



Drink: A Social History of America

Andrew Barr

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In this shrewd cultural history of drink in America, Andrew Barr considers the significance of alcohol, historically and socially, symbolic and real, in the evolution of a nation born of a rebel spirit and intoxicated by liberty - and sometimes by rum or raw whiskey, which the colonists preferred to their royally taxed British tea. While Americans have both asserted and celebrated their freedoms with alcohol they have also, in Barr's perceptive historical view, put it to more insidious use; in suppressing native American populations in the country's expansion west, for instance, or in controlling acculturation of immigrants. Blending his candidly opinionated take on history with a lively bit of cultural anthropology, Barr examines not only the social influences that determine what, where, and why we choose to drink but also the social ills that have been attributed to alcohol, from the supposed decline in national values to the dipsomaniacal state of our national health. Barr argues, however, that the scapegoating of alcohol by moral alarmists, the medical establishment, and platform politicians has more often produced dubious cures and moral hypocrisy than it has accomplished social good.

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