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Book Review - Modern Moonshine: The Revival of White Whiskey in the Twenty-First Century

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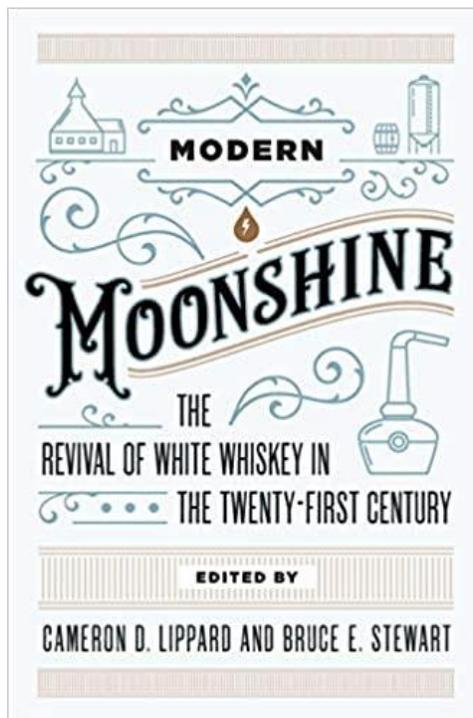
Modern Moonshine: The Revival of White Whiskey in the Twenty-First Century edited by Cameron D. Lippard and Bruce E. Stewart (West Virginia University Press, 2019: ISBN 9781946684820, \$29.99)

The resurgence in the popularity of moonshine in recent years has set the stage for an academic examination of the reasons behind this renaissance of white whiskey. *Modern Moonshine: The Revival of White Whiskey in the Twenty-First Century* is edited by Appalachian State University professors Cameron Lippert and Bruce Stewart, who also author the introduction, which serves as a useful unification of the book's sometimes disparate themes. The book brings together a collection of essays that provide the context in which modern moonshine has flourished and bridge the history of moonshining to modern day commercial distilling.

Limited in scope to Southern Appalachia, the essays in the book are divided into three sections. Part I takes the reader through the early history of moonshine up through the postmodern era. Stewart's brief history of moonshine debunks the popular idea that the often "othered" culture of Appalachia was a result of geographic isolation and ethnicity. He posits instead that it was external economic and social forces that drove the first people there to make their own liquor. History professor Daniel S. Pierce follows up by describing how modern moonshiners have taken the stereotype of the hillbilly outlaw

and used it to market their liquor. In one of the book's more provocative chapters, media studies professor Emily D. Edwards examines the popularity of the moonshiner's trickster persona as a hero figure for the downtrodden working-class White man who sees the government as a corrupt institution favoring greedy politicians, the wealthy elite, women, LGBTQ people, and other minorities.

Part II shifts into a more academic gear to scrutinize the economic conditions that led to



the rise of the modern moonshine industry with Kenneth J. Sanchagrin's description of the wave of deregulation enacted by many states after the Great Recession of 2008. His contribution stands out as a laborious yet necessary piece amidst the tales of intrigue and adventure. The following chapter on the concept of authenticity in the marketing of moonshine, by sociologists Byrd, Lellock, and Chapman, serves as the core of the collection and ties several of the other essays together. Their understanding of authenticity as constructed instead of innate underlies all other discussions of the

marketing of modern moonshine and helps the reader understand why this is a topic worth investigating. Another standout essay, written by Jason Ezell, introduces two distilleries—one gay-owned and one woman-owned—and writes of the challenges they encounter working within neoliberal systems that frown upon any divergence from the heteronormative, patriarchal, and ableist traditions tied to the

very history of moonshine upon which distillers depend to market their products.

The final section wanes as the authors tell of the ways in which legal moonshiners have hitched their businesses to existing tourism markets, historic buildings, and cultural artifacts. *Modern Moonshine* shines brightest when recalling the history of the practice to the uninitiated and when it uses sociological methods to explore the modern American

fascination with moonshine—and the ways in which distillers tap into that fascination to market a product that would otherwise fade into history.

This title is recommended for libraries with collections on Southern Appalachian history and sociology.

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