Kentucky Bourbon's Jewish Spirit

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SPEAKERS
Abby Glogower, Question, Reid Mitenbuler, Julie Scoskie

Tonight we are pleased to have read Milton Milton Bueller presenting Kentucky bourbons Jewish spirit, which explores the fascinating and often overlooked Jewish heritage woven through the story of Kentucky bourbon. Reed is the author of bourbon Empire, the past and future of America's whiskey. His writing has appeared in The Atlantic, slate, whiskey advocate and other publications. He has degrees from Georgetown University and Indiana University Bloomington. Please join me in welcoming Reed mitten Bueller.

Reid Mitenbuler 00:49
Right Well, thank you very much. Best part about writing. Okay, I'm gonna get this book about bourbon is that I get to come to Louisville. So tall, it's a curse thanks there. Yeah. All right. Trash tragedy avoided. That's good. Yeah, that's great. All right. Well, thank you very much for coming tonight. When I was writing the book, I actually did quite a bit of research here at Filson. But it was before all this was built. And this is very beautiful. This is a really nice room. And tonight, talking about the Jewish heritage of bourbon whiskey, which is one of those topics, it's kind of Who knew, right. And so, to begin, I like to kind of talk how I sort of first stumbled on to the the topic and, and discovered it was in the early aughts. And I was just out of school. And sort of becoming a budding whiskey geek, I guess you'd say, you know, getting interested in the way that some people are interested in wine or beer. You learn about the product. And then you start learning about the history behind the product and the technical details and that kind of thing. And this is before we really had entered into what I think we're all calling the bourbon Renaissance now or the product has really had this, this revival in popularity and distilleries have all been building out and expanding and the the products become a lot more popular again. And I came to live I'm from Indianapolis originally. And I came to Louisville to tour some distilleries with my father, my best friend, as my first distillery tour. This is prior on 2005 before the book before the book was a twinkle in the eye. And my father and I go to the bourbon Heritage Center at heaven Hill in Bardstown. And it was I think it was before that big resurgence of popularity on Bourbon. And so distillery visitor centers were pretty sleepy, pretty quiet, you get a private tour, a lot of times, if you if you went in, it wasn't the big crowds that you have today. And the the Heritage Center was sort of one of the first really, really nice ones.
It was nice, it was new, shiny, big room. And we're in the tasting room. And if I remember correctly, they're actually pouring the Elijah Craig 18th, I think for free, which I doubt they do anymore. And while my father and I are sitting there, you know, just talking, we look up into the rafters, and we see a Star of David, kind of the way the rafters are arranged, but there's also this is iron or steel, embedded in the middle, and it kind of sticks out at me. This is a it's very distinctive symbol, sign of heritage, I kind of wonder, I wonder why that's, that's the it hadn't really occurred. When you think of bourbon, you know, there's a stereotype sometimes that comes along with it. And you think of the frontier and you think of Daniel Boone, you think of something almost rather waspy you don't associate a Jewish hair, you know, you don't I mean, it's kind of this. So it really, it really struck me and made me curious.

Partly also because I later learned about the Shapiro's and this whole family behind it, but partly so called these brands that have really built up the company, Evan Williams, Elijah Craig. And these other kinds of names don't necessarily match the symbol that I'm seeing. And so I sense the story. And then shortly thereafter, as I'm learning more about bourbon, I became attracted to the history behind it, you know, it's one of these products that I immediately recognized. There's this great American story here, you know, within with this product, you can look at the evolution of the country, you know, and you see the how this product has had an influence. You've got the Whiskey Rebellion, which is Alexander Hamilton versus Thomas Jefferson kind of battling For the sole of American business, you have, you know, the whiskey ring scandal, you've got prohibition, you've got all of these elements of American history that have been profoundly influenced by bourbon. Then on the flip side of that, the way bourbon has evolved, is profoundly influenced by the nation itself, as it's changing, you've got this migration story, you know, as people move west into the frontier, you know, they're using rye last and converting to corn. So you see, even the recipe reflects the country in a certain way. And then I realized, you know, there's an immigrant story here. And if we're going to use bourbon, as a way to tell kind of the story of America, the most interesting stories usually have these backstories, you know, can deal with, you know, you might have African Americans, women, Jews, you have all these people in America, and their stories are sometimes forgotten from this greater narrative that is kind of put up on the billboard, or can everyone hear me okay? She just realized that, if I mean, you know, that, that makes it onto the billboard or makes it onto the movie screen. And so when I sought to write my book, I kind of wanted to explore some of those stories. And the Jewish heritage of bourbon is a story that is just part of the book, but I spun it out into an article, which is by far out of all the different stories in the book, the one that is grabbed the most attention that I get the most emails about, that people want to hear about the most. But let's start with these labels. You know, when I was in the Heritage Center, and Heaven Hill, you have these brands, Evan Williams, Elijah Craig, but then you've got the story behind the company, which is a little bit different than this frontier story, you know, that we're seeing. And some people sometimes complain about that or crab about it. I'm more curious about it. I just think it's kind of interesting. And the figure I decided to use in the book to kind of tell the story of the Jewish contribution to bourbon, I stumbled on the story of Isaac wolf Bernheim. And I immediately kind of start leaning for the more and more, I'm hearing his story and decided to sort of use him in a way to illustrate these kinds of other points about about the contribution Jesus made to to Bourbon and an Isaac wolf Bernheim, you have this figure who in 1867, migrates to the United States from Germany. And it's a pretty classic story itself, and he's in steerage. He's surviving on potatoes, he's poor, I've seen pictures of his home and it's outside of Frankfurt, it might be in Frankfurt wasn't destitute, I mean, certainly, but it was poor as a struggle. I remember reading one point, you know, he really has a big deal. They get a
warmer top coat, you know, for particularly cold, cold winter. So there's this kind of Americans for this immigrant story. And when he gets involved in whiskey making, it's not out of a great passion for it necessarily, like I always wanted to make whiskey. It's kind of in you just kind of stumbled on it like, well, what brought you to whiskey and so I was there and a couple a couple fellows recognize his bookkeeping abilities, and they hired him and they were running a distillery and he just kind of kind of fell into it. And throughout his career, he was always a little bit from what I could detect a little ambivalent about the trade itself. You know, this was a really it represented a better life mail once he had arrived in America. So Isaac Wolfe earns enough money to bring his brother Bernardo over, and they start their own distillery. And then, throughout the 1880s, as they became more successful, they eventually moved from Paducah, Kentucky to Louisville. And around the time, the IW Harper brand comes out, it's like you've started your own distillery. You're starting brands, this is kind of around the same time period, we really saw the rise of big brand names in America. Well, what to call it. And if you look at some of the other pretty big figures in bourbon history at the time, like James pepper, these are individuals who are sometimes reaching back to the frontier. James pepper especially like to reach back to the American Revolution. You know, if they had a family connection that would certainly be played up, you know, kind of for patriotic reasons. That really tugged a lot of heartstrings for people that really that had a resonance. And Isaac Wolfe. Bernheim doesn't do that. He goes with the name Harper, Isaac IW, using his first two initials, and then Harper, because with an Anglo Saxon name, which came from his horse trainer, and he had to you he was really into horses to whiskey and bourbon. So he was really was a Kentucky guy. Then a Burnham originally came from his family's from Bern, Switzerland. And they had to escape that during a pilgrimage and ended up in Germany. But he goes with the name Harper and 1944. When Isaac Wolfe Bernheim was 98 years old, he admitted he was skeptical of using his own name for the prejudice. It might bring he was kept, kept his distance. And as I'm doing research for the book, I'm coming across lots of Jewish names, but oftentimes listed, you know, maybe bottling or as distributed, not often as the name, I mean, it's not the name emblazoned with a figure wearing a coonskin cap, you know, standing on a rock, you know, these, these other images that are very popular in the iconography of of American history. Which kind of got me thinking, like, well, that's if I'm telling the story of America to the story of this product, that becomes part of the story. And a part that I was really interested in, you know, feeling kind of compelled to not use your name because of the prejudice that might bring and that's a part of the American story as much as these other parts. So, as I was saying, Before, you know, as Isaac Wolper and Himes brand is becoming more and more popular, he moves to Louisville, and then Louisville, shows up on my I'm looking at it as part of this regional cluster of whiskey distilling centers. During this time, the late 19th century, you've got Peoria, Illinois, Chicago, Louisville, Cincinnati, all big, big whiskey makers. Especially especially pra, which we'll get to in just a minute. And in Louisville, I discover why started looking into this a little bit more 3% of the population roughly, is Jewish, but 25% of the community around distilling, and it could be producing, distributing retail is Jewish. So very disproportionate, you know, is not a big part, not a huge part of the community, but it's a huge part, distilling. Why is that and I mean, that's, that's, and those numbers are reflected in these other big distilling centers, same kind of proportion, you know, roughly Cincinnati, it was the same kind of thing, not a huge Jewish population, but they were a big portion of distilling roughly a quarter. And so I realized, you know, whiskey offered very, very uniquely offered opportunities to, to newly arrived near Jewish immigrants in America. And a lot of this is connected to a background, a couple of different things. But the first point is, it's connected to Europe, in the liquor trade, had historically. Sorry, I'm getting old, dry. This isn't bourbon. He has vodka, as I run out of the room. So historically, the alcohol trade had offered a lot of opportunities for Jews, and a way to resist oppression also, just to make a living, there was the need to ensure that alcoholic beverages were kosher. So Jews had always been involved at all the different parts of the alcohol industry from production,
retail distribution. So that's part of the explanation why you might see a part of this industry carved out a niche carved out, produced, but you also have a prejudice going all the way back to medieval and early modern Europe, where there had been bands against Jews owning farmland or being involved in certain other industries. And historically, the alcohol trade was relatively much less restrictive towards that involvement. So it always offered an opportunity. Well, there's good work here is a good living that can be made here. And so you start to see that relationship being being formed. And then as people start immigrating over to the United States, and they take this one skill that they already have, and just start doing it here in America. But that leads me to why whiskey right, I'm working on a book about bourbon and whiskey. because many Jews had a lot of experience with wine while over in Europe, but that wasn't really picked up on over here, it was for a couple of different reasons. First of all, the market for wine in the United States was pretty tiny. Americans had struggled for years and years to try to start a wine at Thomas Jefferson famously kind of hated whiskey. I mean, he thought that it led to drunkenness and poor behavior. And he thought wine was more civilized, he was really trying to advocate for a wine, a wine industry. So that kind of accounts for why you might not have seen in a wine industry springing up, especially among Jews. And then there's beer, which was a very sizable industry in the United States, and it's growing, you had this huge influx of Germans. But what especially Jesus discovered, once they landed in America, is that the Jews are that the brewers are only hiring Protestant, Protestant immigrants from Germany, and which was likely a remnant of a prejudice that they had also faced back in Europe, where a lot of German brewing guilds had restrictions against Jews were banned, banned Jews pretty much across the board. So you see that prejudice transferred from Europe, to the United States. So blocked from really getting into the beer industry, even though it's sizable. Another reason is because the beer industry in the United States was run by what we call the tide house saloon system. So it was kind of hermetically sealed. If you think of it that way. You'd have this system where production distribution, retail, could all be owned by one family, one company, it was really hard to kind of break into that. And generally, hiring family members or hiring people from their own communities. Whiskey, on the other hand, bourbon, offered a very different structure that offered an opportunity, especially to Jews that they weren't getting in wine, because that didn't exist. And in beer, because, you know, there were prejudices brought over from Europe. And because of the way the industry was structured, and whiskey was broken up, back then you didn't have the tight house saloon system. So be you a distiller production or if you're in distribution, or marketing, or retail, these were all treated separately. So if you're an aspiring entrepreneur, it's much easier to break into at least some part of the system. Pick one, and you can kind of go for it. And what you see, especially around the time I as a golfer, and Hein is doing well in the industry, is you'll see these regional clusters of communities kind of like you would see with the Germans and with beer blossoming around different parts of the whiskey industry. So it's very smart, just from a business sense to go for whiskey. Not to mention Americans at this time are consuming vast, vast quantities of whiskey per capita, far more than we would be consuming today. If you go down in Washington, DC, I don't know if it's still up, but for several years, they had an exhibit that just how much alcohol Americans consumed in the early 1800s versus today. And they actually have you know, jugs in per capita. It's I mean, it's it's actually kind of disgusting when you think about it, like just exactly. How has anyone has anyone sober? So, you know, whiskey is smart from a business sense and offers a unique opportunity for a lot of Jews, which is part of the reason you see these people like icicle Bernheim, getting involved in it. But it also offered something else it also offered. I think there was a sense of assimilation associated with whiskey whiskey, especially back then kind of had the right look, as opposed to beer and wine, which at that time were more and more being associated with foreigners immigration, be it Italians, you know, coming over with wine, Americans are skeptical of Catholicism. Oh, yeah, they they're worried about that. They see wine wine was sometimes painted with that image to kind of, kind
of market poorly, I guess we can say. And then, you know, beer too, is associated with foreignness, but whiskey never really suffered that whiskey always had this kind of homegrown aspect to it, it was patriotic. And that goes back to you know, of the Revolutionary War, where, you know, we had been drinking an incredible amount of rum in America. But rum is made with sugar imported from British West Indies. So when the United States breaks from making rum and they automatically transferred to whiskey, there was always this very patriotic aspect to whiskey. And whiskey was always pretty relatively cheap. So it was seen as an every man's drank and it wasn't seen as too fancy. It wasn't seen as elitist. It was seen as kind of a salt of the earth kind of thing. If you drank whiskey, you know, you're good people. You are, you're of this place, you're making something that this place makes. So whiskey kind of had had had that there was a good look about it. And this is something that Isaac Wolfe, Bernheim was very sensitive to he was always sensitive about appearing loyal to the United States, which was his new Kanye is one of these immigrants who came over and once he was, I mean, this, this is his home. And anything that might have called his loyalty into question was something that he personally bought again against. Around Louisville. We've got the Bernheim forest, he donated a lot of money for statues, Henry Clay, Thomas Jefferson for these kinds of figures that, you know, he saw is now this is me, showing you just how American American I am. So I think whiskey also kind of had had a connection there. He was an outspoken, anti Zionist, actually. He called the US, our Zion. He I've got his quote here. He always warned people that campaigns for an alien flag and a political loyalty outside of our own land were, you know, something to be wary of, he worried that they would result in the impeaching of our standing as citizens. So I think whiskey and being a whiskey maker is something that helped bolster almost his image. As you know, I'm involved in a very American, a very American industry. But you can see these kinds of fears. And this is kind of part of the same fear that might have led him to calling the brand IW harbor as opposed to IW Bernheim. And those fears did eventually become realized in a way in the lead up to prohibition. When you see a very strong, not just anti semitic but and I emigrant in general streak, running through the discourse by the people who are arguing for prohibition. In a you've got the Women's Christian Temperance Union, a lot of what the people really advocating for the prohibition. You've got Henry Ford, so very infamously anti semitic. Henry Ford was a prohibitionist and he came at it from a direction he saw it as a way to increase the productivity of his workers. He didn't want workers showing up, you know, drunk and that kind of thing. But he's arguing for prohibition, but he is bringing in a lot of anti semitic arguments to kind of bolster his case. That's what he's using it for. And he calls distilling, one of the long list of businesses which has been ruined by Jewish monopoly. Why would he say that? I mean, it's, first of all, it's not true. I mean, there's no monopoly. You know, it's not, but it's the kind of thing where he's trying to stoke fear in order to put in place this policy prohibition that he supports. And when Henry Ford says this, he's likely looking at Joseph green Hunt, who is Jewish and he is the biggest distiller in the country. Perhaps the world that tried to track this down, he owned a distillery in Peoria, Illinois, the Great Western distillery, which still actually operates today. It doesn't make whiskey it's not on by Archer Daniels Midland and makes fuels. But in the late 1800s, Joseph green Hunt was just wildly successful, and immigrant story. Not totally unlike Isaac wolf Bernheim, he came over from I believe it was Germany. He was poor. He fought in the Civil War. It's amazing that he survived the Civil War. He was one of the first people in the state of Illinois to enlist and would storm sniper nests and probably should have died in the war. I mean, did this just crazy stuff. And once the Civil War ended he goes into distilling and he becomes the biggest are in the country. so successful that he has a 35 room mansion where he entertained President William McKinley when William McKinley came through Peoria, Illinois, his summer home on the Jersey Shore, he lent to Woodrow Wilson for uses this summer White House one year. He's very successful. He's very well known as a distiller. And he did at one point tried to form a trust, the cartel, the whiskey Trust, which in newspapers had the popular nickname as the octopus, which is also the nickname they use for
Rockefellers oil trust. Green huts, trust, though failed, it's much harder to start a trust or a cartel no whiskey industry than it is and say, the oil industry just because the barriers to entry are so much lower in the whiskey industry, you need a lot more capital to get really involved in oil. So it was never even remotely successful at starting this cartel, but it was a bad luck for the industry. The popular opinion was very much against the industry. For those one of the reasons it was one of the pieces of evidence prohibitionists were using to argue for prohibition. But looking at GreenHeart. And his attempts to form a cartel. Henry Ford, as he's advocating for prohibition is saying things like, you know, Whiskey was once an art, and he goes, but now has ceased to be whiskey. It's now rotten, got, you know, as part of this Jewish monopoly to control this whole industry, basically making this stuff up. But you know, using it in a way that that did resonate with people. Also, you know, Henry Ford is looking at this reputation that is perhaps starting to grow in United States is, you know, the whiskey has is as having a lot of Jewish involvement, and you call Cincinnati, a thoroughly Judaize city, and he calls Louisville, a place of Judaic complexion. Which is kind of an odd. And it's all very, it's very odd and very ugly. But it worked. You know, it was part of the reason while this policy, which was never really supported by a majority of Americans was enacted, and he was able to use this he was able to use these images, these connotations and paint whiskey with it, in order to help make the case for prohibition. And it worked. So we have prohibition, which is over a decade, and everyone knows how that how well that worked out. You know, Brian's organized crime and everything. And after Prohibition, we have repeal, and with repeal, the industry was vastly changed. It's one of the things that I think is so interesting about the American whiskey industry is that it's not like Scotch or Irish whiskey, which you have this kind of unbroken, unbroken history. And you can see how the industry over there develop here, it's broken, it stopped. And when it comes back into play, it looks wildly different. The government is very involved in writing regulations, how it's going to be operated, that sort of thing. And a little side note, you know, we're talking about the Jewish heritage of American whiskey. But another story I explore in the book is also the role of Catholics, which I was also drawn to, because as I'm driving around here, doing distillery tours, you can see out in the countryside, especially in the counties right around here, you know, what they call the Mary's on the half shell and the bathtubs that are turned upside down, and you see the Virgin Mary in it. And as I'm doing research, you know, I learned about also a very strong Catholic tradition in this area, where you have Maryland and when Maryland was still a colony, its colony for Catholics. But as you have all these young men being born, you know, kind of a born under a pile of older brothers, there isn't a whole lot for them to do and in Maryland, and so they were moving west, west out to Kentucky, and you have, you know, the Archdiocese is in Bardstown there was a very strong Catholic community kind of in this in this area. And so when repeal happens, you still have local option laws, a lot of counties, a lot of areas of the country still were able to basically ban alcohol. So a lot of places where there had been strong distilling communities, a lot of distilleries. They don't, they still don't come back back into business. But it comes back into business in this immediate area, which is kind of one of the reasons while bourbon is so strong here today. It was much more spread out across the nation before but it came back much stronger in this area, because the high Catholic populations I, I'm looking at this too as another minority, another group that had been used to kind of paint alcohol and alcohol industry with an ugly and ugly, ugly kind of color as being a reason why it's so strong, not just in Kentucky, but this very focused, you know, part of Kentucky. So you had these two groups, you've got Catholics, and you've got Jews who have suffered a lot of prejudice in the country. But they're, they play a huge part in the story of the resurgence of this product, which gets back to this other idea of you know, I'm a very American story, but American in the way when you kind of peel the curtain a little bit and look below, you have a much more interesting story. So now that we're in the post repeal whiskey industry, which is a much more consolidated industry, you have four companies that are now running about 75% of the industry. And if you look at the names of these, in these companies, you've
got national you've got Hiram Walker, which is a Canadian company, got Seagram, which is run by the Bronfman family. Bronfman is Yiddish for distiller actually; it's roughly translated a liquor man distiller kind of variants of that, so the Brahmin family and then you have Schenley distillers which is run by a man named Louis Rosenstiel, the most colorful person I discovered and all of whiskey. So, you know, in the Big Four, you've got a very strong Jewish contingent, but you're still not always seeing those names come up on the on the labels. And there's reasons for that, particularly with Rosenstiel Rosenstiel and Bronfman, at one point, were apparently interested in maybe going into business together, but they hated each other. It was a famous story I came across where they were thinking of buying the distillery that we know today is and GPI up in Indiana and they're looking at MDPI and it erupted into this kind of, you know, fingers in each other's chests dropping F bombs. These are both larger than life personalities and Sam Bronfman apparently had his phone reinforced with steel because he would slam it so hard. He had a stuffed tiger in the Bronfman headquarters that was rumored to have eaten 35 men. And Rosenstiel, you know, was rumored to have been the reason why J. Edgar Hoover didn't go after the liquor industry and organized crime. He would bug his office and his home apparently used it as blackmail. You know, he was indicted, although never convicted. Bronfman kind of looked at him and was like, Well, you know, we could go into business together, but the business needs to be run clean, it wasn't clean before Prohibition, we really need to clean this industry up. And resins still is apparently a little looser about some of those rules in the very in the very beginning. And he had consorted with gangster you know, everyone did if you're getting your leg up in the liquor business during Prohibition. But Bronfman was also worried that look, we need to go into business with a lot of Scotch maker, you know, the Scottish DSi or whatever it's called in Scotland. And they are looking at us as Jews and you aren't presenting a very good image and they are not going to go into business with us. And that was also part of the reason I discovered while I was he was skeptical going into business with Rosenstiel. So Rosenstiel, although he was a very controversial figure. And you know, he owned a bunch of distillers around here actually owned what is now known as Buffalo Trace distiller and I remember once bringing his name up while visit someone who worked at Buffalo Trace and they kind of look at me and they're like, Yeah, you don't really like to bring up that guy. Like he kind of presided over a lot of consolidation. He bought out a lot of people. I know pappy Van Winkle apparently despised, you know, he was trying to run him out of the business by buying up coupe bridges and that kind of stuff. You know, it was like it was a very, it was very cutthroat industry that way, but Rosenstein was also responsible for I think, a lot of positive developments. And he was this is the credit for that. And it was one of my favorite stories that it is covered in the book, but in the run up to the Korean War, Rosenstiel. You'll see where I'm going here, you know, the 1964 resolution declaring bourbon, a distinctive product of the United States that's Rosenstiel, and In Rosenstiel, this sky a lot of people describe, you know as as a starker. I mean, really, he's, he's, he's, he's colorful in the run up to the Korean War, he predicts that the United States is gonna have the same kind of shortages that it had had during World War Two. And that the whiskey industry is going to be laid pretty low for a while. So he's like, Well, we're not going to have that problem. Again, I am going to produce way more than we need. And he proceeds to produce eight times eight years worth of demand. So he's got this huge surplus. He's ready. He's ready for this war that he thinks is going to become just a major world war. And it doesn't become a major world war. And he's now left with eight times more and the stuff is evaporating as it ages. He's losing money. And at that time, you had to pay taxes came due at eight years. So the cover of Time Magazine and this is a man who would make the cover of Time Magazine and federal Time magazine covers with loose Rosenstiel and Samuel Bronfman on when it comes due. He is threatening the whiskey industry. I mean, they're just it's going to be a bloodbath that everyone's going to be forced to cut prices. Rosenstiel goes and he meets with the Big Four, he meets with these other foreheads. And he's like, look, we need to lobby Congress to get the tax roll changed. Bronfman
hates them, smells the blood in the water smell and is like, you know what? No, like, we're not going to bail you out of your, of your of your problem. So Rosen stills like, Okay, fine. And at this point, he now owns half of the well aged bourbon stocks in the country about 50%. So one man owns 50% of all you know, the bourbon owns all these distilleries in Kentucky as a whole floor of the Empire State Building. You see pictures of me where those yellow tinted glasses, you know, kind of like a bookie in Atlantic City might where it gets really sharp seats is really good dresser, kind of prowling around this office and he owes just an ocean of bourbon. He's going to ruin the whole industry. And he's like, Okay, I gotta fix this problem. So he goes off and he forms his own lobbying group. He calls it the bourbon Institute before was the distilled spirits Institute. So He forms the bourbon Institute, hires this admiral who had commanded a destroyer at Omaha Beach, to go start pounding on Washington's door. And he does it in 1958, it gets the fraud Act passed. And the fraud Act allowed distillers to, instead of owing the tax eight years, you didn't have to pay it until 20 years. So basically, all of this whiskey, and if it's evaporating, you're not going to lose that huge investment. So he saves himself. He creates this carve out for the industry to create older bourbons do a little bit more experimenting and on that kind of thing. And then he pours got the figures in the book 10s of millions of dollars, at that time is the 50s and 60s into these ad campaigns that say things like are you getting all the age for your money? You know, it's like, you know, you're seeing today as we have surpluses of bourbon people are dropping age statements and that kind of thing. But Rosenstiel is just slapping them on to the bottles, you know, as old as old as old as possible. And all the companies are kind of doing this, because they had also not to the extent of Rosenstiel, but they also had surpluses. So you know, do you have all the age fear money ages better age, he is really hammering the age thing, because he's got age, and he's got all this stuff. He just needed to get rid of it. And then 1964 This famous resolution to declare bourbon, a distinctive product, the United States, he still has a huge surplus well, where to go to go overseas. So he spends 10s of millions more dollars to start a to start marketing and overseas markets. And one of the brands he now owns is IW Harper, he's bought it. And you know, he starts marketing bourbon and overseas markets he gets that resolution passed the the famous one that declares that a distinctive product just so that it would have the same kind of trade protections in foreign markets as tequila has or the champagne has you declare this a uniquely American product or in case of champagne, a uniquely French product, that kind of thing, so that he wouldn't have to worry about foreign producers marketing something called bourbon cutting into the American industry sale. So it gets the 1964 resolution passed. And he marks it by sending a case of bourbon to every single embassy In the United States Embassy in the world, like go forth and promote this uniquely American product. And it's really just a brilliant move. And you see these two things, you know, the fraud act, you see the 1964 edition, which I think are very important to bourbons heritage today as is become more and more marked out as a connoisseur is drink a very uniquely American drink. Now, the tourism industry here, the up marketing attempts that have kind of surrounded bourbon by 1966, IW. Harper is actually selling in 110 countries worldwide. So here you have this product, which I like to use as a symbol in the book, you know, the story of Bernheim, but you have a product that's not even named for the man who made it because he's a little worried that his heritage is going you know, there's gonna be prejudice against his heritage. And this product, seen as a symbol of America is selling in all of these countries in huge quantities and doing that because of another man lose Rosen steel, who at one point owned half of the bourbon in the United States, and also didn't want to put his name on a bottle and then you see these. And then, you know, we all know the story about how in the 60s and 70s, the industry kind of craters, public tastes kind of goes more towards lighter spirits and wine and things like that. Sales are way down, you have this downfall, but in the late 90s, it starts to hit an uptick. And you know, in 2000 I personally while writing the book came to see it in terms of symbols and these little easter eggs of culture, you know, put out you know, throughout the whole history of this of this of this product, and
2000 you have from heaven, hell, Bernheim, the wheat whiskey, and introduce kind of finally commemorating this man who had such an important part, not only himself as an engineer, an important part of the bourbon industry, but also the heritage, his heritage, and if so many other Jews who had contributed to the industry but who weren't historically associated with the industry, or whose names didn't necessarily end up on the bottle. So you have this product of Bernheim wheat whiskey, which came out from Heaven Hill, which is the Shapiro family, which itself is Jewish and a huge part of Kentucky, bourbons, you know, heritage. You know, did the I just thought that was kind of a, there's a poetry kind of to that move is kind of a beautiful gesture, in a way. And I think it's good to see that right now at this time as not only as bourbon is having this, this renaissance and this resurgence in popularity, but also at a time in our history. And I think a lot of people are talking more and more about these stories that sometimes were maybe swept under the rug or weren't necessarily known about as much it's part of our heritage and the contribution of, of groups that weren't always part of the postcard narrative or the billboard narrative, but we're very much a part of that story. So to me that that was a store, I wanted to tell him the book, and I thought that using those brands symbolizes that and it was was that. Good. That Thank you. Time that well for that was

Julie Scoskie 43:44
so we're up in for questions. I can pass the mic.

Question 43:53
Yes. You explained it. But would you do it again, in little more detail how the bourbon brand came along the bourbon? Does that bourbon have to be made in Kentucky? What does it have to be? I mean, you mentioned it but I don't know how it really came about. So just bourbon as a distinctive product. Well, it doesn't have to be made in Kentucky, anywhere in the United States, although Kentucky is responsible for the last time I checked 95%. You know, you've got a few distilleries that just make an incredible amount of it. And that rule saying that it has to be made in the United States. As part of the 1964 resolution, that resin still helped get passed, so they could protect it and overseas markets. You do see before that you would occasionally have people who would go down to say Mexico during Prohibition shows a couple beams members of the family to go to Mexico and we're making it probably they could call it bourbon. But after the 64 resolution, it was official like if you're going to call it this, it has to be made in United States. And then the other rules that are associated with bourbon, you know, at least 51% corn and the barrel entry proof rules and the new charred oak barrel. All the other rules that are associated with it. Were really, they had become best practice well before 64, but were codified in 64. Does that answer? What brought Mr. Bernheim to Paducah? Yeah, I there might be someone in the audience who had no a little more clear than I read this biography. So I believe and please someone correct me if I'm wrong. He because he had originally was a peddler. And there's an old picture of me. It's kind of got and I believe he lives somewhere in the East Coast. It might have been somewhere in Maryland, where he had lived for just a little while. And I think there was an uncle in Paducah. And then, but Somebody here might know a little bit better and I Pennsylvania Yeah. And this gentleman is actually related to Matt Gray. Burnham, so. So I'm glad I got it. right. Sure. Oh, yeah, it was. It was Pennsylvania, where he did that he was a peddler. And he had an uncle in Paducah, and you worked as a peddler there. When he, when he promoted that, add up your Harper and he had so much quantity of it? Did he put it out as an eight year old or 12? year old? Oh, you know, can you repeat the question?
That the IW Harper, when he promoted that, because he had such a volume of it to sell, was already a 12 year old bourbon or an eight year old bourbon? I don't know, I'd have to check. I imagine that there could have been someone else in the room might know the answer to this, there could have been both an eight and a 12. When I was researching that part of the beginning, you're looking at those ad campaigns, you know, do you have enough age, age makes the difference age age age, you would see a lot like, for instance, you need have very old Fitzgerald, very, very old fish. I love those old names like ancient ancient, ancient ancient age. A lot of extensions kind of going up and up and up. Because there were a lot of surpluses, it was a there's really a we need to get rid of this, you know, that's older and mark the price up and kind of tried to finance that. It was interesting to to see how once companies started to try to break into overseas markets. And there were some problems doing that, to see how they would present the image differently. So for instance, being and I think of being white label, you know, you think of that as a pretty just normal kind of an everyday brand. But for some of the foreign advertisements. They were marketing it with men dressed in tuxedos and tails, wearing white gloves, holding a tray with a bottle of them. And it was very like, you know, this is fancy. Just because they're like, Well, no one really knows what it is. So why don't we just try it this way? In listening to your narrative, you've very effectively established strong participation by Jews in the business side and production side distribution promotion, but you haven't addressed at all any participation they may have had in the culture of bourbon. I mean, when I've gone to these distillery tours, it appears that the, if you look at the cast of characters, the master distillers, the people who arbitrate the taste and culture, but it seems to be concentrated in one family, plus a few fragments of others, the beam family and a small cluster of other kind of loosely related people that seem to have guided the culture of bourbon that is the nature of the product, its taste and the procedures for making it and and the standards by which it's to be judged. And I'm wondering, what how could you address that issue? There was Did they like the product they were making, or they were prime? merely interested in it from a business standpoint? I think it very I think both Yes. Right. So this gets away a little bit from the Jewish portion of it. But a good example is with the Sandhills family and Maker's Mark and right after right after repeal it there was that they were using a riot, but they didn't really like that original was like, you know, we want to, we want to do something different. We want to, you know, change this do something a little bit different. also connected to the comment, you know, we talked about the console with a consolidation of the industry, this is something that really interested me in the book is that early on in the 19th century had a lot of differences. I mean, it was a much more diverse industry, it was spread out all over the country, I think a little bit more of throwing spaghetti at the wall and seeing what sticks, different barrel entry proofs, you had many more coop bridges, that's something I wanted one of the book, you know, you've got relatively few today, but back then you'd have regional coop bridges. So they're using different wood because they're harvesting it from different places in the relatively focused places are getting it today. Very good wood, but you're just getting different varieties, you know, trees back then that were being used to make the wood were a lot older, st more that winter green, you'd have a lot more of this. And when you ever taste Dusties, you get a lot more variety, which I think could have been fun to try got different kinds of steel, you know, the old woods, stills, I mean, all this kind of crazy stuff. I mean, you're just going to have a smorgasbord of, but you're kind of starting to see a little bit of that combined with the craft movement. Today, just a lot more variety and that kind of thing. When you have the consolidation that happened after appeal, you did start to see, I think fewer voices, fewer companies, and they're starting to combine and batch processes. And that's the things that Van Winkle that's that's a well our work, you know, grinding our grain a little bit bigger, which affects the alcohol, Connie, all these like little differences, which is going to make a product that's a little bit unique, and then when they close down now even though you know, it's still made kind of the same specs by Buffalo Trace or whatever. It's still a little bit different. So I I like that the craft movement today is kind
of re expanding that more just more variety, a little more of that. Does that answer the question? Sort of I've heard that all bourbons are whiskey, but not all whiskies are bourbon. Could you please explain the difference between bourbon and generic whiskies? Sure. Thank you. Kind of like right all bourbon is whiskey that and all whiskey is bourbon. Bourbon is a type of whiskey. Kind of the same way with beer. You've got different varieties stouts pilsners IPAs, that kind of thing. So whiskey as a general category. It's made from grain and then it is fermented and then distilled and then aged in a barrel. Bourbon is unique because it of the of the mash Bell, the recipe of the grains use so predominantly corn. And then the rest of the mashbill is left up to the Stiller usually dry. A little bit of malted barley, sometimes wheat instead of rye. Whereas with scotch, you're dealing entirely with malted barley. And you're also you're using a US barrel with scotch versus bourbon, we're using a charred new oak barrel. So it is a type of whiskey but just with some different specifications and criteria for how it's made than these other types of whiskey but grain based products fermented distilled and aged in a barrel and then the variances come in all those different parts. Yeah, I can hear you to the previous question about could Isaac's brother was he a distiller when he brought him over here? Bernard? Yeah. Well, they start then they went into they started distilling together. Oh, did he distill when he was in Germany? I don't know. He might have but his brother had already started working for a distillery by the time he brought him over. So I would imagine it was another clerk just Yeah, so brought him into the business.

A

Abby Glogower 54:49

Um, thank you so much. I wanted to maybe circle back to the question that the gentleman was asking before about, you know, did they like their product or what is this just a business thing? And I think there is something really interesting in there may be yet to be discovered and research, which is that and I say this as a Jew and as a bourbon drinker, there was none of that where I grew up, there was very little bourbon drinking in a Jewish culture where I was raised. And that might be different here. And that might be a regional kind of thing. So it sounds like there's this whole other story, not just about the production side, but about the Jewish consumption side as well. And I don't know if you’ve come across anything related to that, or if that could be your next project?

Q

Question 55:40

Yeah, that's, that's a great question. I understand that question a little bit better. And I know Bernheim was a little ambivalent towards it, right. I mean, it was a, but it was respected for making a good product in the industry at the time, and this wouldn't necessarily be a thing about juice, specifically, but you had rectifying or you had these rectified. So part of the reason you know, in the lead up to prohibition, there was a lot of adulterating of the product across the board, you know, when you look at these old ingredients, lists, they're just putting all kinds of just crazy things to mimic the aging process, sugar, that kind of stuff. So there certainly was an attitude, pre probate and pre a lot of the rules that came in like the bottled and Bond Act and that sort of thing, which were supposed to set up criteria for ensuring the quality of the product and making the United States Government kind of a guarantor of the product. You certainly had a lot of people who were like, well, there's a lot of money to be made with whiskey. And if we can, they'd be selling things called Kentucky bourbon, 10 years old. That was none of the things in the label, you know, wouldn't be from Kentucky certainly wasn't bourbon really wasn't 10 years old, who knew I was in it, they certainly didn't care. You know, it was it was definitely
making money, kind of like in prohibition, it was some food color, and whatever this is, and hope people don't die. But then you have, and Kentucky was known, just Kentucky in general. You had a couple of different reps you had the rectifiers are a lot of rectifiers and Louisville, who I was really surprised to learn this did lobby against some of the quality regulation laws in the 1890s, because they were making a lot of money selling kind of a wrapper. And then you had a group of distillers which had their own group, which were like, No, we need to protect our name. So this is where each tailor comes into play. You know, that we're making a product that they were very proud of. That was up to very high standards. And they were saying, Well, you know, we need these rules to ensure that people aren't just selling whatever under our label, because that was a big problem, you know, before the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act, which was essentially a labeling, labeling regulation, just to ensure that hey, we're being new, a lot of people were making quality products and then other people who were just copying their labels and selling junk. So yeah, I mean, the industry that was much more of a problem than obviously than it is now. But maybe that answers that a little bit more. The in regard to the bourbon culture, the bourbon culture that we know today was created after Prohibition. And the Wasp come community or if you're poor for pardon me say it's always created a very defined culture, and especially in the last 10 years, Bourbon before prohibition. If you look at the mash builds of some of the they didn't have a match, they I mean, they used oats, barley, any kind of degree they could get their hands on. And it was even the early like the Stetson Weller distillery. Pappy Van Winkle, the the different grains in some of those early mash bales. We're not anything like what you see today. And when we go back and say, we're doing it just the same way my grandpappy and great grandpappy did. That's marketing that's modern. And it wasn't that way. And if we cannot make a better bourbon today, and Buffalo Trace, for instance, or Maker's Mark are some of the brown forward if they can't make a better bourbon today than we were making 100 years ago that we can't make a better fault. automobile and Henry Ford's Model A was actually a really interesting point. So I went through some old distilling manuals from somewhere from the 1700s, at the Library of Congress in the rare book reading room, and they had a digitized, but I wanted to kind of go through the real ones just to kind of touch the old pages, right. And what I was really surprised to see, first of all, they were throwing anything they could get their hands on into a steal. So these distillers were taking you know, the Wardle berries, I remember thinking what are world parsnips, carrot, any fermentable sugar, it was just throw it into a still see how it tastes, see how much alcohol you can get out in just can we sell it. And then they were adding lots of spices and things like that. But they were going through and these manuals and the manuals are written, but it didn't have the culinary. And this is from the early 1800s, late 17. It's a really old stuff, it didn't have the culinary spin, you would expect to see today where it'd be someone almost chef like being like, Oh, here's what it tastes like. And it was really about the business. There was one. I think it was mmm Harry was the name of the store for this manual, and he would go down the list of different types of grains. And so for instance, when he got to wheat, he was like, Oh, this makes a great whiskey. This is really tastes tastes good. But you're not going to get as much alcohol out of a bushel, and you're better off selling wheat at market and it was it was very business. You know, you're better off selling this grain this way. You're not going to corn though. Oh, we got so much of that. And you know, you can get tons of alcohol out of bushel that way more than you're gonna get from the wheat. And you would see that's how they wrote about everything it was, you know, they would write about things like I think buckwheat was one thing. This is a fantastic spirit, but it's going to ruin your still it's going to gum up and it turned into cement and it's just a mess to deal with. Yeah, it tastes fine, but it's just not worth it. It was all is it worth it and how much alcohol can you get out of it? And then you can sell that it was kind of a footnote it tastes okay. But okay, here's what we really care about. And it was all just amount of alcohol that you can get out of a bushel and how much you can sell it for versus what you could sell those grains for if you can get into market before they rot. That was
okay, we have time for one more quick question,

Joe. Oh, sure, the limestone, the limestone water which removes the lead salts and things up there that I should have I actually called the US Geological Survey. And while the water certainly contributes to the bourbon here, there are many other parts of the country that also have the same limestone, you know, filtering. So you want to make sure and it's special water, but it's not just this part of Kentucky. And I'm a native Kentucky lawyer villain. And I've always heard about the Shapiro family. I didn't hear you say much about the Were they very small in the industry. Well, now they're very, very big. Well, when I was talking about heaven Hill, that would basically be the Shapiro they own, that they own. It's still family owned, it's still the only by far the biggest family on. And that's another story after repeal, starting up that brand, and creating it, but it's funny when you go to the Evan Williams experience, and they talk about William heaven Hill, this guy who was apparently born was Mother was being attacked by him. It's a great story. And that gets back to this whole, like, there's so many great stories involved this and there's a real story here of entrepreneurs who are like, Oh, this is we're back in business with this, you know, we need a colorful straight upon the label. So we'll find this and if you ever seen a picture of William heaven, hell, I mean, he looks like he just was stranded on a desert island for a decade. Yeah, great story. But I also kind of think that the family story of starting this brand, it's still a family owned brand is also a really cool story as well, more pragmatic, and it doesn't have to do with Indians attacking William haveno when he was a baby, but yes, so

we wanted to thank you all very much for attending tonight. We do have books here for sale, there are $16 for members $18 For non members. And once again, thank you very much read. Thanks.