



Alcoholism in America: From Reconstruction to Prohibition

Sarah W. Tracy

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Despite the lack of medical consensus regarding alcoholism as a disease, many people readily accept the concept of addiction as a clinical as well as a social disorder. An alcoholic is a victim of social circumstance and genetic destiny. Although one might imagine that this dual approach is a reflection of today's enlightened and sympathetic society, historian Sarah Tracy discovers that efforts to medicalize alcoholism are anything but new. *Alcoholism in America* tells the story of physicians, politicians, court officials, and families struggling to address the danger of excessive alcohol consumption at the turn of the century. Beginning with the formation of the American Association for the Cure of Inebriates in 1870 and concluding with the enactment of Prohibition in 1920, this study examines the effect of the disease concept on individual drinkers and their families and friends, as well as the ongoing battle between policymakers and the professional medical community for jurisdiction over alcohol problems. Tracy captures the complexity of the political, professional, and social negotiations that have characterized the alcoholism field both yesterday and today. Tracy weaves American medical history, social history, and the sociology of knowledge into a narrative that probes the connections among reform movements, social welfare policy, the specialization of medicine, and the social construction of disease. Her insights will engage all those interested in America's historic and current battles with addiction.

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