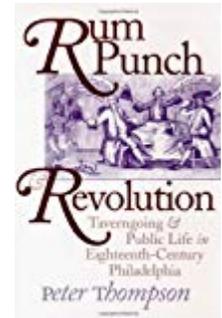**Peter Thompson.** *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999. 265 pp. $18.50, paper, ISBN 978-0-8122-1664-6.

Reviewed by Judith Ridner

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Why were taverns so appealing to so many Philadelphians? Was Philadelphia's tavern culture different from that found in other cities of colonial America? Finally, how did tavern culture shape the larger workings of society and politics in eighteenth-century Philadelphia? In his work, *Rum Punch and Revolution*, historian Peter Thompson, Sydney Mayer Lecturer in Early American History at University of Oxford and Fellow of St. Cross College, sets out to answer these and other related questions in a generally engaging and sometimes provocative new book.

Using the concept of "sociability" as the framework for his analysis, Thompson sets out to explain what he sees as "Philadelphians' passionate attachment to the tavern," a simultaneously private-public space "where they could express and, if necessary, defend their complicated and contested notions of community and society in a new world environment" (p.4). Taverns, in other words, were places where identities were both asserted and contested. Analyzing Philadelphia's taverns, tavernkeepers, tavern patrons, and tavern culture[s], therefore, allows one a microcos-

mic glimpse into the broader and more complex social, economic, and political worlds of eighteenth-century Philadelphia. In the first three chapters, all strong in terms of evidence and analysis, Thompson first paints a general portrait of Philadelphia's tavern trade. Analyzing licensing laws and tavern license petitions, Thompson argues that Philadelphia's tavern trade was in certain respects unique. Unlike Boston, where, as David Conroy has shown, Puritan elders waged a series of battles against alcohol consumption and the public houses that promoted it, in Philadelphia, the idealistic but also pragmatic William Penn and his Quaker compatriots, eager to see their new city develop both rapidly and profitably, quickly reconciled themselves to taverns being permanent features of the cityscape.[1] If Philadelphians wanted to patronize taverns, they would be allowed to do so. City magistrates did not seek to eliminate the trade. Instead, they simply set out to regulate it and keep it respectable.

Thompson next moves readers inside the tavern, arguing that Philadelphia's public houses were more similar than different. Liberal licens-

ing policies, intense competition, and price controls on liquor fostered a uniformity in the city's tavern trade. Taverns, he suggests, were inclusive, and not exclusive spaces. They were places where people of all ranks met and mingled, sometimes eagerly, other times more reluctantly.

Thompson is really at his best in these chapters. His evidence is solid, his analysis interesting. Indeed, he does an especially effective job capturing the complexities and contradictions of early Philadelphia (the 1680s to roughly the 1740s), a paradoxical world where the introspective individualism of Quakers like William Penn was adjusted to coexist with the kind of active, public sociability of non-Quakers like Benjamin Franklin. Taverns and tavern culture, of course, played key roles in this process of adaptation.

In the final two chapters and epilogue, Thompson shifts interpretive gears and focuses more specifically on the connection between tavern culture and politics. He begins this section with a discussion of the "small politics" of Philadelphia's tavern culture and its links to city and colony politics before mid-century. In a city and colony where politics was highly personalized and reputation mattered, tavern talk and tavern confrontations often translated into heated political contests. Tavern sociability, in other words, had larger political implications.

Then Philadelphia's tavern culture changed. The free speech and "small politics" of the pre-1760 era gave way to the "big" politics of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods. The result was a separation of social ranks, an increasingly moral tone to debates, the pursuit of consensus, and, most of all, the desire on the part of Philadelphia's elites to separate politics from sociability. As a result, with the city's wealth gap widening and price controls on liquor ending, taverns became increasingly exclusive spaces serving socially homogeneous clienteles. Establishments like City Tavern were built to serve the genteel, and not the coarse. Thus, while the city's pa-

tricians enjoyed more refined, though not always peaceful, leisure in their own, exclusive spaces by the 1780s, the face-to-face interactions among different ranks once characteristic of all taverns declined. Philadelphia's middling and lower sorts, finding themselves excluded from channels of power in the city, were left to drink in more rustic settings and when angered they rioted in the streets.

Thompson's class-based analysis in this second section of the book is valuable and well grounded in the historical literature of eighteenth-century Philadelphia. He echoes and expands on arguments offered by scholars like Gary Nash and Billy Smith. Indeed, he does a fine job suggesting the many ways that structural changes in Philadelphia's economy could and did impact class and cultural transformations. Yet, while he makes the connections between economics and culture clear, the links between politics, revolution, and cultural change are much less so. In particular, Thompson's discussions of the rising preoccupation with morality during the revolutionary and post-revolutionary eras and its connections to Philadelphia's waning tavern culture are not as clearly argued. To this reader at least, these discussions also seemed less directly connected to the rest of the work. How exactly the ideals of the American Revolution alienated the city's masses from politics could use some more explanation. Was it politics or concepts of leisure that had changed?

In *Rum Punch and Revolution*, Peter Thompson offers readers a valuable (and nicely illustrated) look at one of the more contested social, cultural, and political "spaces" of eighteenth-century urban America. He also adds another scholarly study to the still surprisingly limited historiography of early Philadelphia. Finally, his work leaves readers with some intriguing questions for further consideration (perhaps by other scholars in other studies). First, what role did ethnicity and religion play in shaping Philadelphia's tavern cul-

ture? Thompson argues convincingly that Philadelphia's taverns were settings for a kind of sociability that united people of different classes, albeit at times reluctantly. Yet, after he notes how "Quakers, like Lutherans, generally stood aloof from the rituals of tavern fellowship," (p. 98), and how they were often made to feel like outsiders when toasting, dancing, and singing took place, one is left to wonder exactly how often ethno-religious tensions fractured sociability. Were Philadelphia's taverns ethnically inclusive, or were they largely the domains of Philadelphia's growing Anglican and Presbyterian communities? Was tavern culture a way for these groups to claim power in a city long-dominated by what Thompson characterizes as a Quaker oligarchy? As Thompson suggests, and as any student of Pennsylvania history knows, power shifted dramatically in the colony during the eighteenth century as Quakers found themselves forced to share power first with Anglicans and later with Presbyterians. Was Philadelphia's thriving tavern culture, especially before say the 1730s or 1740s, really an exclusive way for these non-Quaker groups to claim power in the city?

Second, in chapter three, Thompson suggests that the tavern was a shared space where private and public intersected. As he notes, taverns served multiple functions. They offered drink, food, and lodging to guests (and their horses). Most were private residences as well. They were spaces where business and family life intersected. Thompson makes a strong case for the myriad ways taverns became public spaces. He does a generally thorough job of explaining how the microcosmic world of tavern sociability translated out into the larger workings of city, colony, and state. But what about the private side of these spaces? How exactly did work and family life intersect, especially for those poor and often desperate women who operated some 25 percent of the city's taverns?

In his opening chapters, Thompson paints an interesting portrait of tavernkeeping as a female as well as a male profession. Yet, as chapters progress and his focus shifts increasingly to the political, these women tavernkeepers disappear. If "small politics" was indeed the heart of tavern sociability, then where did all these women fit in? Were early Philadelphia's "small political" intrigues exclusively male? Or, did these women tavernkeepers influence the style and substance of this culture in ways that had broader implications on the city's interconnected social and political worlds?

Note

[1]. David Conroy, *In Public Houses: Drink and the Revolution of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

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