

**Lisa Lindquist Dorr.** *A Thousand Thirsty Beaches: Smuggling Alcohol from Cuba to the South during Prohibition.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. 312 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-4327-4.

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*A Thousand Thirsty Beaches* examines liquor smuggling, consumption, and law enforcement in the US South during Prohibition. During this thirteen-year period, the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which took effect in January 1920, outlawed the production, transport, and sale of alcoholic beverages in the United States. However, the amendment only banned the supply side of alcohol; it did nothing to address the demand side. As a result, a thriving black market in alcohol emerged. Prohibition-era bootlegging has inspired no shortage of historical studies, and the harrowing tales of gangsters, smugglers, and police chases in Hollywood films have afforded this historical period a myth-like quality. What makes Lisa Lindquist Dorr's approach to this well-known topic unique is her focus on the international dimensions of smuggling. She shows how bootleggers in the United States sought to supply the persisting demand for liquor by obtaining alcohol from surrounding countries where it remained legal, including Cuba.

By examining smuggling from Cuba to the US South, Dorr created an unparalleled opportunity to explore the relationship between Progressive reforms and US empire. She shows how Prohibition simultaneously depended on US power over Cuba while also revealing the weakness of the

United States in its inability to enforce its own laws. Ultimately, the limited successes of domestic Prohibition enforcement and the burgeoning international dimensions of alcohol smuggling pushed the United States to extend the reach of its laws and law enforcement well beyond its territorial waters. Cuba's neocolonial status under the Platt Amendment during the first three decades of the twentieth century ensured some degree of cooperation in that task.

The book is organized thematically into five substantive chapters. The first chapter offers a descriptive overview of the illegal trade in alcohol, focusing on three key areas: liquor wholesalers in Cuba, smuggling ships at sea, and the reception and sale of liquor through coastal towns in the US South. The second chapter documents the efforts of the US Coast Guard to enforce the ban on alcohol, focusing especially on the challenges of enforcement. Chapter 3 shifts the geographic focus to Havana, outlining the efforts of US personnel to extend the enforcement efforts beyond the United States. Chapter 4 shows how smugglers began smuggling undocumented immigrants and narcotics in the face of temporary successes against liquor smuggling. The fifth chapter centers US Southerners who bought, sold, and consumed smuggled alcohol.

The book's strength lies in its ability to pinpoint the profound contradictions defining the United States at the dawn of the so-called American century. Whereas the United States projected itself as an emergent superpower on a global stage, Dorr uses liquor smuggling as a lens to highlight the multitude of ways that claim to authority rang hollow. For instance, Progressive reformers sought to tame and civilize the US South through Prohibition, but Dorr shows how the Eighteenth Amendment ultimately created new opportunities for southerners to thwart federal authority through smuggling. At the same time, the US government struggled to enforce its own laws, due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and challenges with interagency cooperation. The country's inability to enforce the law underscored the precariousness of US claims to authority.

The book also reveals a lesser-known dimension of US imperialism in Cuba. While Cubanist historians have explored many of the ways the Platt Amendment undermined Cuban sovereignty and destabilized the island politically, few studies have acknowledged the precedent it set for Prohibition enforcement.[1] To this point, Dorr's examination of how the US government coerced Cuba to enforce US law, even as it harmed the island's economic interests, stands as unique analysis.

While the book certainly offers a novel perspective on US history, readers may struggle to find similar insights on the other country mentioned in the title. Indeed, the missing accentuation on Spanish-language proper nouns throughout the text hints at the backseat role Cuba plays in the book. Two of the book's chapters focus explicitly on liquor smuggling and law enforcement efforts in Cuba—chapter 3, which traces anti-smuggling efforts in Havana, and chapter 4, which documents the expansion of smuggling operations to include a substantial traffic in illegal immigrants and narcotics from Cuba to the United States. However, neither chapter affords much

space to Cuban protagonists or references Cuban sources.

Chapter 3, entitled "Booze Cops in Cuba," offers a compelling example of Cuba's one-dimensional role throughout the book. The chapter describes efforts to enforce Prohibition by US agents in Havana following the passage of the Rum Treaty in October 1926. Provided that the treaty obliged Cuban authorities to provide information on ships suspected of smuggling alcohol to the United States, readers might expect to see some discussion on the interactions between various groups of Cuban authorities and US personnel, including diplomats and Coast Guard officers. Instead, the chapter narrates antismuggling enforcement efforts through the activities of a small group of civilians as they gathered information for the Intelligence Division of the US Coast Guard. Recruited by Henry J. Kime, an American expatriate residing in Havana, the group included Mary O'Kane, the Venezuelan-born wife of an American working in Havana, and Salvador Pena (likely Peña), who apparently had grown up in Havana. The author reconstructs their activities through a series of letters between Kime and Charles S. Root, the head of the Intelligence Division of the US Coast Guard.

The chapter charts the group's discovery of how rum runners secured counterfeit clearance papers to evade detection and the subsequent efforts to relay that intelligence to US authorities. However, the group faced significant challenges in translating the intelligence into law enforcement action. Even though the group obtained clear evidence of smuggling and on several occasions even convinced Cuban authorities to detain rum runners in Havana harbor, convictions were not forthcoming. Dorr shows how bottlenecks, high turnover, and shifting policies in the government bureaucracy and interagency cooperation often delayed the receipt and application of the information, created inconsistencies in the action plan, and impeded reimbursements and pay of

the intelligence group. Through all of this, the reader learns more about the inner workings of the US federal bureaucracy than the particularities of Cuban roles in smuggling and law enforcement.

To be sure, the author bases her narrative on a rich array of archival sources, including the records of US consuls, the US Coast Guard, the US Department of State, US District Court records, and various correspondence among US agents. However, the book contains no references to material in Cuban archives, or even Cuban publications, besides ones quoted in American sources. These sources supported a narrative that, while technically based in Havana, privileges US agents as its key protagonists.

The reader is left to wonder about the involvement of Cuban authorities in the antismuggling activities in Havana. The discussion of enforcement activities in Cuba offered a rare opportunity to explore the attitudes, experiences, and involvement of Cubans employed at various levels of the Cuban government as they engaged with US agents and navigated US empire. Dorr notes that the United States pressured the Cuban government to bear the burden and expense of enforcement, even though it harmed the island's economic interests. However, the reader is left to wonder how Cuban authorities negotiated this and other demands. For instance, the author alludes to "concerns among Cubans" regarding the "unmistakable incompetence among American officials," as well as Cuban frustrations that the US did not "take advantage of their efforts," and the weight of the Platt Amendment in Cuban negotiations and enforcement of the Rum Treaty (pp. 118-119). While likely accurate, none of these observations affords sufficient weight to Cuban voices. Cuban sources, such as trade and customs records, local and national law enforcement documents, diplomatic records, government documents, court records, or even articles from Cuban newspapers housed in archives in Havana and other port

cities might have offered more insights on this and other aspects of this contentious international law enforcement work.

Over all, *A Thousand Thirsty Beaches* is an insightful study of liquor smuggling to the US South during Prohibition. Whereas most accounts of Prohibition focus on well-known northern figures, like mobster Al Capone or New York-based Prohibition agent Izzy Einstein, this book narrates Prohibition through the lives of lesser-known figures in the US South and beyond. Lisa Lindquist Dorr shows how the US South played a central role not only in bootlegging and smuggling, but also in the development of infrastructure, law enforcement, entrepreneurship, and the extension of US law beyond the political borders of the United States. It also makes a case for viewing the region as more "modern" than most historians have allowed. Although the book falls short in its treatment of Cuban involvement in liquor smuggling and antismuggling efforts, students and scholars of US history will find value in the book's innovative analysis of the contradictions of Progressivism and empire.

#### Note

[1]. Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986); Jules R. Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution: An Empire of Liberty in and Age of National Liberation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Melina Pappademos, *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); and Michael E. Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony: Cuba's Isle of Pines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

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