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# The New York Times

ON THE WEB

## Shaken and Stirred

### By the Rum's Early Light

By JONATHAN MILES

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LAST week I resolved to drink patriotically. The most popular way to go about this is to lurk near a smoking grill drinking a six-pack of beer. Then there's bourbon, the king — whoops, president — of our homegrown spirits, which would have been my choice for toasting the republic had I not come across a new book, "And a Bottle of Rum" (Crown) by Wayne Curtis, to be published this month.



Subtitled "A History of the New World in 10 Cocktails," it views America's past through the prism of rum. "To track rum to its source — back through the mojito craze, the Trader Vic interregnum, the Prohibition era, the grim slave epoch, the age of the pirates and the first European settlement of America — is to run to ground the story of America," Mr. Curtis writes.

If I was going to raise a glass to America, it would contain grog or a rum flip or the mixture of rum, water, molasses and nutmeg that buccaneers used to call a bombo.

For liquid artifacts of this sort, one should visit the Pegu Club, Audrey Saunders's 11-month-old second-story cocktailery on West Houston Street. The space is sleek and contemporary, full of sharp right angles and mod Asian design touches, but its soul is as old and baroque as the 19th-century drink manuals Ms. Saunders keeps tucked behind the bar.

"When I look out onto Houston Street, I sometimes imagine horses and buggies," she confided.

The bombo, using Mr. Curtis's recipe, was a disappointment. But Ms. Saunders, a protégée of the legendary Dale DeGroff, concocted for me her own rum-based syllabus of American history.

The most thrilling chapter was reserved for ti' punch (for petit punch), a precursor of the daiquiri, imported from the French West Indies. A simple mixture of 100 proof Martinique rum, sugar cane syrup and lime, it mellows as the ingredients mingle in the glass, and it matures before your eyes.

If rum, as Mr. Curtis writes, "is the history of America in a glass," then ti' punch is an apt metaphor: brash and raffish around the edges, but blessed, as the flavors melting into one another reveal, with a heart gentle and beautiful.

#### TI' PUNCH     Adapted from Pegu Club

2 ounces rhum agricole blanc (La Favorite is an excellent brand)

1 teaspoon sugar cane syrup

1 lime

Cut a half-dollar-size disk from side of lime. Squeeze it into a rocks glass and drop it in. Pour in sugar cane syrup and stir to blend. Add rum; stir to blend. Add crushed ice; stir to blend.