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Marni Davis. *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition.* Goldstein-Goren Series in American Jewish History. New York: New York University Press, 2012. x + 262 pp. $32.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8147-2028-8.

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Readers of *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition* expecting to find lengthy accounts of Jewish gangsters and their rough-and-tumble exploits will be disappointed. Marni Davis's discussion of bootleggers focuses more on Orthodox rabbis, those unlikely misfits, than on gangsters whose success in the trade was "entirely atypical" (p. 150). Gangsters play a role in this narrative, but their part does not outshine other members of the American Jewish community who participated in or responded to the alcohol trade in the years surrounding, during, and after Prohibition. To her credit, Davis does not sensationalize her subject; rather, she offers an important and forceful study that uses American Jews' conflicted relationships to alcohol as a lens through which to examine their struggles to define themselves as Jewish and American.

Davis narrates a truly multivocal account of Jewish experience during the era of Prohibition and offers a new model for apprehending the American Jewish past. She lets us hear the voices of immigrants with and against those of powerful and established Jews; the perspectives of southerners, midwesterners, westerners, and northerners; and the assorted views of rabbis, representing Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform communities. Davis uses these distinct and, at times, contesting voices to illustrate American Jewry's complex motivations for participating in the alcohol trade and the equally complex associations between Jews and "booze." This is not a straightforward story of Jews adapting willingly and easily to American culture, and readers come to feel "how difficult it was for American Jews to unite their ethnic and American identities" (p. 3). This process of "becoming," in other words, does not follow the usual scripts of synthesis typically found in American Jewish histories.[1] Davis tells a story in which American Jews do not necessarily or easily reconcile the contradictions between their Jewish and American "allegiances." And these challenges are most forcefully illustrated when she details the multiple ways American Jews were forced to adapt to a shifting and often hostile national culture.

Davis begins by establishing how the American alcohol industry facilitated acculturation for nineteenth-century Jewish immigrants, largely from central Europe, who had participated in the alcohol trade prior to their arrival. Many of these entrepreneurs gravitated toward whiskey, because, as Davis notes, the organizational structure of this industry enabled Jews to enter as suppliers, producers, or distributors. Whiskey, along with other sectors of the alcohol trade, forced Jewish entrepreneurs to work closely with non-Jews. This contact encouraged some "to redefine Jewish identity and group unity so that it did not preclude integration" (p. 32). Perhaps owing to these fluid boundaries with non-Jews, Jews in the alcohol industry simultaneously cultivated strong social, religious, and business associations among Jews. Jewish whiskeymen helped to reform educational and religious institutions, such as local Young Men's Hebrew Associations (YMHAs) and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, to reflect American expectations and facilitate "an acculturated version of Jewish organizational life" (p. 31). These nineteenth-century protagonists actively sought a melding of American and Jewish life.

With the rise of temperance as a social and political movement during the Gilded Age, American Jews used their acculturated positions to challenge Prohibition on ideological grounds and present themselves as model citizens worthy of emulation. Davis notes that many American Jews unequivocally rejected temperance as antithetical to ethnic interests, since they viewed the movement as "inextricably intertwined" with evangelical Protestantism (p. 49). Rabbis Isaac Mayer Wise and Marcus Jastrow protested temperance, by turns, as anti-constitutional and a danger to free markets, thus anti-American, and as a movement promoting fundamentally un-Jewish gender ideals: advocates of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) "radically transgressed their proper role" (p. 55). Jewish economic interest in the alcohol trade did not diminish during this period, but Davis argues that it was not the only salient issue motivating American Jewish participation in the "wet/dry debate" (p. 67). The community also viewed attacks by temperance advocates as challenges to their hard-earned and deeply felt rights as Americans.

With the arrival of eastern European Jewish immigrants at the turn of the century, communal demographics changed as did the relationship between American Jews and alcohol. Davis writes that the desire among Russian and Polish Jews to follow "traditional religious commitments" stimulated the growth of the kosher wine industry in America (p. 82): such religious practices brought about changes in the type of alcohol Jews produced, sold, and consumed. The influx of immigrants, Davis notes, also affected "saloon culture" for ethnic communities in the North and South. As communal sites that offered immigrants "the solace of comradeship and shared leisure space," saloons also marked Jews as alcohol purveyors at a moment when Prohibition sentiment was gaining cultural force (p. 92). In a sharp and detailed discussion, Davis describes the convergence of anti-Semitism, populism, and prohibitionism; these ideologies focalized cultural anxieties over industrialism and immigration. Davis deftly uses the "Jew saloon" as a lens through which to examine these connections: "Jews became a symbol, a stand-in for complex and discomfiting socioeconomic dynamics" (p. 110). Populists expressed anxiety toward Jewish middlemen, while progressives viewed prohibition as a vehicle for "remak[ing] immigrants into Americans" (p. 117).

As part of this larger discussion detailing conceptions of Jews and alcohol prior to Prohibition, Davis offers a rich portrait of Atlanta and the social forces--race, sex, and class--shaping the southern cultural landscape. When a mob of angry whites descended on Decatur Street in 1906, destroying black-owned saloons and murdering dozens of black citizens, Jewish Atlantans responded variously. Acculturated members of the

Jewish community took their cues from their white middle-class neighbors, expressing concern but refraining from critique or protest. More recently arrived immigrants, like David Yampolsky, viewed the riot as a "pogrom on the blacks" (p. 126). Jews had become inextricably linked with alcohol, both through business interests and ideological oppositions to Prohibition, and their coveted status as Americans seemed in peril.

Davis keenly argues and amply documents the degree to which Prohibition became an index for responding to larger, more complex anxieties in American society, and how American Jews became perforce caught between asserting their Jewish and American identities. Section 6 of the Volstead Act of 1919 granted special dispensation for the purchase and consumption of alcohol for religious purposes. Davis details how Jews of every stripe took advantage of this exemption and, as they did in other entrepreneurial ventures, developed extensive business networks with and among other Jews. Gangsters, Davis insists, worked "within a Jewish ethnic economy that looked like a violent, underworld version" of legitimate businesses (p. 148). Tempting as it may be for writers today to glamorize or celebrate their success, criminals like Meyer Lansky, Abner "Longy" Zwillman, and their ilk were not alone among Jewish bootleggers of the period.[2] Orthodox rabbis, especially those who lived and worked in immigrant neighborhoods, used the act's special dispensation to augment their meager earnings: as Davis notes, "alcohol became a means to escape destitution and, for a few, to achieve genuine financial comfort" (p. 155). But not all "rabbis" were, in fact, religiously observant or Jewish. The loopholes in the act, which enabled some Jews to get rich and others to stave off poverty, also provided fodder for Prohibition supporters and anti-Semites--at times, one and the same--who were all too ready to challenge American Jews' patriotism and ability to assimilate. And though some Jews readily took advantage of such prospects, others condemned bootlegging as illegal and "bad" for the community.

From the years of temperance through the period of Prohibition, the synthesis of American and Jewish interests--carefully nurtured and professed by established members of the community--were sorely tested and, at points, fragmented. Davis notes that dissension within the community led Elias Cohen to say that American Jewry was "a house divided against itself" (p. 164). This sentiment became especially evident in the wrangling between Orthodox and other Jewish groups over the use of sacramental wine. Such a shifting of loyalties illustrates Davis's larger argument regarding the volatile associations between alcohol and American Jews: as American views regarding alcohol changed, so too did attitudes toward Jews and Jewish participation in the industry. The end of Prohibition marked another transformation in popular attitudes: no longer perceived as threatening to the body politic, Jews and alcohol became nonissues. It also helped that Jews had moved into other pursuits and, on the whole, played a less prominent role in the industry.

Davis offers a serious and compelling study, rich with varied accounts of American Jewish life that are seldom found in one place. Her book combines business history, consumer history, ethnic history, to some degree racial history, and certainly social history. Within these broader categories, Davis travels through the fascinating, multiethnic saloon cultures of Newark and Atlanta, detailing how Jews negotiated these charged social spaces. She includes stories of Jewish cooperation as well as intra-ethnic tension, the moments when Jewishness trumped other vectors of identity and the times when competing interests--class, religious denomination, or region--compromised these ethnic alliances. Davis does not offer sweeping pronouncements, nor does she flatten the many voices and stories in this study to fit a singular argument or narrative arc. She rejects a simplistic story of synthesis in favor of one that de-

tails a "struggle to negotiate" what Jewishness and Americanness symbolized for others as well as members of the community (p. 3). In doing so, she acknowledges that the process of becoming is contradictory, mutable, and rich with possibility. By detailing the manufacturers, purveyors, and consumers in the alcohol trade, an industry fraught with cultural stigma, Davis examines the challenges as well as the triumphs American Jews experienced in trying to meld ethnic and civic interests. She does not take success as a matter of course, however, or use it as a framework for interpreting the past.[3] ***Jews and Booze*** tells many important stories and recognizes the diversity and complexity of American Jewish experience.

Notes

[1]. For a discussion of American Jewish synthesis, see Jonathan Sarna, "The Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture," ***Jewish Social Studies*** 5, no. 1/2 (Autumn 1998-Winter 1999): 52-79.

[2]. On the recuperation of Jewish gangsters as noteworthy American Jews, see Wendy H. Bergoffen, "Guardians, Millionaires, and Fearless Fighters: Transforming Jewish Gangsters into a Usable Past," ***Shofar*** 25, no. 4 (2007): 91-110.

[3]. Rebecca Kobrin, "Destructive Creators: Sender Jarmulowsky and Financial Failure in the Annals of American Jewish History," ***American Jewish History*** 97, no. 2 (April 2013): 105-137.