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Bourbon Empire: The Past And Future Of America's Whiskey

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BOURBON EMPIRE

The Past and Future of

AMERICA'S WHISKEY



REID MITENBULER

NARRATED BY BRIAN O'NEILL



Synopsis

How bourbon came to be, and why it's experiencing such a revival today. Unraveling the many myths and misconceptions surrounding America's most iconic spirit, Bourbon Empire traces a history that spans frontier rebellion, Gilded Age corruption, and the magic of Madison Avenue. Whiskey has profoundly influenced America's political, economic, and cultural destiny, just as those same factors have inspired the evolution and unique flavor of the whiskey itself. Taking listeners behind the curtain of an enchanting - and sometimes exasperating - industry, the work of writer Reid Mitenbuler crackles with attitude and commentary about taste, choice, and history. Few products better embody the United States, or American business, than bourbon. A tale of innovation, success, downfall, and resurrection, Bourbon Empire is an exploration of the spirit in all its unique forms, creating an indelible portrait of both bourbon and the people who make it.

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Customer Reviews

I'm not a bourbon drinker, myself. Bourbon was my late grandfather's drink, the one who fought WWII in the U.S. Army Air Corps and then raised three children in a wholesome Midwestern town. I'm about as likely to order a Jim Beam on the rocks as I am to fly missions over the Ruhr Valley, or eat TV dinners while watching reruns of M*A*S*H. Which is to say, not very likely. So it was a pleasant surprise to enjoy this book so much. That's because Bourbon Empire is not just a history of bourbon, it's a history of America. With a keen eye for a good story, and prose so good you'll find yourself reading it twice, Reid

Mitenbuler goes beyond the rough and ready frontier folk whose names have been pasted on the bottles apocryphally to tell his readers the truth about America's founding drunkards, plucky immigrants, ruthless capitalists, earnest reformers, Prohibition-era bootleggers, Madison Avenue bamboozlers, and modern-day chemists in lab coats. Unabashed five stars. All my friends are getting Bourbon Empire for Father's Day. I only wish Grandpa could have read this book.

This interesting recount, analysis, and projection on America's "native spirit" (as it is often misquoted) is wonderfully written and informative. I learned much about my personal favorite spirit from this book without it ever feeling dry. I would highly recommend you order this, pour a glass, sit in a comfortable chair, and let the 'Murcia flow through you.

While this book does get a little tedious at times, it's a fairly fast read and gives you a ton of information about how bourbon grew up in the United States. It also gives you a lot to think about as a bourbon drinker. I first picked it up when I read an excerpt where the author was talking about the dubious value of small, craft bourbons versus some of the products distilled at the larger companies. Just goes to show that small is not always better. It also gave me a few names to search for in the liquor store!

Mitenbuler's written a hell of a fun biography of that brown stuff your grandpa and no one else drank when you were little. He pulls off the tall task of being comprehensive covering bourbon's long, rich history while keeping things interesting and engaging. The writing's not dry (whiskey pun!) and is filled with Gladwellian nuggets ready to wow dinner parties (e.g. a "shot" is thought to be the amount of booze an old timey soldier could get in exchange for one bullet). There's plenty here to entertain drinkers and teetotalers alike as bourbon's path speaks volumes to the history of our fair US of A and how our relationships with liquors have evolved to reflect the times. Filled with colorful characters, it's easy to understand why it's not just your gramps drinking bourbon in today's day and age.

This was my first foray into the history of bourbon and definitely seemed like a great entry point for a broad overview of the subject. Mitenbuler has the tendency to focus on one or two brands per era that he uses almost as mini-case studies to illustrate his point, which I found effective in connecting the history of the drink to many of the names, peoples, and brands that someone who only really knows about the modern bourbonscape can connect to. At times he does get a bit repetitive, and he

does come dangerously close in some of the later chapters to something that could be seen more as marketing than may be appropriate (I do not believe he crosses the line, but I could see other people viewing these later chapters in a bit of a harsher light.) Additionally, this book is grounded heavily in the current atmosphere surrounding whiskey, which is great if you're reading it 2015, but may be a little less powerful in the future (barring any updates to the text.)

First, you definitely need a glass of bourbon in hand while you read this review, let alone the book. Spectacular history of bourbon in the US. Mr Mitenbuler not only analyzes most brands and their lineage, but also focuses on the movers and shakers that made American bourbon what it is today, for better or worse. For example, I didn't even know that Old Crow used to be a high end bourbon in the mid-1900s. It's simply amazing to read how many bourbons rose to prominence then just as suddenly fell out of favor, and which ones rose from the ashes in present day. As bourbon has now seen a resurgence in popularity, I'd highly recommend picking up, if not at least to have some cool facts to bring with you next time you go to the bar. Just don't be that guy who goes overboard and will only drink Pappy Van Winkle.

The book is a fascinating tale delivered in an exemplary fashion. Bourbon is a huge part of US history and the historical twists and turns of the country had a huge impact on the bourbon industry. The two are deeply connected in ways that this book brings to life effortlessly. A great read, could not recommend it more.

Mr. Mitenbuler's book deserves a space on the shelves of history lovers as well as bourbon lovers. It does not just repeat the popular history of American whiskey; rather it adds detail, context, and perspective to an important contributor in the development of the American economy. His Acknowledgements section, Bibliography, and parts of several chapters give credit to other authors well-known to the community of American whiskey enthusiasts because they rely on historical research rather than folklore (and advertising copy) to tell the story of Bourbon. I liked Mr. Mitenbuler's somewhat novel approach - he tells the story of bourbon by telling the story of the economic development of the U.S. with a focus on how bourbon, and other American whiskeys, contributed to that growth rather than focusing just on the growth of bourbon. It certainly deserves to be included with the half-dozen or so definitive works on bourbon which is why I bought the hard copy AND the Kindle version. It looks really nice with those other six or so books, each of which is special in its own way. And each of which has been read more than once. Way more.

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