

J. Anne Funderburg. *Rumrunners: Liquor Smugglers on America's Coasts, 1920-1933.* Jefferson: Mcfarland, 2016. 208 pp. \$39.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4766-6757-7.

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Published on H-FedHist (February, 2018)

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Few subjects draw more attention than the American experiment with the national prohibition of alcohol from 1920 to 1933. In nearly every part of the country, tales abound of this site or that house being the location for bootlegging or other related criminal activities. Popular culture has also provided a vivid backdrop for these activities, portraying participants as either violent thugs, as in *The Untouchables* (1987), or as complex and sympathetic characters, as in HBO's *Boardwalk Empire* (2010-14). The identities and operations of most bootleggers beyond the most notorious are largely unknown and confined to local narratives. J. Anne Funderburg's *Rumrunners* proposes to place those narratives within a broader context and that the work is the "first accurate, comprehensive history of liquor smuggling on the high seas" (p. 1).

The book follows a generally narrative structure, with each chapter standing as a largely separate vignette of a particular topic or individual. There is no formal introduction or conclusion, simply a four-paragraph preface and short chapter at the end that discusses the ending of Prohibition. Within the work there are four key sections that, while not identified as such, define the core structure of the book. The first two chapters establish the operations of Rum Row, the floating array of vessels just inside international waters

where smaller vessels from the shore would transport liquor back to their bases. Other ships operated as a combination drinking establishment and retail store. The following chapter covers the operations of the islands of St. Pierre and the Bahamas, principal sites where liquor was stored and then transferred to the vessels of Rum Row. The second section addresses the efforts of the United States Coast Guard to stem the tide of illegal liquor coming into the Atlantic seacoast. The four chapters cover a range of topics including the limitations of equipment available to catch high-powered rumrunner boats, the challenge of corruption within the ranks of the Coast Guard, and the bursts of violence inherent to the Prohibition effort. The third section addresses a series of individuals engaged in the trade, sites such as Long Island, and larger groups that utilized radio and more sophisticated ways to elude law enforcement. The final five chapters move the discussion to the Gulf of Mexico and the West Coast along with the brief discussion of Prohibition's end.

While each of the chapters has interesting and engaging content, they stand largely apart from each other. Even as a narrative work, the lack of a unifying discussion makes the book feel like a collection of essays rather than a unified whole. As noted, there is no formal introduction

or conclusion, simply the assertion in the brief preface by the author. It further speaks of the “shortcomings” of other works, but provides no discussion of those works or how this particular book will offer redress of those limitations. The material within the chapters flows well internally but ends abruptly with no connection to the next chapter. There is also little analysis of the events chronicled, with the material being presented largely as a series of “flat facts.” Indeed, it is a curious point that while the book follows parts of both the narrative and academic writing format it conforms to neither style.

The strongest part of the book discusses the activities of two women rumrunners, Gertrude Lythgoe and Edith Stevens, who played significant but separate roles within the operations of Rum Row. While the other, largely male, figures are also engaging, the chapters devoted to these women stand out as they are the most sharply written and offer more analysis than the other chapters. Another strong chapter concerns the legal ramifications of the Prohibition efforts, notably the 1929 *I'm Alone* case. The Coast Guard chased this particular vessel down in the Gulf of Mexico, shelling and sinking it, resulting in the loss of one of the crew. Though merged into a larger chapter this case and others offer a window into a different facet of the Prohibition effort that involved a branch of the armed forces rather than the better-known struggle of the newly formed Bureau of Prohibition and the varying quality of its agents. Even so, it misses the opportunity to comment on the introduction of more sophisticated weaponry such as navy destroyers as well as cutters, radio communications, and militarized tactics by the Coast Guard to respond to the well-organized and determined rumrunners.

Although the preface comments on the variety of sources consulted, the principal body of sources cited consists of newspapers culled from a range of areas. Though secondary sources do appear, US Coast Guard files appear only sparing-

ly in the nondiscursive endnotes, and not in the bibliography. Additionally, the large number of available court records and other materials related to the various trials discussed, including the *I'm Alone* case, also do not appear. Combined with the assertion to provide a more balanced discussion of Prohibition rumrunners and the heavy reliance newspapers, this lack underscores the earlier point regarding whether the work is a scholarly or narrative work.

This book points readers in a new direction to consider the activities of various participants in the illegal liquor trade outside of either land-based or previously studied major figures. The culling of extensive materials from digital newspaper databases is very well done, but does not afford a full view of the activities of the individuals and organizations chronicled. As an addition to the literature on Prohibition the book pushes researchers to consider the activities of those outside of the spotlight and in communities located away from major cities.

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Citation: Matthew Daley. Review of Funderburg, J. Anne. *Rumrunners: Liquor Smugglers on America's Coasts, 1920-1933*. H-FedHist, H-Net Reviews. February, 2018.

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