A History of the World in Six Glasses

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THOMAS STANDAGE

Tom Standage grew up in London, where his parents encouraged him to study history, science, and English literature. He then studied at Oxford University, one of the world's most prestigious colleges. Afterward graduating from Oxford with a degree in computer science, Standage took a number of freelancing jobs for British magazines and newspapers, including *The Economist* and *The Guardian*. Standage focused on 19th century history, particularly that of America and the U.K. In 1998 he published his first successful book, *The Victorian Internet*. At a time when intellectuals and journalists were falling over themselves to praise the newly-popular Internet for changing the way the world works, Standage offered a droller and more cynical conclusion: while the Internet was an impressive step forward for mankind, it was a modest achievement when compared with the invention of the electric telegraph more than a century before. On the strength of *The Victorian Internet*, Standage was able to devote himself to writing more provocative book-length essays. In 2005, he published *A History of the World in Six Glasses*, in which he proposed that the history of mankind could be told by studying the most popular beverages during different historical eras. Standage has published five other works of nonfiction, and currently serves as deputy editor for *The Economist*, the magazine to which he's been contributing for more than 20 years.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There are simply too many historical events to name in *A History of the World in Six Glasses*, as the book itself is a survey history of the world (albeit a Eurocentric one). In the barest terms, however, the book breaks world history down into six distinct eras: 1) the agricultural era, during which nomadic tribes learned how to farm crops for sustenance; 2) the Classical era, during which Greek and Roman civilizations conquered much of the Mediterranean world and developed sophisticated art, literature, philosophy, and architecture; 3) the Age of Exploration, during which European nations explored (and exploited) the Americas, Africa, and Asia in search of resources; 4) the Age of Enlightenment, during which intellectuals in Europe celebrated the importance of study, experimentation, and mankind's natural right to freedom; 5) the Industrial era, during which strong Western nations like the United States and Great Britain used superior technology to conquer much of the world; and 6) the "American century," during which the United States emerged from two World Wars as the dominant superpower.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

A History of the World in Six Glasses is a work of nonfiction written in a droll tone and divided into six distinct parts—each one of these parts can be read and enjoyed on its own. In this sense, perhaps the most relevant model for Tom Standage was Lytton Strachey's highly influential 1918 book *Eminent Victorians*, an entertainingly-narrated look at the lives of four famous 19th-century Englanders. It's easy to underestimate the impact that Strachey's book had on nonfiction writing in the English language—Strachey was responsible for introducing a new measure of levity and whimsy into book-length works of history. Standage, who specializes in Victorian history, and who has praised Strachey's works in various interviews, seems well aware of his debt. Standage also mentions various works of literature in his book, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, perhaps the world's first true work of literature. In this Mesopotamian epic poem, first performed for an audience more than 5,000 years ago, King Gilgamesh struggles with the gods and the elements to gain control over his kingdom and over himself.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *A History of the World in Six Glasses*
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** June 2005
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Non-fiction
- **Genre:** Creative Non-fiction, Historical Commentary
- **Setting:** Too many to name—the book travels across history and around the world, focusing on settings like ancient Greece, Victorian England, Enlightenment France, and feudal Japan.
- **Climax:** None: the book is structured as a collection of six essays, each of which deals with a different beverage and historical era.
- **Antagonist:** None
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Tom Standage: an unofficial biography: At the age of six, Tom Standage's daughter Ella wrote the following about her father: "My daddy's name is tom. he tells me storys. He likes beer coffee and rum. he has bron hair and blue eyes. he has a nose that looks funny. he is 36 years old. he is great! he has big ears. he works in the Economist. he ritse books. he isent very good at gardening. he dose smelly farts. I love him." Enough said.

Quite the "niche": Tom Standage has spent most of his adult life exploring an unusual thesis: that the world hasn't changed much since the Victorian era. While this might seem to be obviously untrue (all sorts of things we take for granted today, such as the Internet, the airplane, the radio, and the computer, didn't exist 150 years ago), Standage's point is that while much important technology has been invented since the Victorian era, there have been almost no improvements in the basic *scientific breakthrough* of that time: the discovery of the electric signal. As one might imagine, there aren't many people who agree with Standage's argument, and in recent years he has relished his status as a lone detractor against the glory of the Internet, writing pieces for *The Economist* and giving TED talks.

PLOT SUMMARY

Standage's book is a survey of world history, as reflected through six of the most popular drinks of all time: **beer**, **wine**, **spirits**, **coffee**, **tea**, and **Coca-Cola**.

Standage begins by discussing the history of beer. Beer was a byproduct of the defining event of early civilization: the Agricultural Revolution. About 50,000 years ago, nomadic tribes traveling through the Fertile Crescent (roughly the area between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers in the Middle East) learned how to plant seeds and convert crops into digestible food: cereals, breads, etc. These early farmers learned how to brew beer by letting wheat grains soak in water for long periods of time: a process now known as fermentation. As the centuries went by, early cultures continued to brew and enjoy beer. Beer was celebrated as a holy drink, capable of bringing mortal men closer to the realm of the gods. In Mesopotamia—one of the earliest civilizations about which we have information—beer was seen as a symbol of civilization itself, and to be able to drink beer was to be a mature man. In many ancient myths, including those of the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians, and the Sumerians, beer is synonymous with health, life, and happiness. By the time of the Sumerians, beer was no longer a drink for the elite—commoners enjoyed it, and were even buried with it. Today, beer is still seen as a symbol of plainness, friendship, and equality, hence the phrase, "Let's get a beer."

As with beer, it's not clear how wine was invented. Nevertheless, the process of winemaking—crushing grapes and letting the juice ferment in temperate weather—has been well known for many thousands of years. Wine has been the drink of culture, sophistication, and elegance at least since 870 BCE, when the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II served wine at an enormous feast to celebrate the building of a new capital for his empire. The first civilization to embrace wine whole-heartedly was that of Ancient Greece. In Greece, wine was seen as the drink of civilization—indeed, it was said that Greeks only became human beings in the instant that they discovered how to make wine from grapes. Male Greek landowners celebrated their intellect and sophistication by drinking wine at large indoor parties, or *symposia* (women and the poor weren't allowed). The founder of Western philosophy, Socrates, saw the *symposium* as a symbol for civilization itself. By drinking wine, people could test their intelligence, their willpower, and their resolve.

In the Roman Empire, the civilization that succeeded Greece for dominance of Mediterranean Europe, wine continued to be a highly popular drink. Romans took advantage of their land holdings to cultivate the richest, most delicious wines. Emperors consumed wine for its supposed medicinal powers, and even the poorest Romans enjoyed the drink as well. Wine was a symbol of Roman society: although wine was available to everyone, expensive wine was also a way for the wealthy to show off their power. Thus, wine was both a symbol of equality and elitism. After the fall of the Roman Empire, wine continued to be popular in Europe, largely because of wine's importance in Christian rituals.

Standage jumps ahead to the dawn of the Age of Imperialism, in the 1400s. Western European nations like Portugal and Spain, followed by France and England, invested large amounts of money in naval exploration. The result was the "discovery" of the New World—the Americas—where European civilizations discovered supplies of sugarcane. Europeans combined these new resources with the centuries-old process of distilling to create a new, strong alcoholic beverage: rum. Rum became popular among settlers in the British-controlled North America, so popular that it may have played a role in the American Revolution. By the 1700s, there was an enormous black market in rum. The British monarchy tried to crack down on this by raising taxes on the ingredients of rum—sugar and molasses—but these taxes were disastrous: they provoked the resentment and outrage of the most powerful and influential groups in North America, and catalyzed the American Revolution. After the American Revolution and the establishment of the United States of America, rum became less popular, replaced by other distilled alcohols like whiskey (made from fermented cereal grains) and bourbon (made from the fermentation of corn). Whiskey and bourbon remain highly American drinks, in part because of Americans' desire to distinguish themselves from the "decadent, elitist" people of Europe, who drank wine.

In Europe in the 1600s, a movement called the Enlightenment began. The Enlightenment represented a celebration of empiricism, free speech, careful observation, and patient study of classical texts. Perhaps the key drink of the Enlightenment, according to Standage, was coffee. Coffee had been popular in the Muslim world for many hundreds of years, in part because Islam forbade the drinking of alcohol. In the late Middle Ages, coffee arrived in Europe thanks to the strength of Muslim trading networks. Coffee didn't become popular in Europe until

the Enlightenment. Enlightenment Europeans celebrated coffee because it helped its consumers focus and filled them with energy—useful qualities in a culture that celebrated intelligence and careful thinking.

The earliest "coffeehouses" were established in England, followed by France. Coffeehouses were public places where men could drink coffee and—more importantly—discuss art, politics, and philosophy. Many of the key discoveries and milestones of the Age of Enlightenment played out in coffeehouses, from Newton's laws of physics to the beginning of the French Revolution. To this day, coffee remains the drink of choice for intellectuals and creative thinkers.

Like coffee, tea was popular outside the Western world for many centuries before it became popular in Europe. The Chinese were probably the first to drink tea—tea is mentioned in many of the central works of Chinese culture, and celebrated for its intellectual and medicinal powers. Tea reached Europe in the 1500s, at a time when China was far more culturally and intellectually sophisticated than Europe. Over the next 200 years, Europe developed a fondness for tea, and Britain in particular came to love the drink. By the time of the Industrial Revolution (the period in the 19th century when European countries discovered and popularized inventions like the steam engine), tea was the most popular drink in Britain.

Because its people craved tea, the British Empire depending heavily on China, and this eventually led to the Opium Wars on the 1830s. These attacks were designed specifically to ensure that Britain would have a favorable balance of trade with China, and could continue to buy huge amounts of tea without falling into debt. With a secure source of tea established, the British continued to consume tea. To this day, most of the former colonies of the British Empire, such as Australia, New Zealand, and India, contain the majority of the world's tea drinkers.

Standage argues that Coca-Cola was the signature drink of the 20th century: a symbol of America's power and its capitalist ideology. Originally, however, Coca-Cola was only one of hundreds of "tonics" available in America in the second half of the 19th century. John Pemberton invented and sold the earliest version of Coca-Cola, which contained both the leaves of the cocoa plant and the seeds of the kola plant. Coca-Cola then became highly popular as a medicine, but by the 1890s, Asa Candler had transformed Coke from a medicine to an ordinary beverage. Coke remained popular throughout the first third of the 20th century, despite competition from Pepsi and the onset of the Great Depression.

Coke became a global beverage—and a recognizably American one—during World War II, when Coca-Cola executives offered to send every American soldier a bottle of their product. On the strength of this campaign, Coca-Cola opened plants in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Because of its explicit ties to America and the American military, Coke became a rallying point for opponents of America's superpower status during the Cold War.

Communists referred to American foreign policy as "coca colonization," and for forty years the U.S.S.R. refused to allow Coke past its borders. Yet after the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Coke's supremacy as the world's most popular beverage was unchallenged. For better or worse, Standage concludes, Coke is the drink of the 20th century—often called the American century.

In an epilogue, Standage then notes that the defining drink of the future might be the most basic drink of all—water. While most of the industrialized world takes clean water for granted, there are large chunks of the globe in which no such water is available. This leads to outbreaks of dangerous infectious diseases, and has already led to war. The Six Day War of 1967, Standage suggests, was motivated in large part by Israel and Palestine's relative access to clean river water. In the end, the importance of water in geopolitics provides a strong yet poignant example of Standage's thesis: that the history of the world is the history of its beverages.

CHARACTERS

King Ashurnasirpal II – The ancient Assyrian king often credited with popularizing **wine** and making it the drink of power and sophistication.

Gilgamesh – Legendary Mesopotamian hero and protagonist of one of the world's first true works of literature, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Gilgamesh's consumption of **beer** symbolizes his power and maturity.

Osiris – Ancient Egyptian god who was traditionally credited with the invention of **beer**.

Ra – Ancient Egyptian god who saved the human race from destruction by drugging Hathor with **beer**.

Enkidu – A character from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* whose inability to consume **beer** symbolized his wildness and immaturity.

Hathor – Ancient Egyptian god who had planned to destroy the human race before Ra drugged him with **beer**.

Thucydides – Greek historian who claimed that the Greeks became civilized by learning to produce **wine** from grapes.

Dionysus – Greek god of **wine** and drama, supposedly the only entity capable of drinking undiluted wine without going insane.

Socrates – Greek philosopher who theorized that drinking **wine** at a symposium posed a challenge to humans' freedom and self-control, one that could be overcome with wisdom and contemplation.

Plato – A student of Socrates who recorded his teacher's beliefs in the Platonic Dialogues, often regarded as the founding texts of Western philosophy.

Marcus Aurelius – Roman emperor who popularized **wine** in the Roman Empire because he believed it to be a powerful

medicine.

Galen – The doctor of Marcus Aurelius, charged with the task of finding the best **wine**—which Aurelius believed would serve as the best medicine.

Jesus Christ – Founder of Christianity, whose "Last Supper" of bread and **wine**, as well as his first miracle—turning water into wine—helped keep wine popular in Europe throughout the Middle Ages.

Muhammad – Founder of Islam, who forbade his followers from consuming alcohol, but was rumored to have enjoyed Spanish **wines** toward the end of his life.

Galileo Galilei – One of the first modern scientists, and an important figure in the Western Enlightenment.

Francis Bacon – A scientist and philosopher whose innovations paved the way for the Western Enlightenment.

Alexander Hamilton – The first Secretary of the Treasury in U.S. history, and the author of the infamous **Whiskey** Tax.

George Washington – First president of the United States, who faced an early crisis when the Southern colonies refused to pay a large tax on their **whiskey**.

Pasqua Rosee – Founder of the first English **coffee**house in the 17th century, later followed by hundreds of imitators.

Oliver Cromwell – The Puritanical, 17th century dictator of England, whose strict opposition to the consumption of alcohol indirectly helped to popularize **coffee**, a non-alcoholic replacement.

Daniel Edwards – A wealthy English merchant whose friendship with Pasqua Rosee helped to attract wealthy clients to the earliest English **coffee**houses.

Thomas Macauley – 19th-century English historian who argued for the importance of **coffee**houses in 17th-century English culture.

Christopher Wren – English scientist, architect of St. Paul's Cathedral, contemporary of Sir Isaac Newton, and noted **coffee**house patron.

Edmund Halley – English scientist, discoverer of Halley's comet, contemporary of Sir Isaac Newton, and noted **coffee**house patron.

Sir Isaac Newton – Famous English scientist and mathematician, who made the decision to publish his magnum opus, *Principia*, while debating in a **coffee**house.

Robert Hooke – Noted rival of Sir Isaac Newton and **coffee**house patron.

Adam Smith – Author of the central text of modern economics, *The Wealth of Nations*, which he wrote largely in **coffee**houses.

Francois-Marie Arouet de Voltaire – 18th century French intellectual who honed his talent for criticizing the hypocrisy of French government in **coffee**houses.

Montesquieu – 18th century French intellectual and **coffee**house patron.

Rousseau – 18th century French intellectual and **coffee**house patron.

Camille Desmoulins – The man often credited with inaugurating the French Revolution by crying "To arms, citizens!" while in a **coffee**house.

Emperor Shen Nung – Ancient Chinese emperor, and the supposed inventor of **tea**.

Lao-tzu – Chinese thinker, founder of Taoism, and a noted proponent of **tea**'s medicinal powers.

Richard Arkwright – 18th century British inventor of the spinning frame, later a staple of Industrial Revolution factories.

Josiah Wedgwood – Famous English designer of ceramics.

Commissioner Tze-su – Chinese administrator who in the 1830s tried and failed to fight his country's secret opium trade with Britain.

Charles Bruce – 19th century explorer who spent 20 years learning the proper ways to brew and grow **tea**.

Joseph Priestley – 19th century chemist often credited with discovering oxygen, also the first man to learn how to make "sparkling water," the precursor to soda.

Benjamin Silliman – American chemist who was the first man to sell bottled soda water.

John Matthews – An American entrepreneur who patented devices for packaging and soda that are still used 150 years later.

John Pemberton – Late 19th century pharmacist who invented **Coca-Cola** as a "miracle remedy."

Frank Robinson – Business partner of John Pemberton, who coined the name "**Coca-Cola**," and designed Coke's signature cursive logo.

Asa Candler – Georgia businessman largely responsible for shifting **Coke** from a medicinal potion to a popular soft drink.

Harvey Washington Wiley – Scientist who, in the 1910s, launched a popular campaign claiming that **Coca-Cola** was dangerous and caused violence and delinquency.

Archie Lee – Brilliant ad-man largely responsible for keeping **Coke** popular during the Great Depression as a result of his family-friendly advertisements.

Ariel Sharon – Prime Minister of Israel who argued that the Six Day War of 1967 was motivated largely by the need for fresh water.

Gaius Marius – The powerful ruler of Rome in the final days of the Roman Republic.

Marcus Antonius – A powerful Roman politician who opposed Gaius Marius.

Thomas Jefferson – American president, author of the Declaration of Independence, and noted proponent of **wine**.

John Adams – Early American politician and president, who argued that **rum** was one of the leading causes of the American Revolution.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

INNOVATION AND COMPETITION

Standage begins *A History of the World in 6 Glasses* by pointing out an obvious but important fact: in the beginning, humans drank water and nothing else. With the rise of civilization, however, came a steady progression of new beverages: **beer**, then **wine**, then **coffee**, **tea**, etc. It's worth thinking about what drives this process of experimentation, discovery, innovation, and popularization, since it's the process on which Standage's entire book hinges.

To begin with, innovation in the world of beverages stems from the existence of leisure time. Beer and its successors were only discovered because their inventors had enough time to experiment with resources like wheat and grapes, and experience the frustration of trial and error. But once beer had been invented, it became clear that it had many advantages over water. Beer didn't make its drinkers sick because (unbeknownst to anyone before the 19th century) the process of fermentation and boiling killed diseases like cholera and diphtheria that often lingered in plain water. And of course, beer tasted good and caused pleasant intoxication. As Standage argues again and again, the existence of leisure time is one of the hallmarks of civilization: in their leisure time, people discover intriguing new ideas and products, and stumble upon solutions to problems they didn't know they had. Because people across history have used their leisure time to experiment with new beverages, one can effectively study civilization by studying which beverages people experimented with.

Drinks don't only become popular because people have the time for experimentation, though. And regardless of a drink's medicinal properties, it only stays popular and widely available over time if people—people with time and money to spend—enjoy drinking it. Tea, coffee, and **rum** became popular in the Western world partly because they were considered to be healthy, but then they remained popular throughout the 18th and 19th centuries despite the objections of many who claimed these beverages were *un*healthy, or even poisonous. In other words, a beverage stays popular over time when it's enjoyed by the middle classes: people with an average amount of money and power. Although Standage names many drinks that began as luxuries available to only an elite few (whiskey, wine, etc.), these drinks have only remained popular over the centuries because they became increasingly affordable for middle-class people.

A final ingredient in the process by which a beverage becomes popular is competition. Especially toward the end of his book, when he details the rise of capitalist society, Standage describes beverages that became popular because they competed for popularity with other beverages. **Coca-Cola**, for example, had to distinguish itself from the thousands of "universal tonics" available in American in the 1870s and 80s. In the 20th century, Standage argues, Coke remained delicious and affordable because it had to compete with Pepsi, a near-identical product. It's not enough for a beverage to be invented—once invented, it has to be kept affordable and, in some cases, updated to fit new tastes. This process is sped up considerably when alternatives to the beverage exist. When this happens, the sellers of the beverage have to compete with the "marketplace of drinks," and the result is a better and cheaper product.

In all, the process by which a beverage is invented, becomes popular, and stays popular is enormously complicated. Nevertheless, there are some major points in the process that are worth keeping in mind. The rise of leisure time, a strong middle-class with disposable income, and a competitive economy help us understand how drinks survive across the centuries, and how entire societies do the same.

IMPERIALISM

Standage makes it clear from the beginning of his book that a history of beverages is a history of civilization. Even more to the point, a history of beverages is a history of imperialism: the process by which one civilization uses its power to control another civilization. People don't simply drink things that taste good—they drink things that are exotic and mysterious to their societies. It's no coincidence that **coffee** and **tea** (first consumed in the Middle East and in China, respectively) became popular in Europe around the time that Europe became a major imperial power around the world. People want to try new and exotic drinks, and imperialism is the tool that makes these drinks cheap and widely available at home. Standage refuses to come down on either side of imperialism in his book, however, and he acknowledges that it has its good and its bad points, many of which we can understand by studying the beverages that imperial powers consumed.

One of Standage's most important charges against imperialism is that it creates a situation in which one group of people's whims are valued more highly than another group's lives or

livelihoods. Tea first became popular in Great Britain around the time that the British Empire was gaining power. Equipped with a strong military and navy, Britain sent its forces to collect the world's wealth, making its own citizens the most powerful on earth. The result was that a relatively minor change in the British people's tastes could have enormous ramifications for the people of a British colony. As the British people consumed more and more tea, for instance, the British East India Company (a powerful corporation that acted on behalf of the British Empire) was forced to declare war on China to ensure an open market for tea. Chinese society was devastated by the war, and millions of Chinese citizens saw their place in society eliminated by the new presence of British imperialists in their country. Imperialism was the tool that magnified the British people's whims into foreign policy, to the great harm of the Chinese people.

Another important point against imperialism is that it results in a homogeneous culture. Instead of many different, equally powerful civilizations, each with its own customs (and beverages), imperialism results in one strong civilization that institutes one culture that everyone must imitate. A classic example of this phenomenon is the rise of **Coca-Cola** after World War II. As America became the world's dominant superpower, Coke became the world's signature drink, arguably to the exclusion of other, perhaps equally delicious drinks that weren't backed up by U.S. military might.

But although imperialism can bring about homogeneous culture, it also arguably allows for the survival of major art forms (and drinks) from non-dominant cultures. China may not have been the superpower of the 19th century, and yet the imperialist might of the British Empire during that time ensured that millions of people still consume tea today, and that the ancient art of tea making is still widely known. And although homogeneous culture can be dull and repetitive, there's something to be said for the sense of unity and camaraderie brought about by knowing that millions of other people are drinking the same drink—a feeling familiar to anyone who's ever tried a **beer** or a Coke.

Standage isn't writing a manifesto for or against imperialism, but imperialism is an important part of his book—as it's the mechanism by which drinks are popularized around the world. Imperialism has its good and its bad points, and only by understanding both can we understand the history of beverages, and of civilization.

FREEDOM AND SELF-CONTROL

It's interesting to note that all six of the drinks Standage discusses in his book bring about some kind of mental or physical change in the drinker: drunkenness, alertness, calmness, etc. At various points in history, these six drinks have been feared for their ability to do exactly this. People have criticized alcohol for causing violence and unruliness for as long as people have been drinking it, and there were even those who believed that **tea** caused the same symptoms.

While many of the medical and moral complaints about drinks seem silly in retrospect, they point to the same important truth: drinking a beverage poses a challenge for one's freedom and one's self-control. In the act of drinking a drink—both because of the chemical effects of the drink and because of the cultural expectations that go along with drinking it—people might become more honest, more direct, or more alert to their own emotions. This is one of the reasons that people conduct business meetings or have frank discussions while drinking—the act of drinking is an act of contemplation and self-contemplation. The question then becomes: while drinking a beverage, should one let down all defenses and give into one's instincts and emotions, or try to fight these urges through rigorous self-control?

One of the most common answers to this question, judging by Standage's research, is that drinkers should use the occasion of drinking as an opportunity to build up one's self-control and strengthen one's mind. In the Greek symposium, for example, Socrates held that consuming large quantities of **wine** presented both a danger and an opportunity. The drunkard would be more likely to give in to his sexual urges, but if he could fight these urges until he sobered up, then he would be sure to go through life with more self-control and self-awareness. To drink a beverage and still be the same person was considered a high mark of maturity. One sees a similar philosophy in the machismo of drinking hard **liquor**: to be able to "hold your liquor" is the ultimate sign of maturity in many cultures.

And yet Standage ends his book by detailing the history of **Coca-Cola**, a beverage whose "culture," according to Standage himself, is one of hedonism, unlimited freedom, and giving into desire. The supremacy of Coke in the modern world, he claims, reflects the supremacy of an idea: the idea that the best kind of life is one in which people do what they want to do, whenever they want to do it.

Standage isn't judging the "culture" of Coke, wine, or **coffee**—he's merely describing them. At the same time, he points out the major differences between the respective cultures of each of these beverages. In the case of wine, coffee, and arguably spirits, the goal at one point in time was to translate the physical satisfaction of drinking a drink into some intellectual or socially acceptable behavior: conversing, theorizing, debating, etc. Perhaps the supremacy of Coke in the world thus suggests a change in the way people think about freedom and self-control. Where once the highest ideal was controlling one's instincts and biological urges, the model of "good" behavior now is to have a good time, savoring physical pleasures above all else.

EQUALITY AND ELITISM

The six beverages that Standage describes imply two opposite things: equality and elitism. One could say that the earliest beverages were elitist. This is reflected in the origins of **wine** and **beer**—in the beginning, they were intended for the leaders of society (either priests or kings), certainly not for common people. And yet beverages could also be considered inherently egalitarian. Beverages, unlike most foods, can be shared evenly—we see this reflected in an expression like, "let's get a beer," with its suggestions of equality, friendship, and unpretentiousness. And the health benefits of **tea**, beer, and **coffee** (because the water was sterilized, these drinks didn't spread bacterial diseases) applied equally to everyone who consumed them.

The drinks that Standage describes in the first half of book are, by and large, intended for a small, elite group of people with time and money to spare. Beer, despite quickly becoming the drink of the common people, was once intended for priests in religious ceremonies. Wine was originally the drink of kings and gods, and even later on in Ancient Greece, where large groups consumed it at a symposium, the only people allowed to participate in such an event were land-owning men, a relatively small chunk of Greek society. The elitism of the earliest beverages mirrors the elitism of the earliest civilizations. By and large, the world was controlled by a very small group of people with a large amount of power—and these groups celebrated and reinforced their power by drinking special drinks. Even today we can see some of these connotations of power and access in familiar beverages: wine, for instance, was and still is considered the drink of wealthy, sophisticated people.

In the second half of his book, Standage describes drinks that either became symbols of equality and egalitarianism, or were always intended as such. To be sure, true equality isn't ever possible, but with each chapter, Standage comes closer to describing true equality as he details the history of a particular drink. First of all, coffee became a symbol of equality in France and England, where young intellectuals drank it as they discussed the ideals of the Enlightenment. Yet even here, coffee was somewhat expensive, and only available to half of the population—women weren't allowed to drink it alongside men. The drinks that Standage describes in the following chapters then come closer to representing true equality. Tea became increasingly cheap throughout the 19th century, and lacked the strong gender connotations of coffee—both men and women drank it. Standage ends his book by discussing **Coca-Cola**, a cheap beverage that's consumed on all seven continents by people of every race and gender.

While there are limits to the equality represented by a cup of tea or a bottle of Coke, the overall trend of Standage's book is away from elitism and toward egalitarianism. This change in what new beverages connote reflects what is arguably (for Standage) an overarching trend of world history: away from inequalities of wealth and power, and towards equality between the sexes, between people from different countries, and even between the wealthy and the poor. Drinking tea or coffee may be elitist, but this is like saying that civilization itself is a kind of elitism. Reading Standage's book, one gets the sense that history consists of bringing about "elitism" in the most egalitarian way—in short, by drinking special drinks together.

DRINKING SPACES AND COMMUNITY

A highly important part of Standage's book is his discussion of the places where drinks have been consumed over the centuries. With every new beverage, humans had to invent a new space in which to enjoy it: the **wine** symposium, the **coffee**house, the **tea** parlor, the **whiskey** bar. Standage might as well have named his book *A History of the World in Six Drinking Spaces*. The question, then, is why are spaces so important for the enjoyment of a drink? Why couldn't Voltaire have enjoyed his coffee in the street?

Perhaps the most important function of a drinking space is to define who belongs to a community. It's one thing to drink a drink alone in the streets—it's another to be surrounded by other people who are drinking the same thing. Since the beginning of civilization, as seen in the enormous banquets of Mesopotamia, drinking has been a social activity, designed to build awareness that one belongs to a large, stable group. Drinking spaces, then, perform a key social function: they force people to drink together and recognize that they belong to some community, whether the British Empire (the tea parlor), the French Enlightenment (the coffeehouse), or the American frontier (the whiskey bar). On the other hand, it's no coincidence that the one drink Standage describes that has no obvious drinking space to go with it—**Coca-Cola**—has no obvious community associated with it, either.

But the function of the drinking space isn't just to let people in—drinking spaces also keep people out. There were no women in French coffeehouses, nor were there Indians in British tea parlors (see Equality and Elitism). Communities are arguably at their strongest when they exclude some kinds of people. This suggests another way of looking at the importance of drinking spaces: by keeping certain people on the other side of the door, drinking spaces make the privilege of getting past the door more special, and the sense of community more powerful.

In all, drinking spaces are a microcosm of civilization itself. Like all civilizations, drinking spaces are designed to build a strong, cooperative group united by a common culture. Moreover, both drinking spaces and civilizations have strict rules about who is and isn't allowed into the inner circle, and strong rules of exclusion translate into a strong sense of community. The history of bars, symposiums, and coffeehouses thus provides a

neat confirmation of Standage's thesis: if the history of civilization is the history of drinks, then it's only appropriate that each drinking space be a miniature society.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

BEER

Beer, the first major "symbol" in the book, has meant many things to many different civilizations (at one point, it was considered a gateway to the realm of the gods). Nevertheless, for more than two thousand years it has been the drink of choice for everyday, working-class people. If anything, then, beer symbolizes the virtues of ordinary, day-to-day life: friendship, loyalty, and unpretentiousness.

WINE

From nearly the beginning of its existence, **wine** has been the drink of power and sophistication. Arguably more than any of the other symbol-drinks in Standage's book, then, wine's symbolic significance is plain, and has stayed the same over time. From the time of the prosperous ancient Greeks (who considered wine a celebration of prosperity, hedonism, and sensuality) to the early days of the United States (during which wine was a symbol of the decadent European culture America was leaving behind), wine has symbolized elitism and cultural sophistication. It's important to bear in mind, however, that for some Greeks, like Socrates and Plato, wine was more than an invitation to hedonism—it was also an opportunity for the drinker to *overcome* vices with intelligence and self-control.

SPIRITS

Spirits have symbolized multiple, contradictory things to different peoples over time. For the Muslims, who refused to drink alcohol, spirits (even more than other alcoholic beverages) symbolized sin and depravity—the violation of Islamic law. Yet for the Americans of the early 1800s, spirits (such as whiskey and bourbon) had an entirely different symbolic meaning: spirits represented strong opposition to the decadence and tyranny of the Europeans, whose love for wine was well known. It is perhaps this second symbolic meaning that the book portrays as the most influential: while whiskey has lost its specifically anti-European overtones, it continues to imply the same rugged masculinity and adventurousness apparent in the early culture of the United States.

COFFEE

As Standage argues, **coffee** has long symbolized intellect, creativity, and "just a streak of revolution." During the Enlightenment, coffee—and the coffeehouses where it was served—represented a form of free, open discourse in which new ideas could be discussed without prejudice. Even today, it might not entirely be a coincidence that Seattle, a center of Internet development, is also the birthplace of Starbucks, the most popular coffee chain in America. Coffee continues to symbolize the thrill of creativity and entrepreneurship.

TEA

As with coffee, **tea** began to take on symbolic meaning in the instant that it became a European beverage (it was symbolic long before that in Eastern cultures, but Standage touches on this very little). The British fondness for tea is world-famous, and in *Six Glasses*, tea can be said to symbolize not only Britain but the British Empire as well. Indeed, the Empire fought more than one war with the goal of ensuring the flow of tea from its colonies into Britain. Even today, tea is most popular in countries that were once colonies of the British Empire—a reminder of the strong cultural and symbolic association between the beverage and the nation that consumed it.

COCA-COLA

For Standage, **Coca-Cola**'s status as the beverage that symbolizes America in all its glory and weakness began during the Great Depression, when the company ran a brilliant series of ads that depicted Coke as an "all-American" product, fit for the entire family to enjoy. Coke's symbolic associations with America became still stronger when, during World War II, the company promised every American soldier a bottle of Coke—a move that resulted in the establishment of Coca-Cola facilities across the world. During the Cold War, intellectuals on the left often took aim at Coca-Cola when they wanted to attack the U.S. While the notion of associating an entire country with a mere soft drink may seem misguided, this was precisely the critics' point: by valuing a mere soft drink so highly, they argued, the U.S. was confirming its status as a crude, ignorant nation, more interested in satisfying people's pettiest needs than in addressing matters of right and wrong on the global stage. Standage ends his book with one of his most provocative claims: love it or hate it, Coke represents everything that's right and wrong about America.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the

Walker Publishing Company edition of *A History of the World in 6 Glasses* published in 2006.

Introduction Quotes

❝ As the tides of history have ebbed and flowed, different drinks have come to prominence in different times, places, and cultures, from stone-age villages to ancient Greek dining rooms or Enlightenment coffeehouses. Each one became popular when it went on to influence the course of history in unexpected ways.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In this introductory paragraph, Standage gives a "thesis statement" for his entire book. In short, he's going to argue that we can understand important things about the history of human civilization by studying what beverages humans have drunk over the centuries. While this may seem like an odd thesis, Standage has a clever argument to convince readers that he's right. He argues that drinking is a central part of culture: every civilization had different beverages, and places that were intended for the consumption of beverages. Furthermore, the consumption of beverages is a starting point for all kinds of important cultural activities: everything from romance to scientific innovation. So as unusual as Standage's idea might seem at first, it's actually true that studying beverages can be a novel and productive way to study history.

❝ In some European nations, and particularly in Britain, coffee was challenged by tea imported from China. Its popularity in Europe helped to open lucrative trade routes with the East and underpinned imperialism and industrialization on an unprecedented scale, enabling Britain to become the first global superpower.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Standage gives an example of how we can learn about history by studying a specific beverage. The cultural and military competition between Britain and China during the 18th and 19th centuries was mirrored in the gastronomical competition between coffee and tea. This makes a certain kind of sense: a civilization that's powerful and wealthy will have the resources to spread its cultural artifacts around the world. In this way, one could say that tea and coffee are "cultural markers—-i.e., every cup of tea or coffee consumed is a cultural victory for China or Britain, respectively.

Standage is also making the stronger claim that Britain became an imperialist superpower in part *because* of the popularity of tea: Britain traded heavily with China because British people enjoyed the taste of that particular drink. Throughout the book, Standage will study beverages from both of these perspectives. At times he'll argue that beverages reflect world history; elsewhere, he argues that beverages can themselves *change* world history.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Beer was not invented but discovered. Its discovery was inevitable once the gathering of wild grains became widespread after the end of the last ice age, around 10,000 BCE, in a region known as the Fertile Crescent.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Standage explains that beer was discovered, partly by accident, due to the large amount of wheat and grain in the Middle East thousands of years ago. Standage doesn't explain exactly how beer was discovered—because, of course, he has no way of knowing this. For the early chapters of the book, which deal with ancient history and even prehistory, there's less specific information than we'll find later on; just a general idea that certain beverages arise because of the available resources. But in this way, Standage emphasizes the importance of coincidences and accidents in innovation. All sorts of important inventions were happened upon because of lucky accidents (like the discovery of penicillin, for example). Beer is no exception.

Unlike food, beverages can genuinely be shared. When several people drink beer from the same vessel, they are all consuming the same liquid; when cutting up a piece of meat, in contrast, some parts are usually deemed to be more desirable than others. As a result, sharing a drink with someone is a universal symbol of hospitality and friendship. It signals that the person offering the drink can be trusted, by demonstrating that it is not poisoned or otherwise unsuitable for consumption.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Standage makes an important point about beverages: they're different from foods in the sense that they can be shared evenly. Although in this case Standage is talking about beer specifically, his arguments can be applied to the rest of his book: enjoying a beverage with someone is a universal sign of equality and friendship, in part because beverages can be divided equally.

Standage's observations about the "equality" of beer point to an interesting tension in the history of beverages. Although beverages are virtually unique in the sense that they can be divided equally, they can also be a sign of elitism, sophistication, and superiority—i.e., the opposite of equality. (Wine is an excellent example of a drink that usually signals elitism, not equality.)

Chapter 2 Quotes

Enkidu's primitive nature is demonstrated by his lack of familiarity with bread and beer; but once he has consumed them, and then washed himself, he too becomes a human and is then ready to go to Uruk, the city ruled by Gilgamesh. The Mesopotamians regarded the consumption of bread and beer as one of the things that distinguished them from savages and made them fully human.

Related Characters: Gilgamesh, Enkidu

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're told that the legendary character Enkidu, from the Mesopotamian poem *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, was a savage, dangerous individual, as evidenced by his unfamiliarity with beer.

It might seem unusual to associate civilization with the ability to make an alcoholic beverage, since alcohol has traditionally been associated with wildness, violence, and uncontrollable energy. (It might also seem odd to link beer and civility, since most "civilized" people nowadays don't have a clue how to make beer!) Even so, Standage argues that the Mesopotamians admired the ability to brew and consume beer because it represented the ability to master one's environment. Brewing beer was one of the earliest forms of agriculture, meaning that it was one of the key steps in the history of civilization. The history of beer, therefore, is the history of the birth of civilization—an excellent example of how we can study history and culture by studying drinks.

Whether in stone-age villages, Mesopotamian banqueting halls, or modern pubs and bars, beer has brought people together since the dawn of civilization.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Standage argues that beer has the power to bring people together. It might seem odd to think that the beverage itself—beer or otherwise—has the power to change human behavior (it would seem to make more sense to say, "I'm choosing to get a beer with my friend," not, "The beer is bring my friend and me together"). And yet on closer inspection, Standage's idea isn't as odd as it might appear right away. Whether in bars or at home, there's an unwritten rule that drinking together is a way to build a friendship. In part, this is the case because beer is cheap and accessible—there isn't necessarily a way to show off while drinking beer. In general, then, to drink a beer is to "be equal" to other people, to establish a friendly relationship over an intoxicating beverage.

Chapter 3 Quotes

Enthusiasm for civilized competition and Greece's presumed superiority over foreigners were apparent in the Greek love of wine. It was drunk at formal dining parties, or *symposia*, which were venues for playful but adversarial discussion in which drinkers would try to outdo each other in wit, poetry, or rhetoric. The formal, intellectual atmosphere of the *symposion* also reminded the Greeks how civilized they were, in contrast to the barbarians, who either drank lowly, unsophisticated beer or—even worse—drank wine but failed to do so in a manner that met with Greek approval.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

The ancient Greeks loved to drink wine for a number of reasons, whether they were totally conscious of those reasons or not. To begin with, Standage argues that drinking wine was a way to test one's wit and intelligence: if you could drink wine and still hold your own in an argument, you were pretty smart and self-controlled (this isn't so different from the modern idea of being able to "hold your liquor"—a definite sign of maturity). Second, wine was a way for the Greeks to celebrate their own civilization's superiority. The association between wine and civilization ties in with Standage's general point about beverages and cultures. Drinking a drink takes no skill, and everyone can do it; the only requirement is that one have access to the drink in question. As a result, drinks are an excellent way for a group of people to celebrate their membership *in* the group. By drinking wine, the Greeks were implicitly saying, "We are Greeks, and you (barbarians, foreigners, etc.) aren't."

As wine became more widely available—so widely available that even the slaves drank it—what mattered was no longer whether or not you drank wine, but what kind it was. For while the availability of wine was more democratic in Greek society than in other cultures, wine could still be used to delineate social distinctions.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 54-55

Explanation and Analysis

In the ancient world, wine became more and more available. the growing availability of wine created an interesting situation: wine had always been the drink of prestige and sophistication, so its widening availability was something of a challenge to the elites. The elites' response was to *stratify* the consumption of wine by choosing ever more elaborate and expensive vintages for themselves. One could even say that wine was a metaphor for the nature of ancient Greek democracy: although wine was technically available to everyone, there were definitely some people who had more access to wine—and better wine at that—than others. In general, this quote is a great example of the paradox of beverages: beverages are symbols of equality, but also of elitism. In the end, what usually happens is that beverages become stratified, just like wine, in such a way that they're available to everyone, but in different qualities and at different prices.

Plato saw drinking as a way to test oneself, by submitting to the passions aroused by drinking: anger, love, pride, ignorance, greed, and cowardice. He even laid down rules for the proper running of a *symposion*, which should ideally enable men to develop resistance to their irrational urges and triumph over their inner demons.

Related Characters: Plato

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Plato, the important ancient Greek philosopher, wrote extensively about the importance of wine and alcohol to human thought. Plato was interested in wine because it dimmed the powers of the intellect and aroused humans' natural tendencies to be wild, angry, greedy, etc. In short, Plato saw wine as bringing out the worst in human nature. It's for this reason that wine was so important to Plato: he believed that drinking wine was a way for intellectuals to "build up" control over their base urges. If a philosopher could drink wine and still be intelligent and self-controlled, then he was a great man. (At the end of Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates wins an elaborate argument while drinking

massive amounts of wine, proving that he's truly the wisest man at the party.)

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ While the richest Romans drank the finest wines, poorer citizens drank lesser vintages, and so on down the social ladder. So fine was the calibration of wine with status that drinkers at a Roman banquet, or *convivium*, would be served different wines depending on their positions in society.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

As the quotation shows, the ancient Romans' attitude toward drinking wine is perhaps the best example of stratification in the consumption of a beverage. While wine is a traditional symbol of power and sophistication, it was also widely available in the ancient world, especially in Roman society. In order to cement their status as elites, the leaders of ancient Rome developed elaborate, expensive vintages to drink, thereby proving that they were truly superior to the Roman masses, even if everyone *did* drink wine. While the Roman stratification of wine is similar to the stratification of the drink that occurred in ancient Greek society, it's important to recognize the differences. Roman stratification was much more precise and specific than its Greek counterpart. This suggests that Roman society was more rigidly hierarchical and less mobile than Greek society.

❝ Wherever alcohol is drunk, wine is regarded as the most civilized and cultured of drinks. In those countries, wine, not beer, is served at state banquets and political summits, an illustration of wine's enduring association with status, power, and wealth.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 89-90

Explanation and Analysis

At the conclusion of his chapter on wine, Standage argues that wine has remained the drink of prestige and sophistication throughout the Western world (even in China, French wines are the ultimate drink for the elite). This suggests a couple things. First, it reminds us that drinks (or just commodities in general) are often associated with power and prestige simply because they're hard to get, not because they're inherently better. In other words, wine is a drink for elites, not because it's superior to beer but because it takes a long time to make it, and a lot of skill to make it well. In short, by drinking wine, a person is implying that he or she has the money to spend on the drink. Second, the supremacy of wine today is proof that stratification is an important way for elite beverages to remain elite, even after they become more accessible. Although wine overall has become pretty cheap and affordable, the *most* expensive wine has actually become less and less affordable. It's for this reason that people can buy "two-buck Chuck" from the grocery store, while presidents and kings wash down their caviar with champagne: these drinks are both wine, but one kind of wine is far more expensive and desirable than the other.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ It soon became customary for Europeans to present large quantities of alcohol, known as *dashee* or *bizy*, as a gift before beginning negotiations with African traders.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

In the early modern era, the European explorers sailed to Africa, the Americas, and Asia. During the course of their expeditions, they traded extensively with the native peoples of these "new" continents. It's disturbing to think that the Europeans made sure to offer their trading partners alcohol before they began their business deals: Standage is clearly implying that the Europeans did so because they thought that intoxicated negotiators would be easier to argue with than sober ones. The Europeans' trading habits suggest that the Europeans saw alcoholic spirits as a weapon, something designed to help them maintain their economic and military control over the world. In all, the quote is a powerful reminder that beverages can control people's behavior, often in direct, measurable ways, and that Westerners often used alcohol to manipulate the people they wanted to

exploit.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Jefferson did his best to cultivate wines in America and advocated a reduction in the excise duty charge on imported wine as "the only antidote to the bane of whiskey." But his cause was hopeless. Wine was far more expensive, contained less alcohol, and lacked the American connotations of whiskey, an unpretentious drink associated with independence and self-sufficiency.

Related Characters: Thomas Jefferson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, we're told that Thomas Jefferson, one of the Founding Fathers, tried and failed to popularize wine, his favorite beverage, in the newly established United States.

It's important to recognize that Jefferson failed for two basic reasons: wine wasn't practical, and it clashed with the idea of American culture. In the former case, wine was too expensive to import from Europe (the only area of the world where wine could be grown at the time—the California vineyards were centuries away). In the latter case, wine was seen by the American people as a symbol of "old-world" arrogance and snobbishness; in other words, everything that the Americans had started a revolution to escape. The Americans' two basic reasons for rejecting wine (practicality and cultural associations) reflect the two sides of beverages as Standage writes about them: first, the physical processes used to make beverages; second, the stereotypes that arise around beverages as a result of the way they're made, sold, or consumed.

Whatever [the origins of the custom of drinking while trading with Indians], this custom was widely exploited by Europeans, who took care to supply large quantities of alcohol when trading with Indians for goods or land.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Standage reminds readers of the dark side of European history. For hundreds of years, European explorers colonized other parts of the world, often using brutal military power to control and even enslave their enemies. Arguably the most important word in this quotation is "exploited." Standage means that the Europeans offered alcohol to ensure that the Native Americans would be almost incapacitated during negotiations, so that they would be able to get great deals for land and supplies.

The quotation is an excellent example of how a beverage can be used for more than just the drinker's pleasure—or rather, how a drinker's pleasure can have serious historical results. The Native Americans' fondness for alcohol, something they'd never tasted before, led them to surrender some of their own land, weakening their position against the European explorers.

Chapter 7 Quotes

The diffusion of this new rationalism throughout Europe was mirrored by the spread of a new drink, coffee, that promoted sharpness and clarity of thought. It became the preferred drink of scientists, intellectuals, merchants, and clerks—today we would call them "information workers."

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 134-35

Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, Standage discusses the influence of coffee on the Age of Enlightenment—the period of European history in the 17th and 18th century when European intellectuals came to celebrate the importance of rationality, deep thought, and experimentation. As Standage sees it, coffee contributed to rationalism in the most literal of ways: it stimulated the brain, allowing people to think, talk, and focus for longer periods of time.

The popularity of coffee in Europe, Standage further points out, marked changes in the structure of European society,

too. While many kinds of people enjoyed coffee, the drink was especially popular among information workers. The popularity of coffee among these kinds of people shows that Europe was transitioning from an economy founded on manual labor, military valor, and other physical endeavors, to an economy based on intelligence, quick thinking, and other intellectual endeavors. In short, coffee set the Western world on its current path.

❝ But of even greater significance than [coffee] was the novel way in which it was consumed: in coffeehouses, which dispensed conversation as much as coffee. In doing so, coffeehouses provided an entirely new environment for social, intellectual, commercial, and political exchange.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

Having already argued that coffee literally stimulated the mind and the imagination, Standage makes the additional argument that the coffee*house* stimulated innovation, too. By this point in the book, the idea that social spaces promote longstanding social relationships is nothing new: we've already seen how bars promote friendship and equality; the symposium promoted philosophy and self-control, etc. The coffeehouse, then, was the successor to a long line of drinking spaces.

What kind of drinking space was the coffeehouse? The role of coffeehouses in 18th century Europe points to the importance of collaboration, competition, and group work in European history. Arguably the key word in the quotation is "exchange"—after all, the 18th century was the time when the modern capitalist economy was on the rise. In coffeehouses, businessmen exchanged money and credit, just as scientists and writers exchanged ideas. Furthermore, the groups that passed time in coffeehouses formed rivalries with one another, like businesses competing to make the best product. As a whole, coffeehouses were places for businesslike competition and achievement: theintimacy and energy of the coffeehouse encouraged it.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ French coffeehouses highlighted the paradox that despite the intellectual advances of the Enlightenment, progress in the social and political spheres had been hindered by the dead hand of the *ancien regime*. The wealthy aristocracy and clergy, a mere 2 percent of the population, were exempt from taxes, so the burden of taxation fell on everyone else: the rural poor and the wealthier members of the bourgeoisie, who resented the aristocracy's firm grip on power and privilege. In coffeehouses the contrast between radical new ideas about how the world might be and how it actually was became most apparent.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

The quote describes how the coffeehouses of 18th century France inspired the intellectual middle classes of the country to rise up against their social and political superiors. As Standage says, France in the 18th century was an incredibly unequal society, in which a tiny fraction of the country enjoyed the vast bulk of the country's wealth and power (something that hasn't changed much in today's society). The inequality of French society as a whole contrasted markedly with the atmosphere of equality and open exchange within a French coffeehouse. In short, Standage is suggesting (a little playfully) that French coffee drinkers wanted their entire country to be as open and equal as the coffeehouses where they spent their time.

The quote offers an interesting variation on the familiar theme of drinking spaces. Earlier in the book, Standage offered examples of drinking spaces that were intended to be separate from the outside world—refuges from the troubles of life. In the case of coffeehouses, however, Standage offers an example of a drinking space that inspires its patrons to go out and change the outside world. As Standage shows later in the chapter, French coffeehouse patrons were instrumental in the beginning of the French Revolution—the popular uprising against the wealthy elite of France. Coffeehouses offered a "utopia" for their patrons, and these patrons then tried to establish such a utopia throughout the country.

Is it any surprise that the current center of coffee culture, the city of Seattle, home to Starbucks coffeehouse chain, is also where some of the world's largest software and Internet firms are based? Coffee's association with innovation, reason, and networking—plus a dash of revolutionary fervor—has a long pedigree.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

It's a mark of coffee's continued relevance to information work, the quote suggests, that Seattle is the home of Internet innovation and Starbucks. In other words, the suggestion seems to be that coffee continues to inspire good ideas and creative thinking. More specifically, though, coffee appears to be particularly good at inspiring the *exchange* of new information and new ideas. Just as coffee encouraged French philosophers and English scientists to collaborate on new projects, it may be encouraging 21st-century engineers to improve the Internet—the ultimate medium for the free exchange of information.

It's important to recognize that Standage phrases this quotation as a rhetorical question. To be frank, Standage has no way of *proving* that Starbucks and Microsoft are linked in any literal way; the best he can do is to describe the general trends relating to coffee and innovation. Because there isn't much specific information on the history of beverages, Standage is often forced to make assumptions and educated guesses about the role of a drink in world history.

Chapter 9 Quotes

For the poor, tea gradually became an affordable luxury, and then a necessity: tricks such as stretching a small quantity of tea with the addition of more water or reusing tea leaves, finally brought the drink within everyone's reach, in some form at least.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

As the quote makes clear, the history of tea illustrates how a once-exotic beverage gradually becomes more affordable and accessible for a large group of people. Tea used to be a luxury, available only for those who could afford to import it from China. But as the Western world began to trade with China more regularly, tea became a normal part of life for average Western people.

The phrase "in some form at least" provides an important point of clarification. Standage isn't saying that all kinds of tea became equally available for all kinds of people. On the contrary, *some* kinds of tea remained exotic and expensive, while others became cheaper and commoner. The history of tea illustrates how a beverage (or a commodity more generally) slowly becomes more widely available: its quality and price become stratified.

Chapter 10 Quotes

Just as deskbound clerks, businessmen, and intellectuals had taken to coffee in the seventeenth century, the workers in the new factories of the eighteenth century embraced tea. It was the beverage best suited to these new working arrangements and helped industrialization along in a number of ways. Mill owners began to offer their employees free "tea breaks" as a perk.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 200

Explanation and Analysis

In the 18th century, the modern European economy and class system was beginning to take form. And, as the quotation states, beverages were an important benchmark of the newly emerging class system: different parts of European society drank different drinks, and defined themselves by their choice of beverage. While upper middle class intellectuals preferred coffee, working class people preferred tea.

What factors made coffee a distinctly middle class, intellectual drink and tea a more common working-class drink? Standage doesn't (and can't) offer a complete answer to this question. While he suggests that coffee was a good fit for intellectuals because it focused the mind, he also admits that a social class's drinking preference is partly coincidental. Had coffee or tea become available at a slightly different historical era, then tea could have become the intellectual's drink and coffee the preferred drink of the

factory worker.

❝ Britain has remained a nation of tea drinkers ever since [the glory days of the British Empire]. And around the world, the historical impact of its empire and the drink that fueled it can still be seen today.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

The quotation sums up Standage's history of tea consumption by reiterating the close relationship between the United Kingdom and tea—and between empires and beverages in general. Although Britain did not discover tea, it spread tea around the world. Tea was a virtual symbol of the British Empire, the international force that conquered and colonized more than a quarter of the Earth's surface during the 18th and 19th centuries. Wherever the British founded a new country, they established places for the production, sale, and consumption of tea. In this sense, the popularity of tea provided a benchmark for the strength of the British Empire.

The enduring popularity of tea in former British colonies, such as Canada, Australia, and India, illustrates the full influence of British imperialism. Even if Britain no longer exerts military or political control over Canada or India, the popularity of a distinctly British drink there confirms Britain's "soft power"; its cultural influence on these territories.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Ultimately, [Coke and Pepsi] benefited from each other's existence: the existence of a rival kept Coca-Cola on its toes, and Pepsi-Cola's selling proposition, that it offered twice as much for the same price, was only possible because Coca-Cola had established the market in the first place. The rivalry was a classic example of how vigorous competition can benefit consumers and increase demand.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 248

Explanation and Analysis

One of the major themes of Standage's book, especially in the second half, is the rise of capitalism: the economic system in which private businesses compete with one another to offer superior goods at the best prices. At its best, capitalist competition can reduce prices, benefitting customers, while also improving businesses and inspiring innovation. In the rivalry between Coca-Cola and Pepsi, the two companies offered a very similar product, so they had to use clever marketing and business strategies to impress customers. Most importantly, both companies had to offer the cheapest soda possible, since low price, at least as much as high quality, attracted customers. In the end, both Coke and Pepsi became highly successful companies. Their success reflected the rise of capitalism as a whole in the United States (and foreshadowed the way that Coke would be conflated with capitalism itself throughout the Cold War).

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Coca-Cola came to stand for everything that was deemed wrong with capitalism, particularly the notion that satisfying consumers' often trivial demands should be the organizing principle of the economy.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 257

Explanation and Analysis

The history of Coca-Cola is perhaps the best example of Standage's thesis that beverages symbolize ideas and entire cultures. In the case of Coke, the soft drink came to symbolize the spirit of American capitalism. In part, Coke came to symbolize capitalism because the drink was heavily associated with the American military during World War Two. After the war, Coke was conflated with America, but specifically with America's militaristic, aggressive policies. For intellectuals and philosophers, Coca-Cola was virtually a military force: a cultural weapon that, much like capitalism, "conquered" sophisticated cultures and replaced them with disgusting, mass-produced products. (In Italy, for example, the popularity of Coke helped shut down some of the country's prized vineyards.)

The quotation also suggests how Coke came to symbolize the vacuousness and triteness of mass capitalism. For some, the fact that Coca-Cola was a cheap, available, and widely-consumed product was a symbol of American society at its best. For others, though, the very fact that everyone drank Coke represented how American capitalism was making people dull, unimaginative, and narrow-minded.

❝ Coca-Cola is unquestionably the drink of the twentieth century, and all that goes with it: the rise of the United Sates, the triumph of capitalism over consumerism, and the advance of globalization. Whether you approve of that mixture or not, you cannot deny the breadth of its appeal.

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

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Explanation and Analysis

This quotation sums up Standage's arguments about the history of Coca-Cola during the 20th century. Standage argues that Coca-Cola reflects the rise of America, capitalism, and globalization. The very fact that people on all seven continents, of all races, religions, and classes, consume Coke is a tribute to the success of globalization: thanks to the availability of Coca-Cola, the people of the world are "united" with one another via what they buy.

Notably, Standage doesn't offer judgment on whether or not the rise of Coca-Cola is worth celebrating or condemning; he leaves his readers to make up their own minds. His role as a historian and an author is to present the facts, not to interpret them in terms of "good" or "bad."

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INTRODUCTION: VITAL FLUIDS

Standage begins his book by noting that thirst is one of the most important parts of the human experience—without liquid, humans can't survive more than a few days. As civilization has become more advanced, he says, humans have begun brewing more complicated, idiosyncratic drinks, instead of simply drinking water.

Standage gets to his point right away: drinks are extremely important for human existence. He will then go on to emphasize this importance, and to use this one aspect of human life to comment on all the rest of it.

Standage maintains that by studying the history of beverages, we can understand important things about human culture. He singles out six drinks: **beer**, **wine**, **spirits**, **coffee**, **tea**, and **Coca-Cola**. Each one was "the defining drink during a pivotal historical period."

Here we find the "thesis statement' for the entire book: Standage will examine six important beverages and, through the lens of their history and development, extrapolate conclusions about world history and culture.

Standage briefly goes over the outline of his book. He begins with the dawn of the Agricultural Revolution, the time when humans first began converting wheat into **beer**—a drink so popular and important that often, workers were paid in beer. Later on, in the Mediterranean, humans began making **wine** from grapes. Wine became a symbol of Greek intellectual culture.

Standage clarifies what he means when he says that we can learn about history by studying drinks. Complicated processes go into making a drink: you have to have the right resources, the right technology, the right environment. Therefore, by studying which drinks were available at which times, one is implicitly studying an era's culture and anthropology.

Another milestone beverage was **coffee**. Coffee became popular throughout Europe in the late Middle Ages, when Europeans began trading and communicating with the Arabic world. Another drink that became popular as a result of these trading practices was distilled alcohol—"**spirits**"—such as brandy, whiskey, and rum. Spirits were an important drink during the Enlightenment, and gave rise to many important historical events of the time.

Standage proceeds from drink to drink in something like chronological order, reinforcing the link between beverages and history. Each essay will be a highly condensed kind of history, and also a Eurocentric one, as Standage focuses on his own strengths (he is a British writer on economics) and tries to make the book both entertaining and easily digestible.

In the 18th and 19th century, **tea** became the defining drink of the British Empire. As the British Empire colonize the world, it adopted Chinese tea as its own favorite beverage, and in turn distributed this beverage to its other colonies in North America, Africa, and Asia. In the 20th century, perhaps the defining drink has been **Coca Cola**. Coke has become a symbol of America: American optimism, capitalism, and commercialism.

In a sense, Standage is saying that each drink "symbolizes" a particular historical process or era. Tea, for example, was only popular in Britain because of the strength of the British Empire, and its ability to extract tea from countries like China. To study tea is to consider all of these factors.

Standage concludes by reiterating that by studying beverages, we can gain a better understanding of history, in particular the histories of agriculture, philosophy, medicine, religion, technology, and commerce.

Standage states his thesis one more time, essentially acknowledging his "gimmick," and then proceeds to the real discussion of history.

CHAPTER 1: A STONE-AGE BREW

50,000 years ago, Standage begins, humans lived in small, nomadic tribes. They hunted to survive, using technology like bows and arrows and fishhooks. They also developed important technology like pottery, the wheel, and writing. At this time, humans drank almost nothing other than water. Water is the basis of all life on Earth: it makes up two thirds of the human body. But when the nomadic tribes began to settle and develop agriculture, they turned from water to other more complicated beverages, such as **beer**.

Although Standage is writing a nonfiction book, the very basis of the work hinges on symbolism—something small (like a beverage) representing something large or amorphous (like a culture or historical era). The transition from water to beer, Standage implies, is "symbolic" of the transition from nomadic life to agriculture and civilization. We also see from the start just how broad Standage's descriptions of history are—he's not trying to be exhaustive or detailed, but simply wants to make points about large trends across time.

Beer was probably discovered between 10,000 BCE and 4,000 BCE. By 4,000 BCE, at least, it was popular throughout Mesopotamia (modern Iraq, more or less). It's not clear how beer was first discovered, because the oldest writing samples to which we have access are only 5,400 years old. But it's clear that beer was a side effect of the invention of agriculture. When farmers had access to grains, they experimented with their new food sources—beer was only one of the many inventions that followed.

The popularity of beer in the ancient world is indicative of a broader trend: the new availability of grain, and the prevalence of experimentation with this grain. Standage makes it clear that from the start, the natural curiosity and inventiveness of humans is an essential ingredient in the creation of new drinks.

Standage goes into more detail on the discovery of **beer**. The Fertile Crescent—the area between Egypt and Turkey—was home to the first practitioners of agriculture. Agriculturalists used techniques like planting and plowing to harvest grains. Grains weren't an exciting form of food—they were largely flavorless—but they were extremely reliable and nutritious. One advantage of grain was that it could be stored for years as long as it was kept dry.

Civilization—like the earliest crops—wasn't exactly exciting, but it was much more reliable than a nomadic lifestyle. We might think of civilization as being a trade-off between security and freedom—aptly symbolized by the switch from meat to grain.

As a consequence of having a stable, reliable food source, agriculturalists were no longer nomadic—they built themselves permanent homes. With permanent homes, agriculturalists had more time to themselves, and more time to experiment with grains. These agriculturalists quickly discovered two other properties of grains: 1) grains could be soaked in water (a process called malting), resulting in a sweet, slightly bitter taste, and 2) wet grain would become more bitter and intoxicating. The second discovery—of the process we now know as fermentation—marked the birth of alcohol in civilization.

Standage describes these events in only a few paragraphs, but many thousands of years went into actually discovering and sharing this knowledge. The process of trial and error, which led to the discovery of grain, was slow and tedious, like the process of evolution itself.

After agriculturalists in the Fertile Crescent discovered fermentation, they would have experimented with the process until they'd perfected it. One of the agriculturalists' most important discoveries would have been the discovery that alcohol becomes stronger when grain is left to ferment for longer. They would have also realized that it's possible to flavor **beer** by adding things like berries, fruits, or herbs.

Again Standage condenses huge amounts of time into only a few sentences—but he's trying to write an entertaining 200-page history of the world, so these kinds of compressions are necessary for his project.

There's an interesting debate among archaeologists over which came first: **beer** or bread. It's quite likely, Standage argues, that the earliest agriculturalists developed bread because they wanted a more elaborate "sweetener" for their beers. However, some archaeologists claim that agriculturists invented bread *before* they invented beer—it was only a coincidence that bread turned out to be a useful flavoring for alcohol. At any rate, bread and beer were "different sides of the same coin: bread was solid beer, and beer was liquid bread."

Standage isn't too radical in his claims—beer may have been a very important part of early civilization, but he's not about to claim that it was the first *part of civilization. Sometimes, there's no rational explanation for an invention or discovery—it's no more than a lucky coincidence.*

Standage moves on to discuss the social applications of **beer**. For many early agricultural societies—the Sumerians, the Egyptians, etc.—drinking beer was an important ritual. Drinking is different from eating, in the sense that a drink can genuinely be shared (when cutting up a piece of meat, for example, some of the pieces are inevitably better then others). In this way, drinking beer became an important act of bonding and friendship. Beer was also a religious drink, since the state of intoxication it brought on was believed to bring man closer to the realm of the gods. In Egypt, for example, it was believed that beer was invented by the god Osiris. Beer was used as a religious offering throughout the ancient world, from China to the Americas.

One of Standage's most important claims is that drinking is a social behavior, one that unites unlike people. In this way, the invention of different beverages parallels the creation of different social groups. At first, beer was both an egalitarian, social drink, and also a profound, religious one. The religious connotations of beer have disappeared from our culture, but the friendly, egalitarian connotations remain.

It has been suggested that agriculture became the dominant survival mode for human beings precisely because agriculture ensured a steady supply of **beer**. While such a theory is interesting and tempting to believe, it's more likely that the invention of beer was a mere side-effect of the rise of agriculture. One advantage of beer, however, was that it was highly nutritious. In the ancient world, beer often contained whole grains, along with particles of yeast, meaning that beer contained large amounts of protein and vitamins. Beer was also safer to drink than water, since it had to be boiled.

Again, Standage makes bold claims, but isn't too *bold. He's ready to say that beer was an important part of social bonding, and thus civilization-building, in the ancient world, but he's not prepared to argue that beer was* the *reason that civilizations began or endured over the centuries. Standage balances his claims, making himself seem more thoughtful and persuasive.*

The role of **beer** in early civilization is still hotly debated. Some believe that beer was a crucial part of the success of agricultural societies—beer provided a nutritious, safe drink that gave agricultural societies an advantage over nomadic tribes. Others go so far as to say that agriculture was adopted by other societies largely because farming could make a large supply of beer. In any case, the prevalence of beer among ancient societies, and its place in ancient rituals and religious ceremonies, proves that beer was an important part of life thousands of years ago.

Standage ends his first chapter with a quick reiteration of his thesis. His writing is well-organized and easy to digest, reflecting Standage's training as a journalist for The Guardian *and* The Economist. *While there's much debate over how important beer was in the ancient world, it's clear that it had some importance, and Standage gives weight to several contrasting arguments.*

CHAPTER 2: CIVILIZED BEER

The chapter begins with the Urban Revolution: the rise of cities throughout the Fertile Crescent, and later Europe, Asia, and Africa. It's still not entirely clear why people chose to live in cities instead of small villages. There were probably a few reasons, but one of the most important was that cities provided a defense against invading armies. In cities in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and elsewhere, agricultural surpluses paved the way for advanced civilizations. This occurred because with a surplus of grain, bread, and **beer**, some people could afford not to work full-time, meaning that they could focus on administrative, political, or artistic tasks. The surplus of grain also made it possible for civilizations to invest in large public works, such as canals and pyramids.

The creation of leisure time is a fixture of the earliest civilizations. When not everyone had to work all day, some people could afford to think long-term, and develop architectural plans, poetry, art, or philosophy. But the existence of leisure time was already implicit in Standage's argument. Without at least some leisure time, after all, the earliest agriculturalists couldn't have discovered beer, with its increasingly intricate brewing processes. Also, leisure is an essential part of drinking as a community activity—everyone is taking a break from work when they are drinking together, no matter the beverage.

The earliest records of people drinking **beer** have been found in Mesopotamian poetry. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the first great works of literature, Gilgamesh confronts a "wild man" named Enkidu. Enkidu's wildness is immediately demonstrated when he's served bread and beer, and doesn't know how to consume them. As soon as Enkidu drinks a glass of beer, he "turns into a human." In spite of the fact that beer leads to drunkenness, beer was also a symbol of civility and culture in the ancient world.

Strangely, beer's intoxicating properties made it a symbol of civilization, not wildness. This appears strange to us because we take the process of making beer for granted—to ancient peoples, however, the intricacies of beer-making outweighed the wild drunkenness beer could produce. In other words, the process of making beer was more civilized than the beer-drinker was uncivilized.

In ancient Egypt, **beer** was believed to have divine origins, and to be able to cure diseases. In one Egyptian story, beer saves the human race: when the goddess Hathor plots to kill off all humans, the god Ra gives her beer, making her fall asleep and forget her mission.

Mythology is one of Standage's most important tools for studying the importance of beer in early civilization. There aren't many historical records from Ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia, so Standage has to study the stories Egyptians and Mesopotamians told one another.

Following the golden age of Mesopotamia and Egypt, the dominant civilization of the Middle East was Sumer. Sumerians were the first to use writing, and also made use of elaborate canal systems to ensure regular irrigation for their crops. Sumerian rulers provided their people with regularized rations, and scientists have found that these rations included meat, fish, chickpeas, lentils, beans, and **beer**. In all, the rations provided about 4,000 calories per day—more or less the same amount recommended for adults today.

Standage finds similarities between ancient and modern civilization, always with at least a tenuous connection to his beverage of choice. While we might think of the diet of an ancient man as being very different from that of a modern man, Standage suggests that they're not so different after all—the number of calories people eat per day has barely changed at all in the last few thousand years.

The Sumerians' language was called cuneiform. The cuneiform symbol for **beer** looks like a jar. The oldest written recipe in the world is a recipe for beer, scrawled on a tablet.

This is one of Standage's strongest pieces of evidence: the creation of beer was clearly an important event in Mesopotamian civilization, as it was important enough to be carved in stone.

In Sumer, as well as in Egypt and Mesopotamia, people were required to pay taxes in the form of grain. This wealth was then used by the people's rulers to build public works. In other words, grain—and **beer**—was a form of payment. To build the pyramids at Giza in Egypt, workers were paid in beer. In general, bread and beer were regarded as the bases of all life—so much so that in Egypt, "bread and beer" was an expression of good luck and prosperity. The Egyptians also used beer as a sedative during surgeries. Finally, Egyptians were buried with bread and beer, so that they would have riches to take with them in the afterlife. Even common Egyptians, who didn't have the wealth to be buried in elaborate tombs, were buried with bread and beer.

In this section, Standage branches out to show the dozens of uses of beer in the ancient world. This section can be a little hard to follow, but Standage likewise wants to convey the growing complexity of civilization. As societies divided up into classes, professions, and hierarchies of power, beer became more varied in its forms and its uses. This provides one final example of Standage's big point, that beer mirrors human history.

Although the world no longer sees **beer** as a universal currency, beer remains a staple of working-class life, just as it was for the workers at Giza thousands of years ago. Toasting a friend's health with a glass of beer is a vestige of the ancient world's belief in the restorative powers of beer. Finally, beer remains a symbol of friendship, unpretentiousness, and equality, hence the saying, "Get a beer."

In the end, beer in the ancient world reflected the same basic virtues that it still reflects today: friendship, equality, etc. While at first beer may have been available only to a lucky few, even in ancient times it soon became a drink for (almost) everyone to enjoy. With the close of this first section we get a better sense of Standage's style and goals—he isn't trying to be exhaustive or overly provocative, but rather to provide a unique and entertaining lens for looking at history.

CHAPTER 3: THE DELIGHT OF WINE

Around 870 BCE, King Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria gave an enormous feast. The feast, which went on for ten days, was meant to celebrate the building of a new Assyrian capital in Nimrud. The King served huge quantities of food: thousands of sheep, lambs, ducks, chickens, etc.—but the most important part of the meal was the **wine** that Ashurnasirpal served. While **beer** was the most common drink at the time, the King made sure that wine—previously a rarity in the region—was readily available at this feast. By serving wine, the King proved his wealth and worldliness. Ever since this feast, Standage concludes, wine has been a symbol of power, sophistication, and wealth.

Standage worked as a journalist for a variety of British newspapers and magazines, and the beginning of this chapter shows his journalistic training. Standage begins "en medias res," meaning that he begins in the middle of a scene, so that we're more quickly drawn into the flow of the narrative. It's exactly the kind of opening to an article one might expect to read in The Economist*—snappy, suspenseful, and informative.*

It is not known how, exactly, **wine** was invented. It's been around at most since 6,000 BCE, when the invention of pottery made it feasible to transport. The earliest evidence of wine comes from a large pottery vessel from 5,400 BCE, found in the Zagros Mountains. It's speculated that wine was first popularized in Turkey, Greece, and later Egypt. The process of making wine by crushing grapes and leaving them to ferment was easiest in warm, sunny climates, but even so wine became a mark of status because of its rarity. Kings were buried with wine, and served the drink at feasts. After King Ashurnasirpal II's feast, however, wine largely changed from a religious drink to a social one—albeit one that was highly expensive.

From the very beginning, wine is an expensive drink, to be consumed by a lucky few. Unlike beer, wine doesn't become a drink for common people during ancient times—by and large, it remains a drink for the rich and powerful. This is interesting, since even today wine is considered an "elite" drink, fit for business meetings, weddings, or formal dinners. In immediately setting up a contrast between wine and beer, Standage seems to be saying that this present status reflects wine's origins as a royal beverage.

In general, **wine** never became as popular and widespread in Mesopotamian society as it did in Mediterranean societies. This meant that wine remained a luxury, fit only for kings. By the first millennium BCE, wine had become the most cultured and civilized beverage in Mesopotamia.

Standage's scope broadens in this second chapter. He includes fewer details about the process of making wine, or about the details of life in the ancient world, instead, focusing on the overall reputation of a drink—in this case wine—in Mesopotamia.

It's usually believed that Western philosophy (Western ideas of ethics, science, law, politics, etc.) began in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE in Greece. Greece was also among the first societies to divide the known world into a civilized "West," and a barbaric "East." (Even the world "barbaric" is a Greek invention, referring to the foreigners' inability to speak intelligently). Greeks showed off their sophistication by drinking **wine**. Wine was an intellectual's drink—the Greeks liked to participate in symposiums, during which they drank and discussed intellectual matters.

As Standage broadens his narrative, he moves on from Mesopotamia to Ancient Greece. The Greeks, he argues, were obsessed with their own cultural superiority. He suggests that wine was a way for the Greeks to prove their superiority to other peoples: expensive drinks that took a long time to prepare could only be enjoyed by the most elite, sophisticated peoples—Greeks.

In general, **wine** was a vital part of the Greeks' belief in their own superiority to the rest of the world—indeed, the Greek historian Thucydides wrote that the Greeks became civilized in the instant that they learned to cultivate olives and grapes. As time went on, wine became more and more available, meaning that it was no longer only available to kings, as it was in Mesopotamia. The Greeks worshipped Dionysus, the god of wine and drama, and believed that wine was the gods' gift to all mortals. But even though wine became more available, the Greeks still learned how to show off their status based on the *type* of wine they drank—certain grapes, especially from the islands of Chios and Thasos, were considered particularly rare. In this way, wine continued to be regarded as a mark of culture and intelligence.

This is an important stage in the history of wine—it's the stage when wine becomes available to a larger group of people. Surprisingly, even though wine becomes less elite (if more people can buy it, it's less valuable), it still comes to symbolize elitism. It's worth considering how this happens a little more closely. Wine drinking becomes more stratified in Greece—in other words, people no longer measures themselves based on whether or not they drink wine, but rather, they show off based on what kind *of wine they drink. In this way, wine—but only certain expensive types—continues to be a mark of power or sophistication (as it still does today).*

The Greeks drank **wine** by mixing it with water. This mixture was the beverage consumed at the symposium, or intellectual drinking party. Men (no women were allowed) would gather in a private house, recline on chairs, and drink wine, often for many hours. The wine was served in a large bowl, making it easy to dilute the wine with water if need be. A bowl of wine that contained equal parts water and wine was considered to be very strong. It was believed that no human being could drink pure wine without becoming mad and violent—only Dionysus himself could do such a thing safely. Unbeknownst to the Greeks, it was actually life-saving to mix water and wine. By itself, water was dirty and could spread disease—wine purified the water by killing bacteria.

This passage is important for two reasons. First, it reminds us that the Greeks drank wine, but they drank it in a far different way than modern people do: they "cut" it with water. Second, the passage shows us that the Greeks, like so many ancient peoples who consumed alcohol, unwittingly saved themselves from bacterial diseases by drinking wine mixed with water. Sometimes, accidents like this resulted in the prevention of huge outbreaks of disease. Standage returns to this theme again with tea, coffee, and spirits.

At a symposium, the drinkers could indulge in intellectual conversations, but they also enjoyed playing games and improvising poetry and music. A game called *kottabos*, in which the players had to flick the last drops of **wine** in their glass at a specific target, was all the rage in ancient Greece, and being talented at the game was considered as impressive as being a good athlete. In general, the symposium was something of a microcosm of Greek society—it had to be carefully controlled (like diluting the wine with water) so that things wouldn't get out of hand.

The symposium was certainly no only *a place for intellectual discussions. People played games and had fun while they drank—some things never change. Standage is usually careful to balance his examples in this way—although he's about to describe the important intellectual activities that took place at the symposium, he first makes it clear that these examples were only the minority of all cases.*

In ancient Greece, the symposium was viewed as an opportunity to discuss profound truth. In Plato's *Symposium*, one of the most famous Platonic dialogues, Plato's mentor Socrates gathers his followers and discusses the history of love. Socrates proves himself to be the best thinker, not only because of the sophistication of his arguments but because he succeeds in drinking **wine** without collapsing from drunkenness. In the dialogue, Socrates argues that wine is an opportunity for a man to test his character. When a man drinks, he lets loose all his darkest feelings—envy, anger, lust, etc. Thus, by drinking, men can train themselves to control and even overcome these urges.

Socrates' arguments for drinking wine seem a little paradoxical, but they're somewhat like the modern notion of a vaccination: people train their bodies and minds to fight drunkenness by getting a little drunk. *This is also somewhat similar to the modern idea of "drinking machismo." In many cultures, it's arguably a sign of maturity, strength, or sophistication to be able to "hold your liquor"—in other words, to be able to drink a lot and still maintain self-control.*

The symposium, in addition to being an opportunity for philosophers to discuss the universe, was an apt symbol of Greek democracy. At a symposium, full of **wine**, everyone was equal. Yet this equality was limited—only male landowners were allowed to participate in the festivities (women, slaves, and the poor were forbidden). The same was true in Greek society itself: wealthy men could vote, but not women, slaves, or the poor. Plato was suspicious of democracy—he believed that civilization needed order and hierarchy to survive. In his mind, the symposium was an illustration of the best and worst of human nature: the freedom of the mind, but also the chaos of unbridled democracy. Yet despite his misgivings about the structure of the symposium, Plato used the symposium as a model for his famous Academy. There, Plato taught students for many years, always using the same open-ended format that he'd enjoyed as a younger man at symposiums.

For Plato (and for Standage), the symposium was a microcosm for Greek society as a whole. While the Greeks paid lip service to the idea of democracy and equality, the fact remained that only a small group of people could actually vote, or had any real political power at all. The same was true of the symposium: those who made it past the door were equals, but the majority of Greeks never made it that far (no women were allowed, for example). Standage will return to this theme again and again: drinking spaces are miniature versions of society, and like most societies, they depend on excluding certain groups of people from entering.

Wine was the perfect symbol of Greek culture: intellectual and elitist, yet hedonistic. In the centuries following the time of Plato, wine was exported across Europe and the Middle East. Largely because of the intellectual achievements of the ancient Greeks, wine continues to be regarded as the beverage of intelligent and sophistication.

We begin to recognize a pattern, as each chapter ends with an extrapolation from the trends Standage has identified. Just as beer remains a drink for plain, common people, wine remains the beverage of choice for the powerful, the elite, and the sophisticated.

CHAPTER 4: THE IMPERIAL VINE

By the 2nd century BCE, the Romans had become the most powerful civilization in the Mediterranean, replacing the Greeks. And yet the Romans continued to use Greek customs, study Greek literature and philosophy, and worship Greek gods. If there was a difference between Greece and Rome, argued the Roman orator Cato, it was that Greece was decadent, sloppy, and hedonistic—while Rome, by contrast, was organized and principled. We can see the differences between Greece and Rome in the way these cultures viewed **wine**. For the Greeks, wine was a mark of sophistication and pleasure, but for Romans, wine was a mark of hard, patient work.

In this chapter, also on wine, Standage narrows his focus and takes up an interesting case study: the relationship between Greece and Rome, as expressed in the Romans' love of wine. In the same way that a culture expresses itself by what its people drink, one culture also distinguishes *itself from another by consciously choosing a different drink. Rome's case is a little different: it emulated Greece in almost every way (including its drinking habits), while also trying to appear different and superior.*

As Rome grew in power, it continued to use Greek methods for making **wine**. Powerful Romans purchased villas, where slaves worked hard to produce wine. This wine was then shipped across the Roman Empire, extending as far as the Middle East and Spain.

Standage's theme of imperialism is truly introduced here, as the size of the Roman Empire meant the spread and prevalence of fine wine. With a huge supply of grapes to choose from, elite Romans could sample the best wines of (present-day) France, Germany, Spain, and Italy.

In 87 BCE, Marcus Antonius, a prominent Roman politician, was faced with a difficult problem. Antonius had developed a rivalry with Gaius Marius, the present ruler of Rome, and so he feared for his life. Antonius hid in the home of a loyal follower, who sent his slave to go to the market to buy **wine** for Antonius. At the market, the slave requested an especially fine wine—and when the merchant inquired as to why the slave's master wanted such a fine drink, the slave explained that his master was hosting Marcus Antonius. The merchant then told Gaius Marius the news, and Marius sent soldiers to kill Marcus Antonius.

This amusing and terrifying example illustrates the importance of wine in Roman culture. If Antonius's friend hadn't sent a slave to market to buy wine, he might have kept his identity hidden and so stayed alive. The broader lesson from this is that it was possible to identify a Roman based on the kind of wine he drank—a clear illustration of the careful stratification of Roman society.

Like the Greeks, the Romans regarded **wine** as a drink for everyone to enjoy—and yet, even more so than the Greeks, they regarded fine wine as an excellent way for the wealthy to show off their power. The greatest wine, it was agreed, was Falernian. By the first century BCE, wine had become so popular that some writers worried that Rome was becoming as decadent as Greece had been. The divisions between good and poor wines reflected the growing divisions in Roman society: Romans could either be patrons (wealthy and powerful) or clients (the lucky students and beneficiaries of a patron's generosity)—sometimes, a Roman was both a client and a patron. There was, in short, "a wine for every rung on the social ladder."

Roman society exemplified the same contradictions as Greek society. Romans were supposedly committed to equality (all Romans were citizens of the Empire, with the right to vote), and yet their society was highly stratified by wealth and power. Wine was therefore an apt symbol of the Roman Empire: elitist and yet egalitarian, available to all and yet a status symbol for the wealthy few.

In 170 CE, there was a huge **wine** tasting in Rome. Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman emperor, sent his personal doctor, Galen, to find the best glass of wine available. Galen was one of history's most important doctors—he pioneered the infamous theory of the "four humors," according to which sick patients were supposed to have blood drawn to restore the "balance" in their bodies. Galen also used wine as a disinfectant, noting that it seemed to cure gangrene. Galen believed that the best wine was also the best medicine. After tasting dozens of wines, he found one for Marcus Aurelius. Aurelius was supposed to drink the wine constantly, and pour it on any wounds he acquired.

It's interesting that wine continued to be regarded as a medicine even during the time of the Roman Empire, when it was clearly being enjoyed as an intoxicating beverage. While this emphasis on the medicinal powers of wine might seem odd by modern standards, wine actually was *medicinal, insofar as it contained no infectious diseases, and was therefore a safer alternative to water, which carried diphtheria, cholera, and other dangerous bacteria.*

In the years following Marcus Aurelius' death, the Roman Empire fell into a state of disarray. Northern (Germanic) tribes attacked Roman troops, diminishing the size of the empire. While tribes disrupted Roman trade routes, the culture of **wine** in Rome remained very strong. One reason for this was the rise of Christianity. Wine has an important place in Christianity—indeed, Jesus Christ's first Biblical miracle was the transformation of water into wine. Wine symbolizes the blood of Christ, and—in the ritual of communion—becomes the blood of Christ. Partly as a result of the prevalence of Christianity in the Western world, wine remained a staple of the Western diet in the late Roman empire and into the Middle Ages.

Standage comfortably jumps through the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire, dealing with Christ and the rise of Christianity in only a few sentences. While this might seem like bad history writing, Standage's project seems to inherently involve condensing and glossing over certain parts of history in order to keep the book short and fast-moving. It's also worth noting that Standage's "history of the world" is more a history of the Western world, as the arcs of history he traces are all rather Eurocentric.

Although Christianity was the largest and most influential religion in Europe, it faced cultural and (in some cases) military competition from Islam. The founder of Islam, Muhammad, commanded his followers, the Muslims, to refrain from drinking alcohol of any kind, calling it an "abomination." There were complex cultural reasons for Islam's rejection of **wine**. In general, however, Islam turned its back on "the old notions of sophistication," of which wine was a powerful symbol—and wine, as a clear symbol of Christianity, posed an obvious threat to Islamic values. Despite Muhammad's ban on wine and alcohol, he was rumored to have enjoyed Spanish wines in his late years—this caused some Muslim scholars to argue that Muhammad placed a ban on drinking *to excess*, not drinking itself.

Much like the Greeks and the Romans, the Muslims tried to distinguish themselves from their rivals, the Christians, and vice-versa. But unlike the Romans, the Muslims didn't adopt their rivals' beverages—on the contrary, they refused to drink alcohol of any kind, viewing it as a symbol of decadence, and sinfulness. Amusingly, Standage notes that even Muhammad might not have been able to follow his own rules—the relationship between alcohol and religion is a complex one, and an issue that Standage doesn't delve too deeply into.

Wine remains the quintessential beverage in the Mediterranean, usually consumed in moderation and with meals. In Northern Europe, on the other hand, **beer** remains the most popular drink. Wine's influence on culture can be detected at any formal dinner—at such an event, wine, not beer, is the alcohol of choice. Wine is a symbol of sophistication, power, and social status. It's also an opportunity for the powerful to show their taste—being able to identify wines is still a mark of a cultured person, just as it was among the ancient Romans.

Standage ends his chapters on wine with a summary of his main points. Wine has always been a drink for sophisticated people who want to talk about sophisticated things, and from the time of the Greeks to the present day, people have demonstrated their intelligence and culture through wine—first by drinking any wine at all, and later (as wine became more available), by choosing the right *wine.*

CHAPTER 5: HIGH SPIRITS, HIGH SEAS

At the end of the first millennium AD, the most "cultured" city in the Western world was Cordoba. Cordoba had a vast library, beautiful palaces, sophisticated sewer systems, and many other strikingly modern features. Cordoba was an Arab city, and the center of Arabic scholarship. Cordoba's citizens pioneered trigonometry, modern cartography, algebra, and—most relevantly to this book—the process now known as distillation.

Standage begins his chapter on the history of spirits ("hard" liquor) in Cordoba (southern Spain). Although most of Standage's history is Eurocentric (his last two chapters, for instance, were about the Greeks and the Romans, who regarded the Eastern world as barbaric), he readily admits that the Arabic world was far more sophisticated than Europe in the 1100s. Yet despite this, he doesn't focus on these parts of history like he does in describing Rome, Britain, or America, for example.

Distillation involves vaporizing and then re-condensing a liquid. This process makes the liquid pure. When **wine** is distilled, it becomes much more alcoholic, because wine's boiling point is lower than water's—that is to say, the steam that rises from boiling wine contains more alcohol and less water. Arabic scholarship was crucial in describing this process and popularizing it throughout Europe. Even the English word "alcohol" derives from Arabic, proving the importance of Arabic thinking in Western drinking. Throughout the age of imperialism, Standage argues, distilled liquor was an important commodity, reflecting the enormous changes in the world at the time.

Standage explains how liquors are produced, but doesn't linger on the details of the process. His focus isn't on the science of the creation of spirits, but rather the processes by which spirits became popular and influential throughout the world. In this section, he lays out his project for the chapter: he'll describe how spirits reflected the changes in the world during the "Age of Exploration."

In 1386, Charles II of Navarre, "Charles the Bad," was lying on his deathbed. His doctors decided to try a new medicine—distilled **wine**, or "aqua vitae." They had learned of the distillation technique from Arabic texts. The doctors fed Charles highly alcoholic liquid, hoping that it would cure him of his diseases. Likewise, many other doctors at the time advocated distilled wine as a medicine. Doctors claimed it could improve the memory, fight nerve disease, and cure dozens of other afflictions. Aqua vitae was known as "burnt wine," or, in English, "**brandy**."

Like wine and beer, spirits were celebrated for their medicinal properties—and as with wine and beer, this idea was based in fact. While spirits don't seem very healthy by modern standards, they weren't *contaminated with bacterial diseases, meaning that they were often a healthier beverage than plain water, which could carry all sorts of diseases.*

The invention of distillation coincided closely with the rise of European exploration. Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal pioneered voyages to north Africa and the Americas. In the Americas, Portuguese explorers found sugarcane, a plant that could be enriched to produce sugar. Because sugar required a large amount of labor to cultivate, Portugal turned to slavery, kidnapping Africans and taking them to the Americas to work. This constituted the first major surge in slavery since the time of the ancient Romans. The surge continued throughout the 16th century, when Britain, Holland, Spain, and France joined Portugal in exploring the New World. All of these nations used alcohol to trade with Africa: **wine** and **brandy** were accepted forms of currency for slave traders in Africa. As Standage puts it, "brandy oiled the wheels of the slave trade."

Although the Age of Exploration was inaugurated because of the personal ambitions of a few Western monarchs like Henry the Navigator, by the end of the century, exploration was often being fueled by the desire for specific products. Standage tries to take a dispassionate view of the more horrifying aspects of history, instead simply showing how beverages affected global trends—even if these trends were atrocities like the rise of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

On the island of Barbados, colonists experimented with new ways of making **spirits**, using the new supply of sugar. One new drink, rum, became popular in the 17th century. Rum was produced by allowing cane sugar to ferment for long periods—its name derives from the slang word "rumbullion," meaning a brawl—suggesting the link between drinking and fighting. Rum was served to slave traders in Africa and slaves in the Americas to soften their hardships. Rum was also a popular drink for sailors journeying to and from Europe. Rum elegantly closed the "triangle" of trade between Europe, Africa, and the Americas: rum purchased slaves, who were then used to produce sugar and more rum.

As with beer, the invention of rum represented a new set of resources becoming available to a new group of people. In this case, the new resources were sugar and sugarcane, and the new group of people were Europeans—who applied the processes of fermentation that they'd used to produce beer and wine for thousands of years. It's also interesting to note that rum immediately appeared as an alcohol of incivility—emphasizing all the negative aspects cultures had found in beer and wine. Again Standage is detached in describing the human cost of his beverages' respective histories. He is most interested in how imperialism and slavery spread resources, and never spends time condemning them.

CHAPTER 6: THE DRINK THAT BUILT AMERICA

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, England began exploring colonies in North America. It did so in part because it was believed that the areas of North America would have a similar climate to the Mediterranean, since the area had a similar latitude. In actuality, England's colonies in North America yielded no rich soil, gold, or minerals. During the early 1700s, colonists in North America had to make due without **beer** or **wine**, since these products were highly expensive to ship across the ocean. This changed in the 1750s, when **rum** reached North America from the West Indies. By the end of the 18th century, rum was a staple of colonial life in North America—everyone drank it, and it became an accepted form of payment. Distilleries were established in North America, converting West Indian sugar into rum. At one point, the average colonist (including women and children) consumed four gallons of rum per year.

Because of the "discovery" of the New World, European alcohol lovers in the Americas faced a challenge: they had acquired a taste for alcohol, but were unable to obtain wine or beer from Europe, since shipping these products across the sea was extremely expensive. Thus, rum had a virtual monopoly on drinking culture in North America, as sugarcane was the only available resource that could be safely converted into alcohol. Standage implies that, as with wine and beer in earlier times, rum was consumed in large quantities because it represented a safe alternative to water, which carried diseases (something that the colonists would have observed).

The **rum** business in North America became so influential that Britain began to tax it heavily. In 1733, the infamous Molasses Act taxed North American distilleries' sugar sources, making rum prohibitively expensive. As a result, a huge black market of rum and molasses arose in the New World. Smugglers bribed officials to sneak sugar into North America. In general, the Molasses Act was despised in North American colonies, and provided an early symbol of British tyranny.

Governing the British colonies in North America proved very difficult. Britain was thousands of miles away, and separated by an ocean—as a result, the British had to rely on excessive taxes and duties to keep the colonies in line. But these measures simply didn't work—the colonists had developed such a fondness for alcohol that they resented any taxes on rum.

In 1764, Britain passed the Sugar Act, which strengthened the Molasses Act by raising the tax on sugar. Smugglers were punished more harshly, further raising the price of **rum**. The Sugar Act was the first of a series of highly unpopular acts in the 1760s and 70s: the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, and the Tea Act. These political decisions on Britain's part would eventually lead to the Revolutionary War of 1775.

The Molasses Act was only the first of many excessive measures that the British crown used in an attempt to control the British colonists in North America. Ultimately, Standage argues that the colonists' fondness for rum led directly to their resentment of British authority, and eventually to the American Revolution. This is, of course, a simplified portrayal of history, but Standage also puts an emphasis on interesting trends that otherwise might go unnoticed.

During the Revolutionary War, alcohol was a crucial part of the American war effort. George Washington (knowing full well that Americans were rebelling in part because they'd been deprived of **rum**) made sure to provide all of his soldiers with adequate rations of rum, along with beef, bread, and pork. John Adams once wrote that the tax on molasses was "an essential ingredient" of the American Revolution.

Admittedly, the link that Standage is drawing here—between the colonists' fondness for rum and their desire to rebel against the British crown—is much more tenuous than anything he attempted in the earlier chapters. Yet Standage bolsters his claims with quotes from John Adams—a famous figure of the Revolution

Following the Revolutionary War, **whiskey** replaced rum as the dominant drink in America, in part because the sugar supply flowing from the West Indies had been disrupted by the war. Whiskey could be produced in North America without any trade whatsoever—all it required was cereal grains. Whiskey was also used as a currency, and even clergymen were paid in whiskey. In 1791, Alexander Hamilton, the Secretary of the Treasury under President George Washington, proposed that the government tax the consumption and sale of whiskey, causing a minor uproar in the colonies. The uproar culminated in the so-called Whiskey Rebellion of 1794. Thousands of farmers and distillery-owners refused to pay their whiskey taxes. In response, Washington sent an army of 13,000 men to the South to collect the whiskey taxes, and was able to obtain the money without a fight.

Ironically, the new American government (which had, according to Standage, fought for its independence partly because of its desire to drink rum without taxation) ran into trouble when it interfered with its own citizens' desire to drink whiskey without taxation. The Whiskey Rebellion was an important milestone in American history, because it proved that the centralized government of the U.S. would use military force to rule its own states—a fact later reinforced in the much bloodier Civil War.

The stigma of **whiskey** following the Whiskey Rebellion led to the invention of new whiskey derivatives, such as bourbon, which incorporated corn into its recipe. **Wine** remained fairly popular in America, but despite the fact that President Thomas Jefferson loved it, it never replaced whiskey or rum as a national drink. In part this was because wine was expensive to ship from Europe, but this was also because wine symbolized the decadence and pretentiousness of the Old World—whiskey, by contrast, was a democratic, down-to-earth drink.

The Americans in the 19th century distinguished themselves from Europeans by drinking bourbon, whiskey, and other non-wine drinks. This mirrors the process by which the Muslims refused to drink alcohol—the Americans wanted to distinguish themselves from their European rivals. By this process, whiskey came to symbolize commonness, ruggedness, and other quintessentially American qualities.

As America shifted from a rebellious colony to a major imperial power in the Western hemisphere, it used alcohol to control and manipulate its enemies. In the American West, Native Americans were known to love alcohol—which they'd never experienced before their contact with Europeans. Because Americans knew about Native Americans' love for **beer**, **whiskey**, and other forms of alcohol, they used alcohol to "sweeten the deal" when trading with Native Americans. One French missionary criticized European traders for shamelessly using brandy to manipulate Native Americans into accepting unfair deals.

In one of the most disturbing passages in Standage's book, he explains how the Americans used alcohol to manipulate the Native Americans and essentially steal their land. Unfortunately, we'll also see a similar process at work in the chapter on tea (where the British Empire used the sale of opium—a drug it knew to be deadly and addictive—to negotiate better deals with China).

One consequence of the importance of alcohol in commerce between Native Americans and representatives of the U.S. was the rise of new forms of alcohol, such as mescal, the drink that incorporated the fermented juice of the agave plant. For many hundreds of years, **spirits** were a fixture of colonial life: spirits inspired colonies to rise up against Britain, and were later used to subjugate slaves and Native Americans.

Although Standage argues that beverages represent different historical eras and all the cultural baggage that goes with them, he's also ready to admit that drinks don't symbolize the same things to everybody. Thus, for some whiskey might be a symbol of American independence and resistance—but to a Native American, whiskey might be a symbol of colonial manipulation and treachery.

CHAPTER 7: THE GREAT SOBERER

In the 1600s, a powerful new intellectual movement began in Europe: the Enlightenment. Figures like Galileo and Francis Bacon stressed the importance of experimentation, empiricism, and careful observation, rather than a blind reliance on accepted truths. Standage argues that the rise of the European Enlightenment was closely paralleled by the rise of **coffee** in Europe among middle-class workers and intellectuals around the same time.

The association between the Enlightenment and coffee has been studied for a long time (Standage even cites 19th-century historians who echo his conclusions). In many ways, Standage's argument in the following chapters is clearer and more concise than the previous chapters. Coffee is a more specific drink than "spirits" (spirits can mean anything from rum to bourbon to mescal, and therefore meant many different things to many different people), and also Standage also seems more comfortable writing about his areas of expertise—that is, British and American history, and particularly their economics.

At the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment, Standage argues, "Europe began to emerge from an alcoholic haze that had lasted for centuries." **Coffee**, a drink that became popular in Europe in the middle of the 17th century, was praised for inspiring a sense of clarity and conversation—exactly the opposite of the feeling that alcohol inspired in its drinkers.

All of the drinks that Standage writes about cause psychosomatic changes in their consumers. While alcohol is essentially a depressant, coffee is a stimulant—it creates energy, vigor, etc. In this way, coffee became an apt symbol of the new optimism of the Enlightenment.

Europe borrowed **coffee** from the Arab world. Coffee was probably invented in North Africa, or possibly Yemen. According to legend, a goatherd noticed that his goats became energetic after eating a mysterious brown bean. The goatherd took the beans to a local holy man, who discovered how to convert the beans into a strong, dark drink. Whether or not the legend is true, coffee quickly became popular throughout the Middle East. Coffee was especially popular because Muslims weren't permitted to drink alcohol. Coffeehouses were well patronized in Muslim countries, to the point where many Muslim scholars tried to argue that coffee was an intoxicating brew—no better than alcohol. Yet other Muslim scholars argued that coffee brought its drinkers closer to Allah (God).

Standage is writing a history of the world, but at the end of the day the majority of his evidence comes from European history. While he explores the origins of coffee in the Middle Eastern world, he doesn't spend much time on this portion of history—in his mind, the story of coffee really kicks off when Europeans begin drinking in the Age of Enlightenment. Of course, Standage's book isn't very long, so he has to cut out many things, but it's also important to keep in mind that he's writing "world" history from a conspicuously European perspective.

At first, the Christian world rejected **coffee** and viewed it as a pagan, Muslim drink. But in the early 1600s, Pope Clement VIII changed the popular thinking on coffee by claiming that it was a delicious beverage. Inspired by the Pope's example, coffee spread throughout Europe, pushed on by the strength of Arabic trading networks.

Although Europe began by dismissing its rival's prized beverage, it then switched to embracing this beverage. After this, coffee (for Standage, at least) became a distinctly European drink.

Coffeehouses first appeared in England during the time of Oliver Cromwell, the Puritan dictator of England. Because Cromwell discouraged the consumption of alcohol, **coffee** was celebrated as a viable alternative to alcohol—not sinful, but still delicious, bitter, and somewhat intoxicating. The first "coffeehouse" in England was tended by Pasqua Rosee, an Armenian servant who'd tasted coffee during his travels through the Middle East. Rosee worked for Daniel Edwards, a wealthy merchant who would invite his friends to discuss politics and religion in the building. The establishment was so successful that many other coffeehouses opened in London—within half a century there were at least 3,000.

Many of the drinks in Standage's book became popular because they were an alternative to another drink that had become unpopular for cultural reasons (whiskey was an alternative to wine in America, for example). The popularization of a drink isn't only a matter of discovering a new brewing process—drinks "replace" one another for cultural reasons that have nothing to do with science or technology.

Within less than a century, coffeehouses had become a central part of social and political life in England. While some disapproved of coffeehouses for provoking intoxication (the effects of **coffee** on the nervous system weren't well understood at the time), triviality, and time-wasting, for the most part men enjoyed coffeehouses immensely.

The coffeehouse is one of the best examples of a drinking space—a place where a certain group gathers and celebrates its cultural identity by drinking together. Coffee, with its effects of focus and concentration, was also an apt inspiration for the intellectuals of the Enlightenment.

Through the 17th and 18th centuries, Arabia was the only supplier of **coffee** beans for England. This changed as England, along with Holland and France, became an imperial power. Holland established coffee plantations in its new colonies in Java (a name still associated with coffee), and later France and England established similar plantations, so that Arabia was no longer necessary to provide Europe with its coffee. European colonists spread coffee to Brazil, Suriname, Guatemala, Santo Domingo, and dozens of other colonies in the New World.

In addition to being an appropriate symbol for Enlightenment values, coffee also became a rather poignant symbol of European imperialism during the modern era. Because of the Europeans' desire for coffee, entire ecosystems and societies in Java and Indonesia were altered. As with sugarcane and rum, the popularity of coffee also fueled the slave trade, as free labor was required to keep these drinks cheap.

CHAPTER 8: THE COFFEEHOUSE INTERNET

In the 17th century, educated and wealthy men would go to coffeehouses to learn about business news, politics, gossip, and literature. Businessmen often negotiated new deals over a cup of **coffee**, while others debated politics and philosophy, using coffee to inspire them. The 19th-century historian Thomas Macauley argued that in the 17th century, wealthy men defined themselves not by where they lived but by which coffeehouses they frequented.

Standage's thesis in this chapter is hardly original, and he acknowledges this up front by citing Thomas Macauley. Coffeehouses were important cultural entities, by means of which people defined themselves and explored new ideas. Also, like the Greek symposium, not everyone was allowed in a coffeehouse—only men.

Coffeehouses were public places, except that they excluded women and the poor. Gentlemen and tradesmen (people lower on the social ladder, who didn't own land), however, were free to discuss intellectual matters with a degree of freedom uncommon elsewhere in their society. Nor were the wealthy afforded more of a voice in coffeehouse conversations because of their power—everyone was given an equal opportunity to speak. Because coffeehouses allowed "everyone" (defined with a narrow spectrum of fairly wealthy men) to pursue their intellectual interests, Standage argues that the coffeehouse was the "Internet" of the Age of Enlightenment.

As with other drinking spaces that Standage discusses, the coffeehouse provided a measure of equality for its patrons, but could only do so by also excluding large sections of the population—women and the poor weren't allowed inside. The coffeehouse was therefore both elitist and egalitarian—much like Western society at the time. This reinforces Standage's point that the coffeehouse was a microcosm for Western society (and that coffee itself is a symbol of the Age of Enlightenment).

The first coffeehouse in Western Europe was established at the University of Oxford—a sure sign of the relationship between **coffee** and intellectual culture. One of the earliest proponents of coffee at Oxford was Christopher Wren, the noted architect, philosopher, and designer of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London. Wren spread enthusiasm for coffee to many of his friends, including Edmund Halley (the discoverer of Halley's Comet) and Sir Isaac Newton.

So far, Standage has spoken of the coffeehouse in the most general terms. That changes in this section when he describes some of the most famous patrons of the English coffeehouses of the 17th century—basically a laundry list of English intellectual giants of the period.

Perhaps the greatest book of the Age of Enlightenment was published because of coffeehouse conversation. Robert Hooke, the noted physicist, was drinking **coffee** with Halley, Wren, and Newton. Hooke brought up the inverse square law: the mathematical rule that was thought to govern the motion of planets. Newton, inspired by this discussion, decided to publish his book *Principia*, the foundation of all modern physics. Another key book of the Enlightenment, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*—the Bible of modern capitalism—was also written largely in a coffeehouse.

Standage gives more concrete examples to prove his thesis that coffeehouses fostered great intellectual achievements. Standage's declaration that the coffeehouse was the "Internet" of its day may sound odd and reductive, but in light of the monumental breakthroughs achieved in coffeehouses, it's hard to argue that the coffeehouse wasn't an important medium for spreading information and inspiring new ideas (like the Internet is today).

Standage argues that science and commerce became heavily intertwined in **coffee**houses. Many coffeehouses were patronized primarily by explorers and sailors, and sometimes these patrons would hatch plans to launch new expeditions. Coffeehouses also served as makeshift stock markets, where sellers and buyers would meet to discuss trading. People who defaulted on their payments were often banned from the coffeehouses where they'd made a trade—their names were written on a board. In this way, the coffeehouse took on a kind of authority, promising that all those permitted inside would be trustworthy.

The coffeehouse took on a new measure of authority when it became a place for business transactions. Coffeehouse owners were effectively screening their patrons before letting them in—a businessmen who'd lost all of his money wouldn't be allowed back into a coffeehouse, and would have to look elsewhere for new partners. This is one of the best examples of how drinking spaces function as cultural entities—drinking spaces decide who does and doesn't belong to a group.

In the mid-1700s, the French philosopher Francois-Marie Arouet de Voltaire rose to prominence for wittily criticizing the foolishness and hypocrisy of the French aristocracy. Voltaire's books were banned for their supposedly immoral content, yet Voltaire continued to frequent **coffee**houses, spending time with such French luminaries as Rousseau and Montesquieu, whose political writings Voltaire influenced.

The intellectual culture of the coffeehouse in France seems no different than that in England. Standage will clarify some notable differences in the following section, but his major point here is that the French Enlightenment was no less inspired by the coffeehouse than the English Enlightenment was.

French **coffee**houses were similar to their English counterparts in many ways: they welcomed wealthy and middle-class men (but not women or the poor), and they encouraged open discourse on a wide variety of topics. Yet French coffeehouses were also policed by government authorities, bent on ensuring that the conversation remained civil and respected the king of France. As the century proceeded, however, the coffeehouse increasingly became a place of political revolution. On July 12, 1789, Camille Desmoulins (supposedly) inaugurated the French Revolution at a coffeehouse. Desmoulins stood on a table and cried, "To arms, citizens!" His cries inspired a rapidly-growing mob that soon engulfed the city of Paris.

It's interesting—and perhaps not coincidental—that French coffeehouses were more strictly policed than their English counterparts. Based on the fact that the French Revolution began in a French coffeehouse, one would expect exactly the opposite to occur, but perhaps this suggests that there was a kind of build-up of pressure in the French coffeehouse—and in French society—that resulted in a revolution unlike anything seen in England. This bolsters Standage's thesis that the coffeehouse was a miniature of society.

In contemporary times, coffeehouses remain popular, though they're far tamer than their ancestors. **Coffee** is still the drink of conversation and intellectual discourse. Perhaps it's not entirely a coincidence, Standage suggests, that the American city most associated with coffee, Seattle, is also the seat of many of our largest Internet and software companies—coffee has long been associated with intellectualism, creativity, and innovation.

As in his earlier chapters, Standage makes sure to draw comparisons between the culture of the past and that of the present. Standage clearly doesn't think it's just a coincidence that coffee culture has continued to inspire radical new creativity—particularly as the drink itself inspires focus and concentration, two vital qualities for any creative person.

CHAPTER 9: EMPIRES OF TEA

By the end of the 18th century, Britain had become the most powerful nation on the planet. The British Empire covered a huge amount of territory in such places as New Zealand, Canada, India, and Australia. **Tea**, Standage argues, linked all these areas together.

In this chapter Standage arguably deals with subject matter he's most comfortable with—the economic history of Britain. Once again he focuses on the Western world, emphasizing the famous British fondness for tea.

Tea was invented in China, supposedly by the Emperor Shen Nung. The Emperor considered tea a medicinal brew, capable of waking people and curing them of depression. Tea is an infusion of dried leaves and flowers from the bush *Camellia sinensis*, which is native to the Himalayas. It's believed that this plant was first widely popularized in China by Buddhist monks in the 6th century BCE. Likewise Lao-tzu, the founder of Taoism, considered tea an important part of a balanced life. His example, along with that of Shen Nung and the Buddhists, may have helped to make tea China's defining drink.

As with coffee, Standage begins by studying the history of tea outside of the West, but we still understand that this history is a preamble to his real focus: the history of tea in Britain, and how it relates to imperialism. It's also interesting to note that tea was celebrated for its medicinal properties from the very beginning, just like beer and wine.

Like many other drinks, **tea** was used as a form of currency in China: it was popular and commonly consumed to the point where anybody would accept it as a valuable thing. Tea became so popular during the Tang Dynasty that it was heavily taxed. In spite of taxes, tea remained popular in the succeeding Sung Dynasty, which lasted until the 13th century.

Despite taxes, tea remained popular, a sure sign of the strong, "inelastic" demand for the drink. (A few centuries later, the tea tax might have resulted in a revolution like the one in America).

Tea drinking was also popular in Japan. Japanese **tea** drinking ceremonies were complex, almost mystical rituals that took many hours to complete. The tea had to be ground perfectly, boiled at the right temperature, and stirred the proper number of times. The culture of tea drinking in Japan became so complicated that tea-masters had to educate the young in the subtleties of the beverage.

In Japan, tea became less and less of a medicine and more of a component in ritual. The point of drinking tea was no longer just to enjoy its medical benefits, but also to master the art of performance, poise, and self-control. These qualities would be practiced in a tea ceremony and then applied elsewhere in life (like Socrates' idea of drinking wine in the symposium). As usual, though, Standage doesn't linger on the history of his beverages outside of the West.

Tea reached Europe in the 16th century, when European sailors first arrived in China, then the most populous nation on the planet. Europeans were dazzled by Chinese sophistication and power: the Chinese had invented gunpowder, the compass, and the printing press. Indeed, Chinese sophistication exceeded Europe's in almost every way. Nevertheless, Europe struck up a productive trading system with China—Europeans brought **tea**, along with rice and silk, back to their homes from China. Tea wasn't popular in Europe in the 17th century because it was expensive. Still, many doctors recommended it for its medicinal properties.

In spite of the (perhaps inevitable) Eurocentrism of his book, Standage readily acknowledges that there's nothing inherently more impressive about Europe than other continents. Indeed, for thousands of years, China was far more sophisticated and powerful than Europe—things like paper and gunpowder wouldn't reach Europe for centuries, and only then because China allowed them to be traded with foreigners.

For various reasons, Britain became the nation most heavily associated with **tea**. The British began their world-famous love for tea in the 1660s, when King Charles II celebrated his marriage to Catherine of Portugal by serving tea—then a highly exotic beverage—at his wedding. Court poets wrote volumes about the merits of tea. Later on, the British East India Company, a large corporation backed by royal authority, began trading in tea with Holland. Gradually, tea shifted from an elite beverage to an everyday one—by the 1700s, commoners drank tea almost every day.

Interestingly, Standage doesn't go into a great amount of detail about why the British came to love tea more than almost any other nation. Certainly, tea was viewed as a novelty, and an exotic foreign beverage at that. But this would only explain why tea was popular in the Western world, not Britain specifically. Perhaps the best answer is that Britain had the largest and most powerful navy in the world beginning in the 17th century, and this meant that the country could acquire more tea and pass it on to its people. Or it might just be as simple as an idiosyncrasy of taste.

In the 1730s, England became filled with **tea** gardens—public spaces where women and men could drink tea together. The tea garden was popular with women in part because it provided a gender-equitable alternative to the **coffee**house. Tea consumption trickled down through English society, to the point where, by the late 18th century, all foreigners visiting England were struck by the country's love for the drink.

As with the coffeehouse and the symposium, the tea garden was an important drinking space, defined as much by those who weren't allowed inside it as by its loyal members. Men and women enjoyed tea together, however, making the tea garden different from the coffeehouse (but still exclusive in its own right). This might reflect the slowly growing egalitarianism of Western society (a theme which will continue in the chapters on Coca-Cola).

CHAPTER 10: TEA POWER

One of the most important technological breakthroughs of the 18th century occurred in 1771 when the British inventor Richard Arkwright developed a "spinning frame" that could weave textiles. This breakthrough was one of the earliest milestones in the Industrial Revolution, the period during which machines performed an increasingly large portion of labor—manufacturing, delivery, etc. Arkwright became so successful that he was able to open a series of mills where workers controlled spinning frames as they produced clothing. Arkwright gave his workers regular **tea** breaks. Tea, he found, was a sensible drink, because it was sterile (water had to be boiled) and easy to prepare. Because tea became popular in mills, cases of dysentery and other water-spread diseases went down dramatically in the 18th century.

As with coffee, wine, and beer, tea was a safe alternative to ordinary water, because it didn't spread bacterial diseases. Standage also argues that tea was a popular drink for workers during the Industrial Revolution. This is a somewhat surprising argument, as coffee seems more conducive for workers than tea does, since coffee is celebrated for stimulating alertness. There is also the fact that in contemporary times coffee is considered the preferred drink for workers, while tea, by contrast, is a drink for leisure and relaxation. Nevertheless, Standage backs up his points with evidence.

The popularity of **tea** encouraged the Industrial Revolution in many ways. Not only were workers given tea at factories and mills, but the demand for tea itself helped to foster a huge industry of ceramics. Potters like Josiah Wedgwood produced fine porcelain using new industrial techniques. Soon, British porcelain became renowned throughout Europe, eclipsing even the porcelain of China.

The rise of the art of porcelain in England reflected the country's growing clout when compared with China. By trying to beat China at its own game, England was also attempting to make a bid for world power, usurping China's status as the center of culture, technology, and military might.

In general, the Industrial Revolution took place in Britain for many reasons: a proud scientific tradition, a strong work ethic, large supplies of coal, etc. But the demand for **tea** also played a small but important role in the era: tea was a sterile, healthy drink that ensured a steady supply of strong, capable workers.

Standage makes another tenuous claim, but remains modest in his argument. Tea certainly did not "cause" the Industrial Revolution, but it played some part in it by providing a steady supply of healthy, focused workers who could man machines and work in factories.

For more than two centuries, the British East India Company was one of the most powerful organizations in the world. This company was responsible for obtaining **tea** supplies from around the world, colonizing entire countries to do so. The company's influence was so great that it could often influence Britain's foreign policy. One famous example of this occurred in the 1770s. The British East India Company feared that smuggled tea would become so popular in the American colonies that smugglers would put the company out of business. As a result, the company convinced the British crown to tax tea heavily. The long-term goal was to lower the price of tea transportation, thereby making tea smuggling impractical. But this turned out to be a huge mistake, since in the short-term tea prices went up enormously. Colonists were so furious with the new taxes that they organized the famous Boston Tea Party of 1773, during which three full shiploads of tea were dumped into Boston Harbor. The controversy over tea prices, instigated by the British East India Company's control over the British crown, played a decisive role in bringing about the American Revolution.

Standage jumps back to the American Revolution, which he'd earlier described in the chapters on spirits. This reminds us that while Standage is ostensibly writing a chronological history of the world, the chronologies of his beverages overlap with one another. In other words, it's not correct to say that tea was the "defining drink" of one era, and coffee was the defining drink of another—these two eras overlapped, and plenty of people drank both tea and coffee, or neither. In this section, Standage reiterates the challenges of ruling a colony from overseas—a recurring theme in his chapters on tea. Nations often depend upon excessive taxes to control their colonies, but the danger of such taxes is that they create resentment and frustration in the colonists, and may even spark a revolution—this is exactly what happened in America (and later in China).

By the 1780s, the British East India Company was in good shape, largely because new sources of **tea** resulted in lower tea prices throughout the British Empire. These low prices made tea smuggling obsolete, and greatly increased company profits. As the company grew in size, it began to focus more on land control. In India, the company seized huge land territories and set up administrative governments in the name of the British Empire. One side effect of these changes was that the British East India Company became less invested in trade—as a result, other mercantile companies became more powerful. Nevertheless, the company continued to wield great power throughout the empire.

The British East India Company wielded a huge amount of control outside the Western world—arguably more than any modern corporation does. Even Edmund Burke, one of the founders of modern conservatism, made a famous series of speeches in which he condemned the company's tyranny in India, and argued that no corporation should have so much power unchecked. Standage is clearly in his element here, as a writer and editor for The Economist.

In the early 19th century, the British East India Company faced a new challenge. The company became heavily involved in the illicit trading of opium in China. Although opium was a powerful and dangerous narcotic that had been banned in China, the company traded many tons of opium with Chinese citizens under the table, and opium became an important part of the company's affairs. It was believed that Britain should have a balance of trade with China because it purchased so much **tea** from China. As a result, opium quickly became the commodity that Britain exchanged with China in return for tea. Because opium trading was officially illegal in China, the British East India Company hid its tracks by bribing officials and laundering money through Indian companies.

In this disturbing passage, Standage echoes his descriptions of colonists' relations with the Native Americans. Just as colonists knew it was in their interest to weaken the Native Americans with alcohol, the British knew that they benefited when Chinese people incapacitated themselves by smoking opium. Standage is writing world history from the perspective of the European countries, but this hardly means that he glorifies Europe unconditionally. It's not difficult to condemn Britain for using opium to maintain its trading advantage with China.

By the 1830s, the British East India Company traded huge volumes of opium every year—its financial standing depended on the trade, in fact. In 1838, the emperor of China sent Commissioner Tze-su to crack down on opium trading in the country. Tze-su, recognizing that British businessmen were entirely responsible for the opium trade, decided to shut down China to all British businessmen. This launched the Opium War of 1839-42, during which the British Empire fought with China for the right to trade freely in China. Britain defeated China so resoundingly that it was able to establish no less than five ports in China, claim Hong Kong as its own territory, and demand a huge reparation payment in the form of silver. All of this was humiliating for China, which as late as the 1700s was the wealthiest and most sophisticated country on the planet. The demand for **tea** had thus changed British foreign policy—and world history.

In this section, Standage launches one of his most compelling critiques of imperialism and of European foreign policy in the 19th century. The whims of the people of Britain—a desire to drink more tea—resulted in a short but bloody war that reversed China's status as the world's greatest military and cultural power. This is perhaps the greatest flaw in imperialism—it creates situations in which one group's whims (here, the British people's need for a certain drink) are weighed more highly than another group's livelihood (the Chinese people's desire to live in peace and autonomy, and without the influence of opium).

Although Britain had fought an entire war to ensure its ability to trade opium—and thus consume **tea** from China—it also pursued ways of growing its own tea. In the early 1800s, it was suggested that tea could be cheaply shipped and grown in Java or India, a major British colony. British officials particularly liked the notion of growing tea in India because it meant the creation of new jobs for Indians, and new sources of wealth for British businessmen. The irony of these calculations was that there already *was* tea in India, in the region of Assam. Tea bushes had grown in Assam for hundreds of years. When this was discovered in the late 1820s, it was hailed as the most important agricultural breakthrough in British history.

Much as the Europeans learned how to grow their own supplies of coffee in Indonesia, the English worked hard to grow their own supplies of tea outside China, thereby gaining economic independence from their great rival in the East. It's a mark of tea's importance in English culture that the discovery of tea bushes in the 1820s was hailed as a monumental breakthrough in British agriculture. The British, one might say, depended on tea almost as much as addicts depended on opium.

Although the British Empire knew that it could grow **tea** in Assam, it wasn't clear how tea bushes should be cultivated to ensure maximum production. Charles Bruce, a talented explorer and adventurer, spent more than twenty years learning the best ways to grow tea by interviewing local farmers. Armed with Bruce's research, the British Empire raised large sums of money from investors with the goal of establishing a thriving tea industry in India. This new Assam Company, a major international company by the 1850s, employed Chinese tea experts in order to ensure success in Assam. Throughout the 1850s, the company's profits were low, but by the 1860s it had become highly successful, making clever use of industrial innovations like the steam engine and the assembly line. By the 1880s, Britain derived most of its tea from India, not China.

It's startling that Britain was able to transition from Chinese tea to Indian tea in only a few decades. In many ways, this is a testament to British ingenuity in matters of agriculture and technology. Standage doesn't hesitate to praise the British Empire for these reasons, even if he takes issue with the basic idea of brutally exploiting China and India for their resources. This "balanced" look at imperialism in the 19th century (praise for the science and technology, criticism of the tyranny and cruelty) is typical of Standage's book as a whole: he tries to stay apolitical, and though his perspective is Eurocentric, he generally remains objective.

At present, India is still the world's biggest producer of **tea**, thanks in no small part to the work of Charles Bruce. India is also the world's leading consumer of tea (23 percent), followed by China. While Britain itself consumes only 6 percent of the world's tea, it's no coincidence that many of the world's largest consumers of the drink—India, New Zealand, and Australia—are former British colonies. By contrast, the U.S. drinks relatively little tea. While tea was fairly popular in the 19th century, **coffee** has been far more popular ever since lowered tariffs in the 1830s made it cheaper to buy. In conclusion, Britain's love affair with tea can be seen all over the world in its colonies—in a way, the popularity of tea around the world is one of the last signs of the huge political and military power the British Empire once held.

By this point, the book's structural pattern is obvious—Standage ends each of his chapters with a summary of his main points, and with a description of how the events of the past continue to manifest themselves in people's drinks today. But Standage's conclusion in this chapter is more poignant than its counterparts in the earlier sections. The prominence of tea in India, Australia, etc. isn't just a reminder of British naval power—it's also a reminder of British cruelty, treachery, and tyranny across the world.

CHAPTER 11: FROM SODA TO COLA

In the 19th century, the United States was a major industrial power, exceeding even the United Kingdom, where the Industrial Revolution began. The culture of the United States was perfect for an age of mass production: because of the country's strong emphasis on equality and reduced class boundaries, products could be mass-produced instead of being tediously tailored to each region's preferences. By the end of the 19th century, the U.S had eclipsed Britain as the world's leading industrial power—one sure sign of this was that British companies imported American machinery, rather than the other way around. By the 1950s, America was the world's dominant superpower, rivaled only by the Soviet Union. With the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 90s, America remained the world's only superpower, confirming that the 20th century was truly the "American century."

This paragraph could easily be its own book: the history of America from the Civil War to the present day is a mammoth topic, after all. But as usual, Standage isn't concerned with details—he's focusing on big ideas and overarching trends. The major trend that he identifies in this section is the rise of American power, and with it the rise of industrial capitalism around the world. It's hard to argue with Standage that this is the dominant "story" of the last 150 years. America spread capitalism across much of the globe, and its preeminence in the 90s, after the fall of the U.S.S.R., seemed to confirm the superiority of liberal capitalism over other forms of government and economies.

Standage proposes that the history of American dominance on the global stage is mirrored in the history of **Coca-Cola**, sometimes seen as the ultimate symbol of American values and weaknesses. For some, Coke is the ultimate symbol of equality, unpretentiousness, and mass culture. For others, Coke is the symbol of capitalism, greed, imperialism, and cultural genocide.

For his final chapters, Standage argues for Coca-Cola as the symbol of American hegemony. This is a provocative thesis (and probably the most controversial beverage of the book), but also somewhat familiar—as even Coke's advertisements suggest that it's "America's drink." As with tea and the British Empire, Coke is the symbol of everything both good and bad about the "American Empire."

The invention of **Coca Cola** was anticipated the research of the 18th century British chemist Joseph Priestley. Priestley discovered the relationship between oxygen and carbon dioxide, and is often credited with the discovery of oxygen itself. Priestley was also the first to learn how to combine gas with water to produce "sparkling water." In 1772, he published a chemistry book in which he explained how to make sparkling water. Priestley suggested that sparkling water could be used as a medicine for fighting nausea, tiredness, and even scurvy.

It's remarkable that all six of the drinks in this book were originally celebrated for their health benefits. And yet despite this, they have only survived over the centuries because they became ordinary, commercial drinks, rather than medicines. It's also ironic that the most "modern" of these medicinal beverages—Coca-Cola—is actually one of the most unhealthy. Standage doesn't actually deal with the health benefits or problems of any of his beverages, however.

For the remainder of the 18th century, sparkling water appeared as a medical beverage. The simplest sparkling waters incorporated sodium bicarbonate, abbreviated to "soda"—hence the generic name for fizzy water products. Soda became most popular in the U.S., where the chemist Benjamin Silliman began selling bottled soda water in the early 1800s. Shortly after Silliman began selling soda, Americans found other recipes for the liquid. The "**wine** spritzer" was invented when chemists discovered that wine mixed with soda was less intoxicating than wine by itself. Slowly, soda moved from a medicine to an ordinary beverage.

This section is important because it shows us that the technology behind brewing and packaging soda has been around for 150 years—longer than we might think. Here Standage also explains the process by which soda (like the other beverages in this book) moved from being a medicine to being an ordinary drink.

By the mid-19th century, soda was very popular in America. John Matthews, an entrepreneur, devised more than 100 patents for every stage of selling soda: bottling it, dispensing it at a soda fountain, washing the bottles, etc. Soda was perhaps the most representative mass-produced commodity in America: cheap, easy to transport, and completely interchangeable. As early as the 1890s, writers praised soda for its democratic, egalitarian implications. One writer wrote, "The millionaire may drink champagne while the poor man drinks **beer**, but they both drink soda water."

Standage had suggested that tea was the quintessential drink of the assembly line, but his argument is different and more compelling here. Workers drank *tea on their breaks, but Coke was actually produced and packaged according to the rules of mass production—still a new business model at the time.*

In 1887, John Pemberton, a pharmacist living in Atlanta, Georgia, invented the earliest version of **Coca Cola**. It's sometimes claimed that Pemberton was trying to invent a cure for headaches, but the truth is that Pemberton was responding to the trend of "miracle tonics" in the 19th century. Quack doctors sold medicines that supposedly cured diseases—though often these medicines were themselves highly dangerous. These doctors were among the first people to recognize the importance of branding and advertising: they invented slogans, logos, and ad campaigns to market their brews. Pemberton's first attempt at a miracle-cure, which he called French Wine Coca, contained the leaves of the cocoa plant. It had been known since the 1850s that cocoa could stimulate the nervous system and lessen the appetite (cocoa leaves can also be used to produce cocaine).

Coke was an important step forward for American business in several ways. First, it made use of exotic plants from other countries, confirming America's status as a major imperial power. Second, it (along with the many other miracle tonics available at the time) proved that advertising was crucial for a business. While Coke was still sold as a medicine at the time, it wouldn't be long before it was marketed as an ordinary beverage, meant to be enjoyed by people of all ages and backgrounds. By this point in the book, we've come a long way from beer and wine—drinks which were originally celebrated for their medical and religious properties.

Pemberton's original recipe for French Wine Coca contained alcohol. But because he recognized the influence of the Temperance Movement, which was trying to illegalize consumption of alcohol in the U.S., he decided to produce a non-alcoholic drink. In place of **wine**, Pemberton added the seeds of the kola plant from West Africa, while also keeping the cocoa leaves. The result was **Coca-Cola**, named after the two primary ingredients in the drink. The man who named Coca-Cola was probably Frank Robinson, one of Pemberton's business partners. It was also Robinson who designed Coca-Cola's signature cursive logo.

In this expository section, we learn some interesting information about the history of the Coca-Cola label. We're also reminded of the importance of foreign products in Coca-Cola, proof that America had the military and naval power to travel the world and bring back exotic resources. As usual, Standage doesn't linger on the human cost of these "advantages" of imperialism.

Pemberton marketed **Coca-Cola** by claiming that it was "exhilarating" and "invigorating," and claiming that it could cure headaches, hysteria, melancholy, and other diseases. Coca-Cola became very popular, partly because it was non-alcoholic in a time when the Temperance movement was becoming highly influential. Indeed, by 1887, Pemberton, unbeknownst to Frank Robinson, decided to sell some of his Coca-Cola company shares to other businessmen. This created a controversy, in which Robinson, Pemberton, and the businessmen who bought Pemberton's shares all claimed to be brewers of the "real" Coca-Cola.

This conflict between rival vendors of Coca-Cola is unprecedented in Standage's book (nobody argued over who was brewing "real" coffee in 17th-century England, for example), and yet it's entirely appropriate that these kinds of controversies should have broken out in late 19th-century America. America was (and is) a capitalist society—one that depends on competition between businesses. The theme of competition will recur throughout Standage's history of Coke, reflecting the capitalist economy that created Coke and made it popular.

The "Coca-Cola war" of the late 1880s ended abruptly with Pemberton's death from cancer. A shrewd Georgia businessman named Asa Candler then teamed up with Frank Robinson and began buying up rights to brew **Coca-Cola**. Candler made a moving, widely attended speech in which he claimed to have been one of Pemberton's closest friends. Based largely on the moral weight of his supposed friendship with Pemberton (a complete lie), Candler quickly became known as the "true" brewer of Coca-Cola.

Candler was a liar and con-artist, but also an effective businessman—and, Standage suggests, maybe those two things aren't so different at the end of the day. With this emphasis on the "real" brewer of Coca-Cola, we also come to see the importance of branding, especially in a capitalist, consumerist society like America.

By the 1890s, Asa Candler's **Coca-Cola** had become so popular that he sold more than 75,000 gallons of it every month. Coca-Cola was being sold in almost every state in the union, and some hailed it as the national beverage. Yet Candler never sold Coca-Cola in bottles—instead he sold Coke in syrup form, and customers had to brew the drink themselves by mixing the syrup with water. In the late 1890s, Candler broadened his product's appeal by rebranding Coca-Cola as an ordinary beverage instead of a medicine. This rebranding strategy turned out to come at the perfect time: by switching Coca-Cola from a medicine to a drink, Candler avoided a costly national tax on medical tonics that could have crippled his company.

It seems strange for us as modern readers that the forward-thinking Candler insisted on Coke being sold as a syrup. The Coca-Cola bottle is such a ubiquitous image in our society that we forget that at one time, it was seen as a waste of money for companies to bottle their own products before selling them. This also shows how the instant-gratification aspect of bottled Coke (not having to mix anything yourself) contributed to its popularity as well.

By the 1910s, **Coca-Cola** was being sold in bottled form. Around this time, a scientist named Harvey Washington Wiley launched a national campaign claiming that Coke caused violence, delinquency, and sexual promiscuity in its consumers. In 1911, federal cases concluded that Candler's Coca-Cola company had the right to sell its product, since Candler didn't claim that Coke was anything other than a caffeinated beverage. One interesting detail of this ruling, however, was that Coca-Cola couldn't depict children in its advertisements. Indeed, Coca-Cola ads wouldn't depict children until the 1980s. Instead of depicting children directly, Coke thus had to find other strategies for appealing to children. One of the most famous of these strategies was to depict Santa Claus with a Coke bottle. While it's often claimed that Coke popularized the modern conception of Santa (as a fat man with a red suit and a white beard), this is a myth—by the 1930s, when Coke launched its ad campaign, the modern conception of Santa was already widely known.

Wiley's campaign against Coca-Cola seems a little absurd by modern standards, but it's an observable fact that whenever anything new becomes popular—whether it's the bicycle, the television, or Harry Potter—there will always be reactionaries declaiming it as evil. We know now that Coca-Cola doesn't affect one's promiscuity or aggression, but it does have physical effects on its consumers—most of them negative. It's also here that we learn that Coke did not *pioneer the modern depiction of Santa Claus—but perhaps it proves something that this myth is so pervasive. It's indicative of Coke's preeminence in the world of advertising, and of the vast influence that Americans know the Coca-Cola company to have—and also of the current cynical attitude towards advertising and capitalism, after decades of Coke-style corporate corruption.*

During the Great Depression, **Coca-Cola** developed successful new strategies for selling its product. The company publicist Archie Lee approved ads depicting Coke as the ultimate social drink—a wholesome, family beverage that could be enjoyed on dates, in the home, or in shops. Largely as a result of these carefree, escapist ads, Coke became even more popular during the Depression.

Archie Lee, more than anyone else, may be responsible for making Coke the world-renowned beverage it is today. If Lee hadn't kept Coke going through the Depression, it's possible that the company wouldn't have been able to parlay its advantage into worldwide success during World War II.

In spite of its popularity during the 1930s, **Coke** at this time faced competition from PepsiCola. The PepsiCola company had been in existence since the 1890s, but only in the 1930s did it become a serious rival to Coke. PepsiCola benefited from the fact that its product looked and tasted like Coke—many customers mistakenly purchased Pepsi instead of Coca-Cola. This prompted a series of vicious lawsuits alleging that Pepsi was trying to imitate Coke in order to be more successful. By 1942, Pepsi and Coke had ended their legal battles, and Pepsi adopted a new label that clearly distinguished it from Coca-Cola. Ultimately, Pepsi and Coke benefited from each other's existence, as the two companies kept each other efficient and well-managed. Today, business schools often treat the Coke-Pepsi rivalry as a good example of how competition can benefit everyone: both the companies and the consumers.

The rivalry between Coke and Pepsi is another good example of the importance of capitalism in Coke's history. As Standage argues, Coke and Pepsi kept each other in business—if either drink had gone up in price, or tasted any different, than the other soda would have become far more popular, putting its competitor out of business. The fact that Coke and Pepsi taste more or less the same, however, is an early sign of the homogenization of world culture that Coke has come to symbolize in some circles: it's replaced the diverse cultural traditions of the world with two mass-produced products, between which no one can tell the difference.

CHAPTER 12: GLOBALIZATION IN A BOTTLE

In the 20th century, there was a worldwide cultural debate on how people should live—under democracy, dictatorship, socialist regime, etc. By the end of the century, there was a wide global consensus that people are happiest when they're free to choose what they want. Peculiarly, **Coca-Cola** represents this belief better than almost any single product.

Standage begins with his thesis: Coke represents the preeminence of American culture in the world today—for better or for worse. If Coke has an ideology behind it, it's the belief that the best society is one that satisfies its people's needs and desires.

Coke became a truly global product after World War II, at the same time that America was becoming a truly global power. In its earliest days, the U.S. had a policy of strict isolationism, but during World War II, partly in response to Japan's attacks on American soil at Pearl Harbor, America became a staunchly global power, sending troops around the world. American troops also spread Coca-Cola around the world—indeed, every soldier was supplied with one bottle of Coke during the war, courtesy of the Coca-Cola company. Coke became such a popular part of the soldier's experience that the American military asked Coca-Cola to send more soda to U.S. troops in Africa, Europe, and Asia. With the government's help, Coca-Cola established bottling facilities at American military bases in other countries. Coke technicians at these facilities were regarded as important players in the American military—they were affectionately nicknamed "Coca-Cola colonels." Many of the American military's most important figures were fans of Coke.

In this fascinating section, Standage shows that Coca-Cola became a truly "American" product during World War II, when Coke was so supportive of the American military effort that it offered to supply every soldier with a bottle of their product. Of course, it's likely that the Coca-Cola company only introduced this campaign because it suspected that the American government would reward it (which it did). At any rate, Coke's success during the war resulted in its status around the world as an American beverage, and also as a symbol of American military might. Of course, this also means that it represented American imperialism and corrupt capitalism at its worst.

After World War II ended in 1945, **Coca-Cola** plants remained in Africa, Europe, and Asia, and became conventional, non-military facilities. As a result, ordinary people around the world tasted Coke for the first time. Because Coke had been an explicitly military drink during World War II, Coke was regarded as a symbol of American power for years afterwards. The Coca-Cola company, well aware of its product's patriotic associations, launched a series of ad campaigns that emphasized Coke's all-American qualities. As one Coke executive said, "when the world thinks of democracy, it thinks of Coca-Cola."

The influence of Coca-Cola during the war was so great that after the end of World War II, Coca-Cola plants stayed in business. It may seem strange that a soda could come to stand for an entire country, but because Coke had been exported around the world and associated with the American military, it was one of the most visible symbols of America, and thus of American culture and values. The Coke executive's statement, while obviously self-serving, has more than a grain of truth in it.

Because **Coca-Cola** became a universal symbol of America in the 1950s, it also became a symbol of everything people loved—and hated—about the U.S. In France, communist sympathizers referred to the Marshall Plan—the effort to rebuild Europe after World War II with large sums of American money—as "Coca-Colonization." French hatred for Coke was so great that there was a widespread campaign in France to ban Coca-Cola. French protesters smashed Coke bottles to symbolize their opposition to the Marshall Plan, which they believed would lead to an influx not only of American money, but also of mediocre American culture and values. In other parts of Europe, communist sympathizers and opponents of American hegemony treated Coke like poison. There was a popular rumor in Italy that Coke could kill small children.

There have been many campaigns against Coca-Cola over the years, but few so clearly motivated by nationalistic sentiments as the one Italy launched against the drink after World War II. Coke became known as a symbol of American mediocrity and consumerism—an affront to the perceived sophistication and uniqueness of European culture. While these kinds of differences between European and American culture have been around for many centuries (think of the Americans who drank whiskey instead of decadent European wine), they came back with a vengeance after World War II, when America fully replaced Europe as the dominant global power.

Although **Coca-Cola**'s association with American power had been a great asset for the company in the 1940s and 50s, its association with the U.S. became a weakness in some ways during the 1960s. Because Coke was regarded as America's drink, it was virtually impossible for the Coca-Cola company to open Coke facilities in the Soviet Union. Pepsi, Coke's old rival, had a much easier time opening facilities in this part of the world, because its company hadn't been tainted by associations with the U.S. In part because of its new presence in Eastern Europe, Pepsi eclipsed Coke as the world's most popular soft drink in the 80s. However, Coke's absence in the Soviet Union ultimately became an advantage. When the Soviet Union collapsed in the 90s, Russia and its former satellite states embraced Coke with great vigor. By the mid-90s, Coke had become the world's number one soft drink once again.

Coke faced a dilemma for most of the Cold War: although its association with America had shot it into the stratosphere, the company found that it couldn't grow its business very much, since it had no way of entering the Soviet Union. It was for this reason that Pepsi began to eclipse Coke as the world's favorite soda—however, this trend reversed after the Cold War, when Coke's status as America's soda once again became an advantage, not a weakness. All this shows how purely capitalistic Coke and Pepsi's actions have been throughout history—they cared nothing for ideologies or ideals, but only for which political situation might bring them the most profit.

Coca-Cola's strong associations with the U.S. also prevented it from spreading to the Middle East. Coke faced a dilemma in the Middle East: it could establish facilities in Israel or in the Arab world, but not both. In the 60s, Coca-Cola stayed out of Israel. It was suggested that Coke executives believed that Arab states would boycott Coke if they knew that the company did business with a Jewish state—in other words, critics argued, Coca-Cola was condoning anti-Semitism. In the 70s, however, Coca-Cola began selling its products in Israel, which in turn prompted the Arab nations of the Middle East to boycott Coke. Coke then resumed selling soda in Arab nations in the late 80s, when tensions between Arab nations and Israel had subsided somewhat.

The Coca-Cola company again pursued its cynical and amoral strategy in the Middle East: it stayed out of Israel only because it didn't want to lose its Arab (and often anti-Semitic) customers. And yet, Coca-Cola's actions became representative of how any major capitalist company would behave: it did what it could to increase its profits over time. For some time, then, this meant selling in Israel instead of the Arab world. Coke's experience in the Middle East reiterates the connections between the beverage and American capitalism: at the end of the day, capitalism's only goal is increasing profits.

To this day, **Coke** is a benchmark of America's presence in foreign countries. Studies have shown that countries in which people drink more Coke have higher literacy rates and longer average life expectancies than countries in which people drink less Coke. This doesn't prove that coke makes people smarter, of course—rather, it suggests that Coke is a staple of life in a liberal democracy, the form of government that has been shown to produce the greatest prosperity and freedom for its people. In conclusion, Standage argues that Coke is one of the most popular drinks on the planet, and—for better or worse—a symbol of American entrepreneurship and imperialism.

Standage ends his chapter with his usual mixture of modesty and boldness. It's obvious that Coke doesn't create *health and intelligence, but Standage is willing to argue that Coke is so closely correlated with American culture and influence that wherever people drink Coke, there must be an strong American presence. Though this might mean a better economy, more human rights, and better education, it also might mean exploitation, corruption, and cultural oppression—just as Coke is sugary and delicious, but also incredibly unhealthy. In the end, Standage (as usual) refuses to say what he thinks of American global power, and lets us make up our own minds.*

EPILOGUE: BACK TO THE SOURCE

Standage begins his epilogue by arguing that the "drink of the future" is the same drink that humans consumed before they knew how to brew anything at all: water. For centuries, beverages like **beer** or **wine** were welcome alternatives to water because they carried no deadly diseases. Now, however, water purification has become so sophisticated that water can be consumed safely.

Standage comes full-circle in this epilogue by talking once again about water, the source of all life, and the first beverage that human beings drank.

Across the world, bottled water is being sold in record quantities. The popularity of bottled water in part reflects the mistaken belief that distilled water is healthier than tap water. In actuality, tap water is just as healthy as bottled water in developed nations. Most people can't tell the difference between tap and bottled water. In fact, bottled water sometimes *is* just tap water, albeit with a few minerals added.

Standage notes the absurdity (but not the environmental impact) of the fact that people buy bottled water in some parts of the world, despite the fact that it's virtually indistinguishable from ordinary tap water (most people probably couldn't tell the difference any more than they could tell the difference between Coke and Pepsi).

Although water is taken for granted across much of the globe, in the developing world clean water is still a luxury. There are millions of cases of diarrhea and diphtheria every year, most of them brought on by drinking infected water. The United Nations has prioritized the goal of providing potable water to all the peoples of the world.

Standage doesn't make time for a detailed analysis of the contemporary world, but simply sketches the main points of contemporary politics: mostly significantly the huge inequality between the powerful and the powerless countries of the world.

Already, the absence of potable water across the planet has had enormous geopolitical effects. During the Six Day War of 1967, Israel occupied Sinai, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights. It's often thought that the true catalyst for this war was Syria's attempt to divert a water canal from the Jordan River in 1964. The Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon, argued that Syria's canal project diverted potable water from Israel—thus, Israel's occupation of Sinai and the West Bank were not merely political moves, but also attempts to regain drinking water for its citizens. Since the 60s, potable drinking water has become increasingly precious, prompting many to believe that the next important military clashes in the Middle East will be triggered by the need for drinkable water.

Whether or not one buys Standage and Sharon's argument, it's clear that the need for water is a vital one—without water, people can't live. In the future, we can imagine, thirst will catalyze plenty of long, bloody wars, especially if the United Nations fails in its stated goals of providing potable water to all the peoples of the world. In Standage's history of beverages, he has noted an overall trend towards equality and democracy, but in his vision of the future (a vision deeply affected by "democratic" drinks and societies like Coca-Cola/America) inequality is still rampant in the most basic necessity of life—water.

Although water has prompted some military conflicts, it can also cause hostile nations to work together for the common betterment of its citizens. For example, Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia cooperated to ensure its peoples' access to water from the Mekong River, in spite of the military clashes between these countries.

Standage isn't a cynic, and here he makes his most "political" point of the book—arguing that people need to come together to ensure that no matter our nationality, race, or ideology, we all have access to the basic necessity of potable water. His examples of such treaties in Southeast Asia are inspiring (if rare), and in many ways bring us back to the beginning of the book: when people came together to form agricultural societies and began the processes of civilization and invention.

Standage concludes by reiterating that ordinary drinks like **beer** and **Coke** "tell stories" about history. Although drinking a **coffee** or a glass of **wine** is an ordinary act, this act was made possible by the ingenuity of thousands of people across many centuries.

After twelve carefully-argued chapters, Standage's thesis now seems more plausible than it initially appeared (even if this epilogue on water is arguably the most interesting argument of all). No matter what one's views of certain aspects of history (like American capitalism or British imperialism) are, Standage has proven that certain drinks can be examined to tell the story of world history—albeit a condensed and Eurocentric one—because these beverages' trends of invention and popularity reflect, symbolize, and even affect much larger trends of history itself.

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