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## Book Review - The Coming of Southern Prohibition: The Dispensary System and the Battle over Liquor in South Carolina, 1907-1915

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## Off the SHELF

**The Coming of Southern Prohibition: The Dispensary System and the Battle over Liquor in South Carolina, 1907-1915** by Michael Lewis (Louisiana State University Press, 2016: ISBN 9780807162989, \$45.00)

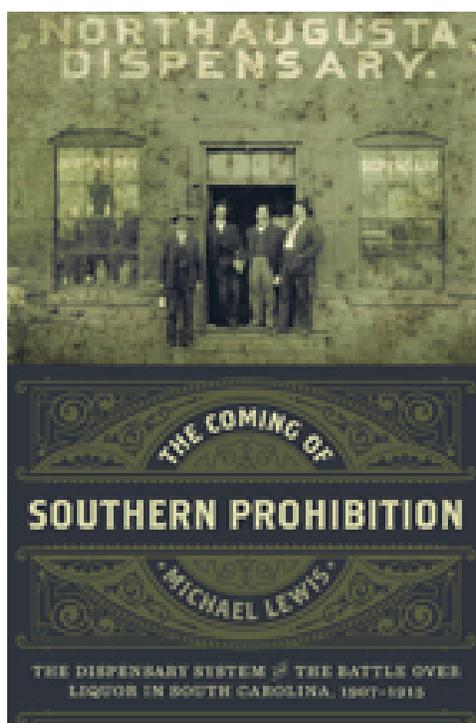
In his book *The Coming of Southern Prohibition*, Michael Lewis offers an exhaustively researched history of South Carolina's alcohol dispensary system between 1907 and 1915. In early 1908, Georgia enacted state-wide prohibition. Thus began a 10 year struggle within South Carolina between those who wished to profit from alcohol sales to neighboring Georgians in order to improve South Carolina infrastructure without raising taxes and those who wished to avoid the social and moral corruption that they believed alcohol sales would bring. What resulted was South Carolina's dispensary system, which essentially established a governmental monopoly on the bottling and sales of alcohol that lasted for close to 10 years.

Lewis's book is broken into three sections, the first of which is a detailed history of the politics of the South Carolina dispensary, the economic context that led to the establishment of the dispensary system, the social costs of the system, and the change from a statewide system to a local option later in South Carolina's movement towards statewide prohibition.

The second section of the book focuses largely on one dispensary in North Augusta, South

Carolina, just across the state line from Augusta, Georgia. This dispensary in Aiken County is offered as a case study in order to form a more nuanced understanding of the forces both for and against alcohol sales in South Carolina at the turn of the century. Lewis offers a detailed description of the coalition of pro-prohibition factions that united within South Carolina to oppose the sale of alcohol including newly emerging evangelical Protestants, women's clubs such as the

Christian Women's Temperance Union, and middle class progressives who feared the social disruption of alcoholism and governmental corruption. In addition, he provides a history of and a sharp analysis of the impact of race, class, and religion that shaped attitudes towards alcohol sales across the South. Finally, he offers an in-depth history of pro-alcohol sales forces within the state who saw an opportunity to relieve land-owning citizens' tax burdens while increasing tax revenue in order to improve civic life, including the building and improving of roads and hospitals, and schools, etc.



The final section of the book describes the successes and failures of the dispensary system and finally, a look at the beginnings of true prohibition in South Carolina through the enactment of laws that prohibited distribution of liquor to dry states. Additionally, Lewis describes the softening of prohibition laws in Georgia, which impacted sales and therefore revenue in North Augusta leading to a lessening

of the political desire to maintain a dispensary within the county.

At times, the book reads more as a dissertation than a book for general public consumption. Lewis includes an exhaustive list of resources as well as charts and graphs detailing sales rates for the dispensary and crime rates for the surrounding county. Nevertheless, it is an excellently written analysis of the socio-cultural and political factors, which weighed into Aiken

County residents' feelings on alcohol sales in the early 20th century. This book is recommended for academic libraries, for libraries maintaining history collections covering the South, or for anyone with an academic interest in the South's love-hate relationship with alcohol.

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at Brenau University*