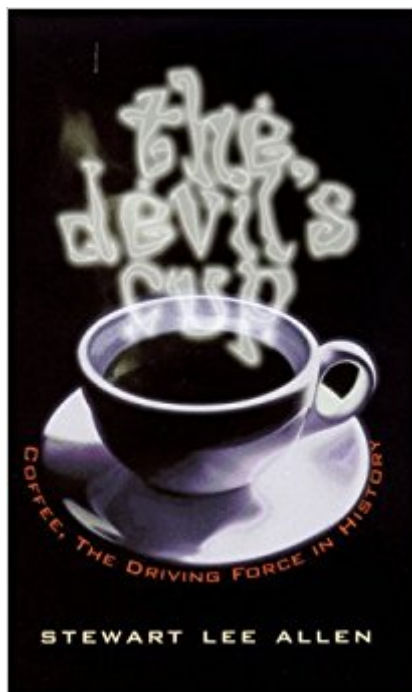


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Devil's Cup



Synopsis

Coffee as history's primary instrument and instigator. What is this elixir that fuels our destiny? Stewart Lee Allen's insatiable, unquenchable thirst for the answer carries him across forbidden borders and several continents as he pursues the precious and little-known catalytic effect of the ambrosial brew upon world empires and mankind. He also documents the unconscionable attempts to suppress coffee. With Paris one "vast caf," for instance, Napoleon banned coffee, but then was summarily overthrown and exiled. His last request: a cup of St. Helena's best. Likewise, Germany's long anti-coffee campaigns kept java from offering its solace to the lower classes. In 1930 German workers voted Adolf Hitler into power. In America the military tried for fifty years to produce an easily brewed cup for battlefield use, and did. The perfection of instant coffee triggered a 3,000 percent jump in consumption during World War I and stimulated the rise of the United States to world-class power.

Book Information

Hardcover: 231 pages

Publisher: Soho Press; First Edition edition (July 1, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1569471746

ISBN-13: 978-1569471746

Product Dimensions: 8.7 x 5.5 x 0.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.1 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 64 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #190,180 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #77 in [Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Beverages & Wine > Coffee & Tea](#) #1105 in [Books > Humor & Entertainment > Pop Culture > General](#) #14469 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences](#)

Customer Reviews

In this appealingly offbeat "coffeecentric history of humanity," Allen brews up a highly personal tribute to everyone's favorite legal recreational drug. Made of equal parts inspired travel writing and savvy cultural criticism, the book describes Allen's pilgrimages to coffee's major sites of interest. From the drink's origins in Harrar, Ethiopia, to its arguable demise at a place called Adrien's Coffeeshop somewhere along Route 66, Allen's espresso-powered peregrinations offer a lively study of coffee's role in world history. By turns worshiped and scorned for its psychoactive effects, the beverage has spawned legends almost as fabulous and seductive as the drink itself. It inspired

the Islamic Whirling Dervishes, who slurped the stuff as a prelude to their bouts of religious ecstasy, and is thought to have precipitated the French Revolution, when citizens stormed the Bastille in part to liberate a coffee-deprived Marquis de Sade. To his credit, Allen, who claims he can tell in a sip that the coffee in a particular Ethiopian town is adulterated with smuggled Zairian Robusta beans, wisely avoids the overworked topic of Starbucks and its bid for a global latte empire. Mark Prendergast's social history, *Uncommon Grounds* (Forecasts, May 17), is more of an omnibus survey of the bean, but Allen's quirky insights more than make up for any scholarly shortcomings. Call it gonzo gastronomy: the work strikes just the right balance between the frenetic praise of a bug-eyed caffeine freak and the informed observations of a true connoisseur. (Oct.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Chef-turned-journalist Allen's debut book is a thoroughly entertaining, absorbing, and often hilarious jaunt through the history and geography of coffee. Allen retraces the spread of coffee, searching the globe for its historical and cultural significance. He begins in Harrar, Ethiopia, where coffee is profoundly embedded in tribal religious practices and local legends. Allen's method of research is delightfully seat-of-the-pants. When he hears of a religious ceremony in Harrar in which serving coffee is a sacred ritual, he bribes his way inside. Next he follows the dissemination of coffee north to Yemen, putting himself on board a merchant ship carrying liquor, AK-47 rifles, and an unforgettable cast of characters. Allen is the perfect traveler: curious, persistent, resourceful, fun-loving, with a nose for adventure, and a deep understanding of human motivation. One of the book's highlights takes place in a coffeehouse in Calcutta, where Allen befriends a glassy-eyed hash addict named Yangi. The two men hatch a plot to export forged artwork to France. Needless to say, the whole thing becomes an international comedy of errors. Allen is an elegant prose stylist, providing countless insights about people and his beloved brew: "Turkish coffee is like a clenched fist in a cup, tight, bitter, and black. The Yemen version, which comes glowing golden in a large glass tumbler, is a lighter, whimsical brew, deliciously sweet." In Vienna, Allen discovers how the invading Ottoman Turks brought coffee to Europe, transforming the whole continent. The author describes precaffeinated Europe as deadly dull, "a lot like Nebraska on a slow weekend church or beer." Coffee was a harbinger for European political reform, especially in England and France. He summarizes a number of quirky yet strangely convincing theories about how coffee triggered revolution, colonialism, slavery, and economic inequality. Allen enjoys his cup to the last drop, and there's nothing decaffeinated about his wonderfully tasty brew. A must for both Java junkies and travel lovers. (Author tour) -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

The premise is simple enough, travel through the countries where coffee drinking originated and evolved while trying to find little bits of that history along the way. Stewart's trail starts in Ethiopia, on to Yemen, India, to Turkey and across to Austria, Germany, France, Brazil and finally to the United States. He combines the adventures of his very unconventional free-form travel with outstanding research on how coffee influenced history and culture along the way. "The Devil's Cup" is full of pity historical insights, laced with humor, sometimes even a bit of dark bitter brew. Coffee plantations and slavery are part of the story. I've read other histories of coffee, but this one is the perfect blend. Stewart's final travels across the U.S., looking for the best of the worst coffee in middle America is a hoot. There's much to ponder here about the quest for caffeination. The morning coffee in the office or standing in line at Starbucks isn't really that different than the many tribal coffee ceremonies hundreds of years ago.

This is one of the funniest books I have ever read! Steward Lee Allen is hilarious as he meanders along his poorly planned but enlightening journey of discovery of the origins of coffee and our coffee mania. His linking of coffee's wake-up and stay-up properties to the rise of capitalism is fascinating and probably true! Is there an office in the US that doesn't have a coffee machine!! As freelance writer and editor, I rely on coffee to keep me on track. I am also fascinated by the history of my favorite beverage and have read several other books on coffee. This was, without doubt, the most entertaining!

Fascinating non-fiction history of coffee. Author starts out in Ethiopia where the coffee bean first grew and then travels to the Mideast, Turkey, Europe, Argentina and the US following the direction coffee took. Was particularly interested to learn why we mostly had we had mostly instant coffee in the US and no coffee shops till the 70's.

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The author takes us on a fascinating tour of coffee, from ancient times to modern. While the book is written in first person, the focus remains *The Bean* - this isn't some egotistical travelogue! A journey as enjoyable as it was educational.

I enjoyed this book by Mr. Allen. It is basically a personal narrative on his travels so it can also be considered a travel essay. As he experiences various regions, he stops and samples various brews. The "History of the World" portion of the title comes from amusing anecdotes throughout the book relating to coffee. I enjoyed learning about some of the regions where coffee was outlawed at a time and the reasoning or lack of behind it. I am only giving it four stars because I wanted more as was related to the title and less narrative. Some chapters are amusing, but there are portions of the book I just skipped over, but all in all a nice effort and I would recommend it. This book appeared to have been written very quickly with quick tidbits of humour. I am convinced Mr Allen was intoxicated with double shot's of espresso while writing this text. After I finished, I brewed up some coffee of my own!- David Carlin

This book was entertaining, although it was a bit...schizophrenic. I wish it hadn't ended where it did...felt a bit sudden and depressing, but most of the book was a whirlwind of the author's travels in search of unique cups of coffee from many of the places that have made their own unique versions. Bits of history come in here and there...where the beans started for instance, and some of the religions that grew around them. Some interesting primary source data also. However...if you're looking at it in terms of food history, it's a bit light on that. It's in there, but far from comprehensive or complete and I feel like it didn't really teach me that much about coffee...or even how to make a good cup myself (though maybe why American stuff is so terrible?) Good...but not what I hoped it was based on the title.

Interesting book, but more of the author's experience traveling around somewhat aimlessly as opposed to an actual history of coffee. "Oh, coffee here sounds interesting, let me go there" is the basic premise.

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