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Caribbean Rum: A Social And Economic History



Synopsis

"The most significant contribution to the history of Caribbean rum since John McCusker's Rum and the American Revolution. . . . It adds significantly to McCusker's work by analyzing the Caribbean environment in greater depth and by bringing the story forward by two centuries."--Anthony P. Maingot, Florida International University

Christopher Columbus brought sugarcane to the New World on his second voyage. By 1520 commercial sugar production was underway in the Caribbean, along with the perfection of methods to ferment and distill alcohol from sugarcane to produce a new beverage that would have dramatic impact on the region. Caribbean Rum presents the fascinating cultural, economic, and ethnographic history of rum in the Caribbean from the colonial period to the present. Drawing on data from historical archaeology and the economic history of the Caribbean, Frederick Smith explains why this industry arose in the islands, how attitudes toward alcohol consumption have impacted the people of the region, and how rum production evolved over 400 years from a small colonial activity to a multi-billion-dollar industry controlled by multinational corporations. He investigates the economic impact of Caribbean rum on many scales, including rum's contribution to sugarcane plantation revenues, its role in bolstering colonial and postcolonial economies, and its impact on Atlantic trade. Smith discusses the political and economic trends that determined the value of rum, especially war, competition from other alcohol industries, slavery and emancipation, temperance movements, and globalization. The book also examines the social and sacred uses of rum and identifies the forces that shaped alcohol use in the Caribbean. It shows how levels of drinking and drunken deportment reflected underlying social tensions, which were driven by the coercive exploitation of labor and set within a highly contentious hierarchy based on class, race, gender, religion, and ethnic identity, and how these tensions were magnified by epidemic disease, poor living conditions, natural disasters, international conflicts, and unstable food supplies.

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Customer Reviews

"Examines how the role of alcohol within the plantation system of the Caribbean has evolved since the sixteenth century.... Smith draws on documentary, archaeological, and ethnographic evidence from Africa, Europe, and the Americas.... Suitable for a variety of readers." - American Anthropologist "Delving into diverse topics, such as the physical environment of the rum still, the cultural use of alcohol in West African funeral rites, and rum's commercial history, Smith's interdisciplinary approach has provided historians of the Atlantic with a well-argued, eloquent examination of one of the Caribbean's transformative goods and of 'Captain Morgan's' drink of choice." - H-Net Reviews "Intellectually rich and deliciously complex.... Smith shows his undeniable talent as a researcher and story-teller as rum's multiple facets unfold from the very first page." - Journal of Latin American Geography"

Frederick H. Smith, assistant professor of anthropology at the College of William and Mary.

Bought it for my dad, he loved it. It talks about the history of the environment and economy surrounding the rum world, all things rum.

Depends on what you are expecting. If pictures and trendy book, don't go for it. If a lot of information and serious study, go for it. I am satisfied as there are information I had been looking for. Well written

I enjoyed reading this historic overview of the rum history and social history of the Caribbean. It was useful for learning the terminology and background. Well written and referenced, I found it a great book for reading during my travels.

A work that epoch, when addressing a topic that is little appreciated by many historians, and offer a model for addressing the same theme in other regions and other alcoholic beverages

Good but lengthy!

Over the past couple of decades I have read and studied most rum books available in the market. I can honestly say that this is the first book in a very long time to contribute new knowledge to the industry. Rather than following the true-and-tried formula of including a bit of history, overview of some rum companies and their products and offering a plethora of rum cocktail recipes, this book focuses exclusively on the social and economic impact of rum, from the slave plantations to modern society. I was impressed by the level of research performed by the author to document the stress-relieving effect of rum on slaves (their owners would often make rum available to the slaves and would encourage them to drink it in order to give them frequent escapes from reality), the ratios of rum production to rum consumptions per country in the Caribbean through the years, the social acceptance of drunkenness and its relationship to violence, etc. Another area of the book that I was very impressed by, is the section devoted to describing the emergence of the rum economy, the threat it posed on European alcohol industries and the subsequent legislations that were put in place in an attempt to control the proliferation of rum. All in all, this book is full of interesting facts and tables, all pearls of information for the true rum aficionado. Those seeking colorful pictures of ornate cocktails with palm trees on the background will be disappointed, but then again, there is a plethora of books to satisfy those consumers. This book is well researched, well written and I'm certain will be quoted by many future works on rum. Luis Ayala Author and Rum Consultant Rum Runner Press, Inc.

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