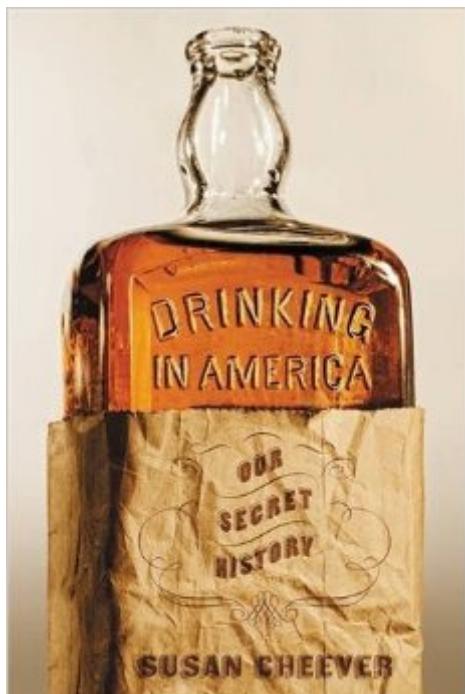


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Drinking In America: Our Secret History



Synopsis

In DRINKING IN AMERICA, bestselling author Susan Cheever chronicles our national love affair with liquor, taking a long, thoughtful look at the way alcohol has changed our nation's history. This is the often-overlooked story of how alcohol has shaped American events and the American character from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Seen through the lens of alcoholism, American history takes on a vibrancy and a tragedy missing from many earlier accounts. From the drunkenness of the Pilgrims to Prohibition hijinks, drinking has always been a cherished American custom: a way to celebrate and a way to grieve and a way to take the edge off. At many pivotal points in our history—the illegal Mayflower landing at Cape Cod, the enslavement of African Americans, the McCarthy witch hunts, and the Kennedy assassination, to name only a few—alcohol has acted as a catalyst. Some nations drink more than we do, some drink less, but no other nation has been the drunkest in the world as America was in the 1830s only to outlaw drinking entirely a hundred years later. Both a lively history and an unflinching cultural investigation, DRINKING IN AMERICA unveils the volatile ambivalence within one nation's tumultuous affair with alcohol.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

First get the facts straight, then tell the story. This is a good book, entertaining and well written. But I'm sure Susan Cheever would agree that, as a historian, her first duty is to the facts. A factual error, even if minor and not related to the central premise, creates a red flag, and is apt to make the reader view the rest of the work with suspicion. Unfortunately, Ms. Cheever makes

several. Early in the book, in referring to Benedict Arnold's treason, she writes that it occurred a few years after Ticonderoga, after the surrender at Yorktown. Actually, it happened in September 1780, more than a year before Yorktown. Later, she gives credit to Ethan Allen for transporting the cannon captured at Fort Ticonderoga to Boston in time for the Battle of Bunker Hill. It was Henry Knox, Washington's chief of artillery, who did so in December 1775. Ethan Allen had been captured by the British almost 3 months earlier, and remained a prisoner for the rest of the war. Two small knit picks: the author claims that George Washington favored imported port, while most historians give that distinction to Madeira, and she reports that he spent his final years on his estates sitting on the veranda drinking with friends while looking out over the city that had already been named after him. It's a nice thought, but Mount Vernon is 18 miles from Washington, D. C. That distance, plus a long bend in the Potomac River, make it impossible.

A collection of anecdotes about drinking and drinkers (and some nondrinkers) sprinkled over a shallow and spotty chronology of U.S. history. While the thesis is that alcohol affected major events and possibly the destiny of the nation, there's no unified thread and little evidence that drink changed the country any more than the country changed drink. Cheever uses a chapter to repeat her earlier writing about the origins of Alcoholics Anonymous. Occasionally interesting but of no particular value.

Interesting topic, but the writing style is pretty terrible. Jumping from topics or locations, too many names, repeating things. Once again, a book written to fill more than 30 pages which would have been enough.

This book was a great disappointment. I am glad it was free and I paid nothing for it. If a book claims to be some kind of history, I expect that the author has made some kind of effort to present history accurately. From the beginning, the author stated many historical inaccuracies. And in the latter part of the book, it became evident she was presenting as historical facts things that she THOUGHT might be true just to prove her points. It was also clear that she used people she just did not like as examples of drunks. She totally lost me when she blamed the Iraq war on Pres. Bush's drinking. I thought that war was a mistake but really? He had quit drinking long before that. What ever this book is, it is not history.

This book is ok, but less than I expected. While she does give some interesting anecdotes on people and events in history who were "influenced" by alcohol consumption, she goes off a lot on talking about alcoholism and its effects on people and their families and treatment which is not why I bought the book. I was disappointed in it.

The first part of the book is interesting but once she starts writing about how "special" authors are and about 20th century politicians she clearly doesn't like, it just seems rather self serving. Glad I didn't buy the book but only borrowed it.

The book is all over the map. It is contradictory in many places. I managed to plow through 2/3rds of it and then she went after George W Bush. I am not a Bush fan, but speculating about what part alcoholism played in his decision making decades after he quit drinking is not history. It is opinion. Does the author know the difference?

Apparently Susan Cheever and her father both had or have problems handling alcohol and this is how she addresses her familial problem of alcohol abuse. It was interesting as we moved into the last 150 or so years of alcohol in America, all the famous drunks happened to be Republicans. We don't hear a word about Teddy Kennedy's problems with alcohol nor other infamous Democrat boozers. After the first 75 years of history the book degenerates into a diatribe against Republican boozers. Sorry, Susan, a recounting of history should be even-handed and your book is not.

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