time. The Nashville Tennessean on the other hand was in continuous print throughout the period of our study.

Figure 1. Overall Newspaper Coverage of the Temperance Movement from 1830 to 1919.



The Nashville Tennessean publications about Temperance are displayed by the dotted line while Temperance publications in the Baltimore Sun are displayed by the solid black line. Both newspapers show significant upward trends in Temperance related articles by decade which peaked at the beginning of the 21st century. In total, we identified 1,314 articles relating to the Temperance movement in the Nashville Tennessean and 1,066 articles in the Baltimore Sun. The noticeable spike in the Nashville Tennessean coverage in the 1900s can best be explained by a change in the newspaper's ownership to Luke Lea, a political activist and known prohibitionist. Lea made Edward Ward Carmack, another prominent prohibitionist, the editor of the paper. Carmack then used his position to express his own views and attack anti-prohibition candidates for office (Dickinson, 2018).

We then investigated how the Temperance movement was framed and how those frames were used. We identified broad themes across the article we reviewed from each newspaper publication that can be summarized as below:

- *Religious*: Indulging in alcohol corrupts the soul and is a sin.
- *Moral*: Alcohol encourages lawless and immoral activity, like gambling, prostitution, and corruption.
- *Social*: Alcohol is disruptive to family stability which is harmful to society as a whole.
- *Scientific and Medical*: Scientific evidence shows alcohol consumption to be harmful to physical and mental health.
- *Economic*: Many rely on the alcohol industry for their jobs and livelihoods and the alcohol tax is the biggest source of revenue for the government.
- *Freedom and Constitutional*: Prohibition is unconstitutional because Americans have an individual right to consume alcohol.

We identify articles of in each frame category and use them to develop specific key-word searches to accurately identify each frame. Our methodology for this portion was similar to that used for finding the total occurrence of articles, namely a trial and error method to minimize “false hits.” However, instead of compiling terms that returned general temperance-related articles, we gathered lists of terms that were mostly unique to arguments under each frame and could be used to differentiate them. As done earlier, we excluded certain terms that would return “false hits” that would limit our ability to differentiate between frames. Table 2 shows the search terms used to identify our five frames.

Table 2. Five Frames of Temperance through Electronic Search Terms

<b>Frame</b>	<b>Search Terms</b>
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<b>Religious</b>	(alcohol OR liquor OR “strong drink” OR “ardent spirit”) AND (temperan* OR prohibit* OR teetotal*) AND (god OR sin OR church OR purity OR scripture OR salvation AND NOT army) AND NOT (advertisement OR hall OR China OR Germany OR England OR Russia OR Canada OR Scotland OR Edinburgh OR Ireland OR Sweden)
<b>Moral</b>	(alcohol OR liquor OR spirits OR "strong drink") AND (temperan* OR prohibit* OR teetotal*) AND (saloon OR brewer*) AND (corruption OR crime OR gambling* OR prostit* OR lawless*) AND NOT (advertisement OR hall OR China OR Germany OR England OR Russia OR Canada OR Scotland OR Edinburgh OR Ireland OR Sweden)
<b>Social</b>	(alcohol OR spirits OR liquor OR "strong drink") AND (temperan* OR prohibit* OR teetotal*) AND (family OR husband OR child) AND (drunk* OR desert* OR "domestic violence") AND NOT (advertisement OR hall OR China OR Germany OR England OR Russia OR Canada OR Scotland OR Edinburgh OR Ireland OR Sweden)
<b>Scientific/ Medical</b>	(alcohol OR spirits OR liquor OR “strong drink”) AND (temperan* OR prohibit* OR teetotal*) AND (health OR medic* OR disease OR death OR poison OR hospital OR research) AND NOT (advertisement OR hall OR China OR Germany OR England OR Russia OR Canada OR Scotland OR Edinburgh OR Ireland OR Sweden)
<b>Economic</b>	(alcohol OR "ardent spirits" OR liquor OR "strong drink") AND (temperan* prohibit* OR teetotal*) AND (taxes OR revenue) AND ("alcohol industry" OR productiv* OR brewer*) AND NOT (advertisement OR hall OR China OR Germany OR England OR Russia OR Canada OR Scotland OR Edinburgh OR Ireland OR Sweden)
<b>Freedom/ Constitutional</b>	(alcohol OR "ardent spirits" OR liquor OR "strong drink") AND (temperan* prohibit* OR teetotal*) AND (liberty OR unconstitutional OR infringe*) AND NOT (advertisement OR hall OR China OR Germany OR England OR Russia OR Canada OR Scotland OR Edinburgh OR Ireland OR Sweden)

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Figures 2 and 3 present charts showing the frequency of newspaper articles that fall under each frame per decade, from the Baltimore Sun and the Nashville Tennessean, respectively.

Figure 2. Articles Published in the Baltimore Sun For Each Identified Frame.

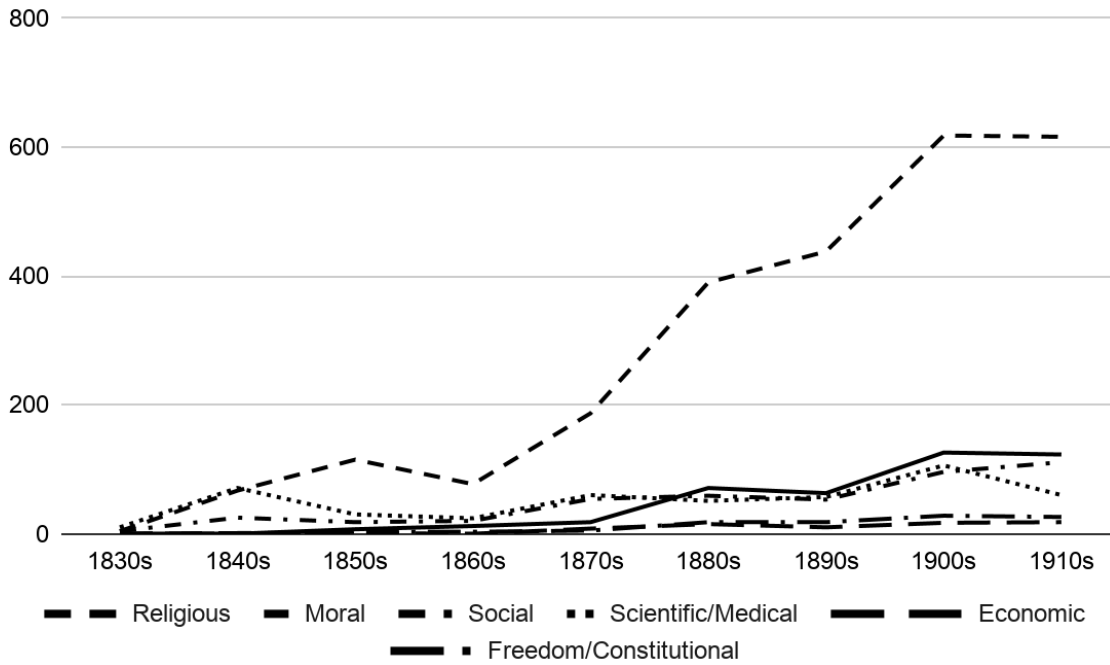
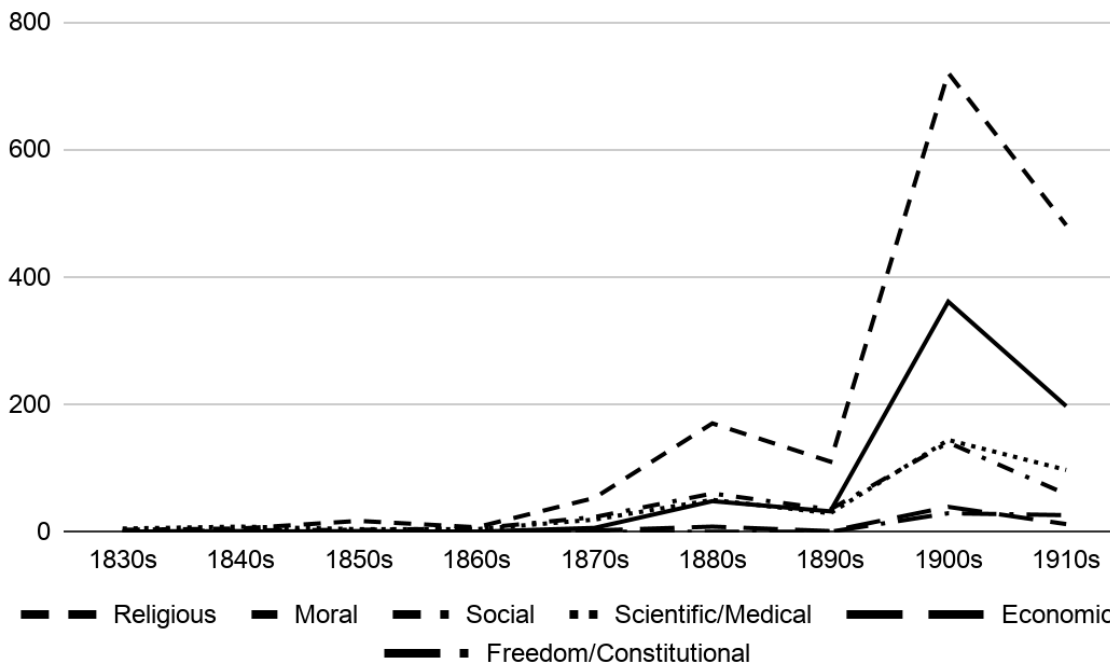


Figure 3. Articles Published in the Nashville Tennessean For Each Identified Frame.



In each newspaper publication, the most common frame by far is the religious frame. The moral frame appears to be the second most prevalent frame across time periods. Further, these figures show an overall increase in Temperance related publications throughout the time period.

## **Discussion**

At the turn of the 19th century, Americans drank on average over 2 gallons of distilled alcohol a year. By the turn of the 20th century, many state and local governments had embraced prohibition and outlawed the sale and consumption of alcohol. In 1919, the United States government passed the 18th Amendment banning alcohol consumption and sale nationwide. Though not long lasting, American prohibition was made possible by the Temperance movement and the many strong public policy frames that were employed. Based on figures 2 and 3 presented above, it is clear that the Temperance movement's strongest argument was on the basis of religion. In addition to acting as a catalyst for the movement, the religious argument remained strong, and increased significantly, leading up to the passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment. Further, as the Temperance movement progressed, the religious argument, which came to advocate that any alcohol consumption was a sin, started to back total abstinence from alcohol consumption rather than just moderation. This development was key to the success of the prohibition movement, as the other pro-Temperance frames were not as successful in advocating for total abstinence from alcohol.

We also find the moral arguments in support of Temperance to have been a leading cause of the success of the movement. Backed by strong anecdotes of illegal gambling rings, criminal activity, and corruption, the Temperance movement was able to attack the alcohol industry as a whole—specifically by targeting saloons and saloon owners. Not only was the alcohol industry framed as being inexplicably linked with immoral and illegal behavior, so were all of its

proponents and those opposed to prohibition, as Temperance supporters argued. Likewise, the social arguments for Temperance were backed by powerful anecdotes that specifically targeted men who choose to consume alcohol. Stories of deserted wives and children circulated and blamed drunk husbands for the family's hardships. Pro-temperance media conveyed this occurrence as a widespread social issue which was perpetuated by everyone consuming alcohol, thus effectively shifting the consequences of drinking from "unintended" to "intended" (see Stone 1989 for more discussion). This shift changed the perception of alcohol consumption as an inadvertent cause of its social and moral consequences to an intentional cause. Therefore, these two frames together, the social argument and the moral argument, were able to take aggregated problems like rampant corruption, family instability, and social disorder and blame individuals for them. For example, the man who indulged in alcohol was directly threatening the wellbeing of his family and the saloon owner who distributed alcohol became individually responsible for the illegal activities that were bound to ensue. The association of saloons with corruption also undermined the political efficacy of politicians in favor of the status quo because they were accused of being paid off by saloon owners or brewers.

The anti-Temperance arguments, on the other hand, were not as prevalent as the pro-Temperance arguments and publications. As Figures 2 and 3 indicate, the anti-Temperance frames had fewer publications than the pro frames throughout the studied time period. However, they remained comparable in frequency through the 1860s and 1870s, when publications using religious arguments became increasingly prevalent. This indicates that arguments appealing to religion and morals became more popular while those appealing to freedoms or economic prosperity remained relatively stable. Though the economic frame also employed strong anecdotes, such as business owners losing their jobs and livelihoods, the relative magnitude of

the religious frame and later the moral frame contributed to the failure of the anti-prohibition frames.

## **Conclusion**

The Temperance movement utilized many arguments that successfully created “others,” generated powerful episodic frames, and shifted the causal stories of the consequences of alcohol consumption. We categorized these arguments broadly as religious, moral, social, and scientific or medical frames to identify each of these techniques in Temperance publications. The social and moral arguments generated episodic frames by utilizing anecdotes of drunk husbands, deserted families, and rampant gambling and prostitution circles. Aaroe (2011) suggest that the strong emotional response elicited by these episodic frames, the more positive support there would be for the promoted policy. Coupled with our findings, this suggests the moral and social anecdotes were more emotional and stronger than those employed by those arguing for freedoms and economic opportunities.

Along with this, the Temperance movement identified supposed villains of these social woes--immigrants, drunks, and saloon owners. This had an “othering” effect in the Temperance movement, which also contributed to the shifting of the causal story. Social and moral consequences of overindulgence were previously identified as having “inadvertent causes.” By identifying this blameworthy group, proponents of the Temperance movement were successfully able to shift to the consequences as having been intentionally caused by immigrants, drunk husbands, saloon owners, and anyone else who indulged in alcohol.

Due to the overall strength of the religious frame, the shift of the causal story, and the utilization of anecdotes, the Temperance movement was able to overcome the strong frames and

arguments in favor of the status quo and was successful in achieving nation-wide prohibition of alcohol with the passage of the 18th amendment.



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