

A Progressively Dry Campus: The Prohibition Era's Impact at North Central College

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Introduction

The Prohibition Era (1920-1933) greatly affected American society, as well as other nations. The Temperance movement, stemming from the belief that drinking led to sinful behavior, gained momentum across the country in the late 1800s and resulted in the passing of the 18th amendment. Due to North Central's religious background, there were many student and faculty supporters on campus. North Central College advocated in favor of the 18th amendment and worked with the Evangelical Association, among others, to create events and lectures centered around the topic. President Rall spent the 1920's advancing the College socially, academically, and financially through the growth of clubs, the honors program, and overall endowment. The students at North Central were not negatively affected by the 18th amendment, and instead saw it as an opportunity to make positive changes in the country and on campus.

The College's Reaction

North Central College staff and faculty supported the 18th amendment. Even before it was passed, the College invited speakers in support of Prohibition. They held speaking events on the topic frequently and invited students to partake in discussions, even going so far as to hold a "Prohibition Week." The College helped organize a Prohibition debate series every year to engage students in stimulating conversations on the topic. Students would argue for or against a statement regarding the validity or practicability of the amendment and the winner was published in the *Chronicle*. Aside from sponsoring events, the College made improvements to the curriculum, facilities, and overall status during the 1920s. These changes represented a societal shift in valuing prosperity, which aligned with the goals of Prohibition.

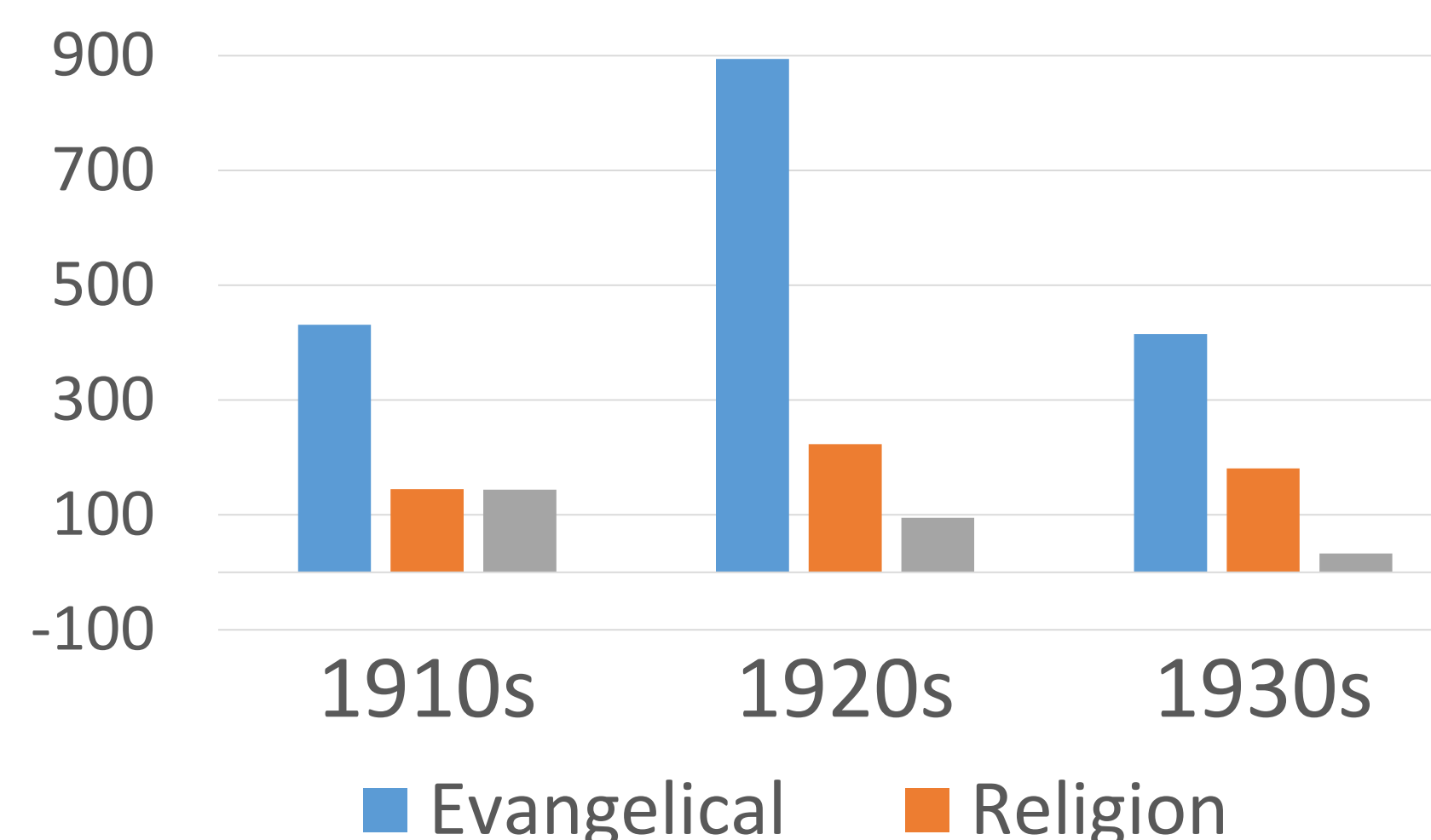


Students supporting temperance at a booster day parade in 1914.
Source: North Central College Archives, <https://library.noctrl.edu/archives>

Religion's Role

Ideas of the Temperance and Prohibition movement stemmed from religious beliefs, especially within the Evangelical Church. Some individuals believed that increased crime rates and family issues were in direct correlation with drinking alcohol. The College's roots in German Evangelicalism resulted in a strong support of these ideas. The Evangelical Association offered funding to President Rall during the school's decade of improvements and worked with the school to organize Prohibition Week and similar events. Throughout the 1920s, the number of Evangelical students decreased from 89% to 45%. The cause may be correlated to the dissention between the two Evangelical organizations involved with the College; however, another factor may be the Evangelical Association's heavy involvement with the College during the Prohibition era.

Keyword Search Results



Campus Wide Support

The overall attitude towards Prohibition at North Central College was positive. Many of the students at the time were Evangelical and came from rural backgrounds; consequently, topics such as temperance were familiar and widely supported. Campus discussions in support of Prohibition began in 1888 and students began to promote the idea as early as 1914. Many students partook in debates on Prohibition topics, attended lectures, showed their support in Booster Club parades, and joined groups such as the Prohibition League and Intercollegiate Prohibition Association. The students at North Central were progressive in their ideas and had most likely witnessed the effects of drinking alcohol or were taught ideas of temperance. The student handbook of 1870, written by students at the time, prohibited engaging with intoxicating liquors and immoral behavior. They hoped that through this movement, people would contribute more to society. Even towards the end of Prohibition, students still believed in its' ideas. A *Chronicle* survey taken in 1932 found that 243 students were still in favor of Prohibition, while only 51 were against.



Student members of the Prohibition League on campus.
Source: North Central College Archives, <https://library.noctrl.edu/archives>

Sample Bibliography

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