

# Bourbon Whiskey

A Short History of (nearly) Everything

**Jenny Hicks**  
CWE, CSS, CS, WSET 3

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## What is Bourbon Whiskey?

*What makes bourbon, bourbon?*

### Mash vs. Wort

It's a mash if the sugary liquid is left with the cooked grains for fermentation. It's a wort if it is drained off. Which is used depends on the laws for the whiskey being made and the style you're making. For example, bourbon is made from a mash; Scotch is made from a wort.

- For bourbon to be bourbon it must be:
  - Made in the United States.
  - Made from a mash bill that is at least 51% corn.
  - Distilled at 80% abv or less.
  - Stored in new, charred oak barrels at a proof of 125 or less.
  - Bottled at a minimum of 80 proof. (This is the same for any American whiskey.)

(Veach 8) (Minnick 13)

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## What's in a name?

### *The House of Bourbon*

Please note:  
Some sources claim Bourbon Whiskey was named for Bourbon County, KY or for Bourbon Street in New Orleans. However, for various reasons through my research, I have determined the explanation below to be the most likely.

### • The House of Bourbon

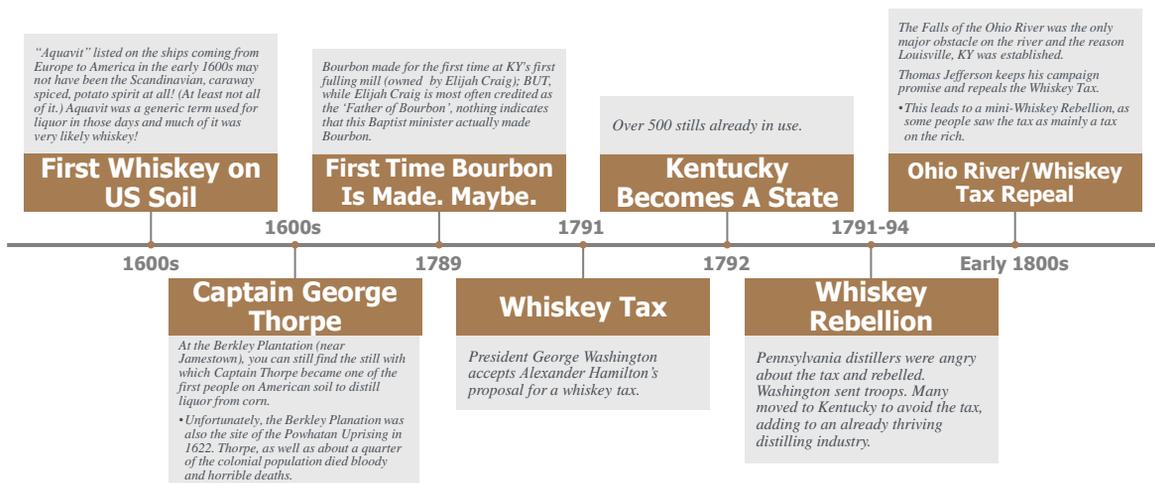
- With the birth of Louis, Duke of Bourbon in 1327, a dynasty was also born
  - Louis was the son of Robert, Count of Clermont and Beatrice of Burgundy (heiress to the lordship of Bourbon,)and grandson of King Louis IX.
- Kings and Queens of France, Italy, and Spain hailed from the House of Bourbon/Borbone/Borbón in the 13th-19th centuries.
- The word Bourbon became synonymous with quality.
  - Bourbon was added in front of sugar, coffee, cotton, etc. to indicate high quality.
  - Bourbon Whiskey and Bourbon Street are the famous Bourbons persisting into the 21st century.

House of Bourbon | Definition, History, Dynasty, Members, & Facts | Britannica: (Minnick 27)

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((Mitenbuler 13, 16, 23) (Minnick 13, 15, 31))

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## Elijah Craig

*The man. The myth. The reality.*

- The Man
  - Elijah Craig was a Baptist minister who owned Kentucky's first fulling mill.
    - *Fulling is the finishing step in the cloth-making process, in case you're wondering (I was!)*
- The Myth
  - April 30, 1789, the same day George Washington was sworn into office as the first President of the United States of America, Elijah Craig had a small fire in his mill and some of his barrels were burnt. The whiskey that was stored in those barrels became the first bourbon ever made.
- The Reality
  - It is possible that the first bourbon was made at Craig's mill, though it was almost certainly not made by Craig.
  - What started out in the early 1900s as an urban legend with some glimmer of truth, turned into a decade long marketing campaign (1958-68) by the Bourbon Institute.
  - In all likelihood, no one person invented bourbon; rather, there was a gradual progression toward this style of whiskey.
    - People experimented with toasting barrels more and more until they were charred.
    - Whiskey was being kept longer, thus exposing it to the charring for longer and allowing for more evaporation and concentrating it.

(Minnick 18)

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## The Whiskey Rebellion

*"Look, when Britain taxed our tea, we got frisky. Imagine what gon' happen when you try to tax our whiskey." (TJ; Cabinet Battle #1; Hamilton)*

- Was T.J. ever right!
  - Hamilton's attempt to tax the farmers and small distillers did not go well.
- Pennsylvania distillers refused to pay the tax.
  - Tax collectors faced the angry rebels and ended up tarred and feathered in some cases.
  - Following urging from Hamilton, Washington sent troops to enforce the tax.
    - The distillers either fought or moved to Kentucky to avoid the tax.
      - This added to Kentucky's already thriving distilling industry.
      - Kentucky's limestone rich water and grain supply made it a perfect place to make whiskey.
    - Of those arrested by troops during the rebellion, only two were convicted.
      - Both were later acquitted by Washington. He determined both were too mentally deficient to be expected to answer for their crimes.
- A promise to repeal the Whiskey Tax was central to Jefferson's presidential campaign platform.

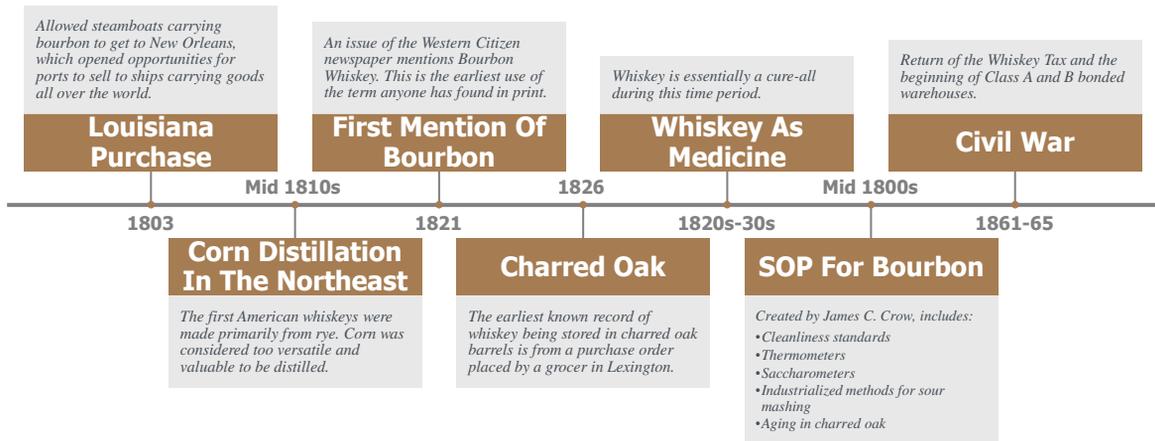
(Veach 12-14) (Minnick 15)

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# Bourbon Whiskey

## A Short History of (nearly) Everything

**Fun Fact:**  
The flatboats that were sent down the Ohio to New Orleans were not seaworthy and could not be sent back upstream. These boats were dismantled and put to other use. Many of the oldest shotgun houses still in New Orleans today were built with wood from these boats.



(Veach 33) (Minnick 19, 21, 33, 38, 41)

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# Rectification

## It says it's whiskey. But is it though?

- Rectification of whiskey was a huge problem in the mid-1800s.
  - Distillers sold barrels of whiskey to the wholesaler who would then bottle and sell it to retailers. However, before bottling, they would stretch the original product by adding any number of ingredients: water, prune juice, neutral spirits, tobacco spit, etc.
  - Books of recipes for imitation spirits entered the market.
    - One such book, *The Manufacture of Liquors, Wines, and Cordials, Without the Aid of Distillation: Also the Manufacture of Effervescing Beverages and Syrups, Vinegar, and Bitters, Prepared and Arranged Expressly for the Trade*, Dick & Fitzgerald, 1868) contains the following recipe for Bourbon Whiskey:

### BOURBON WHISKEY.

Rectified whiskey, thirty gallons; tincture of grains of paradise, one gallon; water, 9 gallons; mucilage of slippery elm bark, one half pint; acetic ether, three ounces; oil of wintergreen, fifteen drops dissolved in the ether. This whiskey has the color usual to all rectified whiskeys.

- Assayers began testing bourbon for purity, by request.

(Dick and Fitzgerald)

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# Civil War

## The return of the Whiskey Tax

- The IRS created two types of bonded warehouses.
  - Class A stored whiskey at a warehouse connected to the distillery.
  - Class B was designed for general storage, not at the distillery, and generally was managed by a merchant.
- Tax was \$2/gallon
  - About \$12 million per year was collected, but evasion was a huge problem.

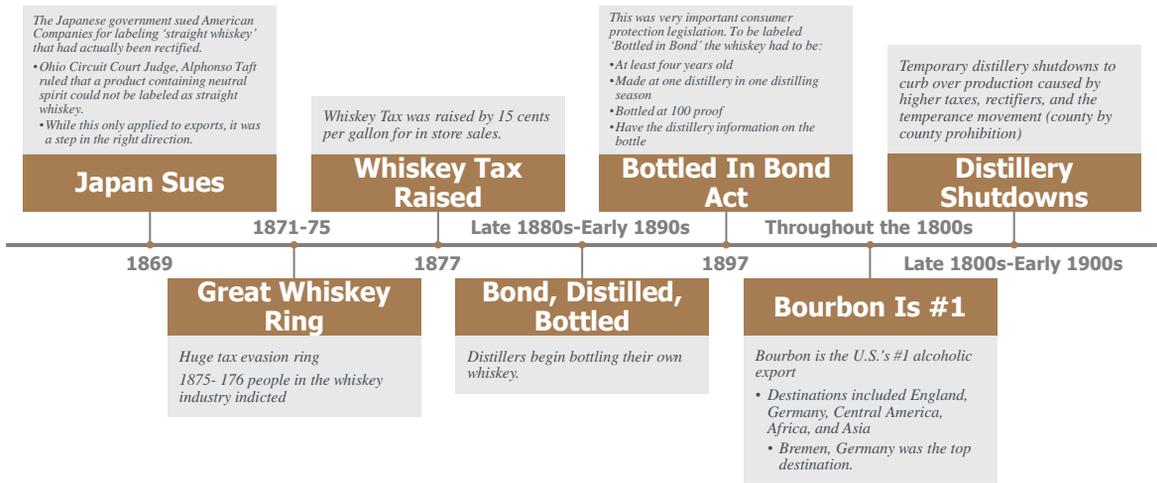
(Minnick 41)

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# Bourbon Whiskey

## A Short History of (nearly) Everything

**Distillery Fires**  
 Fires were a big problem in distilleries throughout the 1800s. The flammability of the alcohol and the barrels made them all the more likely and dangerous. Many lost their lives. Many more lost their livelihood. If there is a silver lining, it is that from all of this tragedy, came innovation and more advanced firefighting techniques.



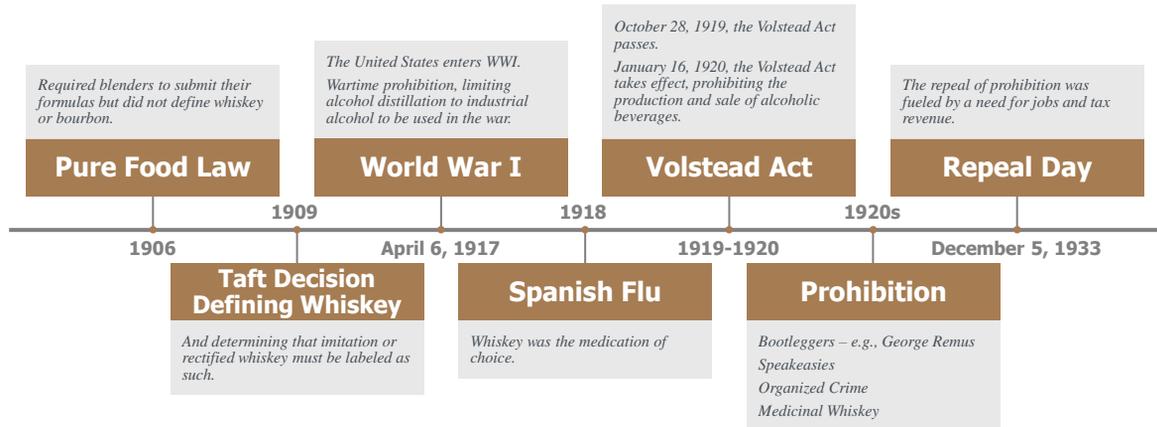
(Minnick 40, 45-52, 54, 59, 66)

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## Bourbon Whiskey

### *A Short History of (nearly) Everything*

**Counterfeit Whiskey**  
In the months before prohibition took effect, a surge of fake whiskey hit the market. This was usually a very dangerous combination of wood alcohol with coloring, sugar, and rye extract. At least 96 people died after drinking it.



(Mitenbuler 177) (Veach 80-81, 87) (Minnick 67, 72-74, 82, 84, 86-87, 90-100)

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## George Remus

### *The inspiration for Jay Gatsby?*

- Born in Germany in 1878, his family immigrated to the United States when he was five years old, settling in Chicago.
- Thinking big from the start, Remus bought the pharmacy he worked in as a young man and quickly expanded to additional stores.
- He attended law school but after practicing for some time, determined that bootlegging would be more profitable and potentially less corrupt than being a lawyer at the time.
- He relocated to Cincinnati and started Drobbatz Chemical Company in 1920.
  - Through the chemical company, Remus could legally purchase medical whiskey to sell to pharmacies. He then hijacked his own whiskey and re-routed it to the black market for greater profit.
  - After attaining some wealth, Remus started buying distilleries as well.
  - It is rumored that F. Scott Fitzgerald based the character of Jay Gatsby on George Remus after an encounter with him in a Louisville bar.
- When he was indicted in 1925 for violating the Volstead Act, he had acquired some \$40 million and had gained a reputation for being quite an entertainer.
- Remus served two years in federal prison.
  - Upon his release, he found that his wife had liquidated and hidden the vast majority of his assets and had filed for divorce.
  - He killed her as she was on her way to the courthouse to finalize the dissolution.
  - He was arrested and tried but found not guilty by reason of insanity.
- Remus lived the rest of his life humbly and passed away of natural causes in 1952.

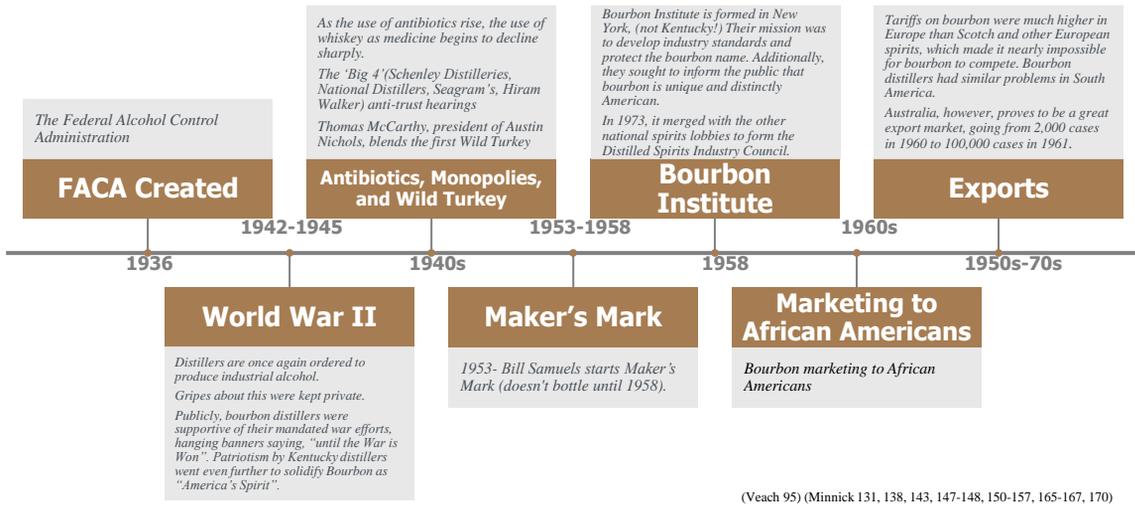
(Veach 87-88) (Mitenbuler 183-185)

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# Bourbon Whiskey

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**Blended to Straight and Back Again**  
 The lack of bourbon being made during World War II led to a lot of blends being produced. They were lower quality than Bottled in Bond, but distributors and distillers didn't have another option, as demand was high. This changed production and buying habits long-term. After repeal, only 10% of bourbons were blended; that number rose to 50% due to the WWII shortage, and today 80% of bourbon sold is blended.

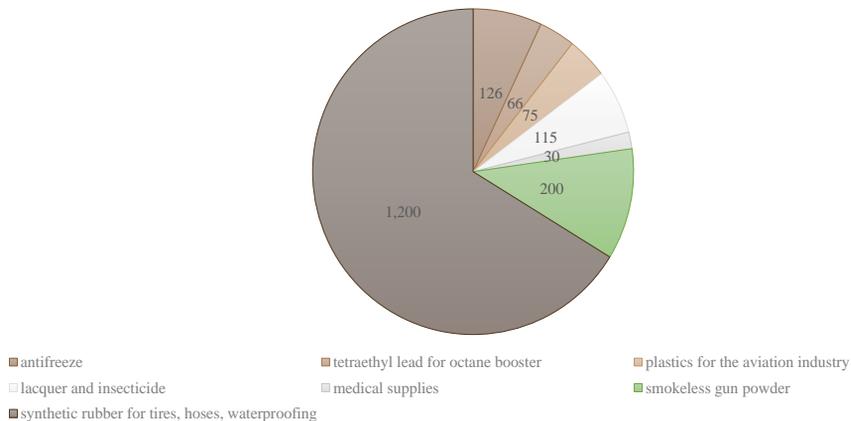


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# Industrial Alcohol

## Primary uses in World War II

Uses of Industrial Alcohol During World War II (In Millions of Gallons)



(Veach 101)

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## Maker's Mark

*Makes its Mark*

- 1958—Maker's Mark hits the market, selling for \$6 a bottle when most other bourbons were selling for \$2.
- Circa 1960—Maker's Mark sends cease and desist orders to competitors who copy their dripping, red wax seal.
- 1966—Ad Campaign with a 'you get what you pay for' message.



(Minnick 165-167)

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## Bourbon Whiskey

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(Minnick 170-171, 188, 197-198, 200, 215)

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## The Vodka Problem

*The unexpected rise of white spirits*

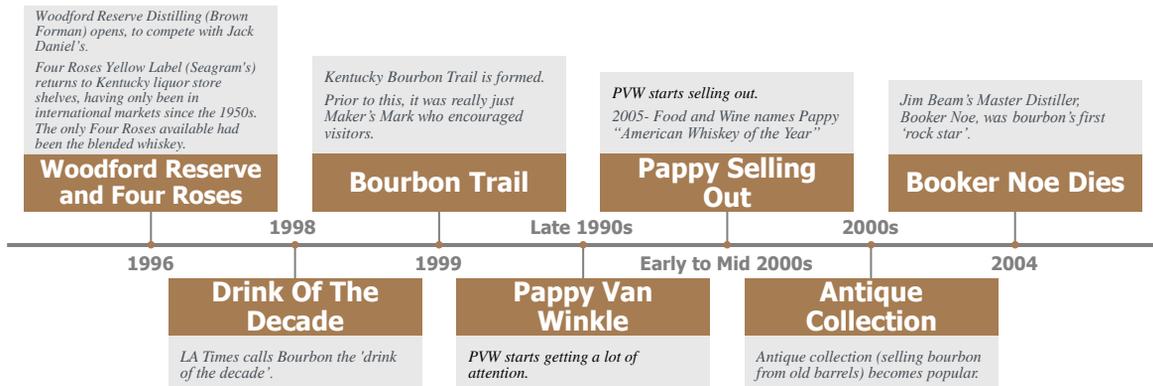
- In the early 1960s there was a sudden rise in popularity of white spirits
  - James Bond (martinis)
  - Younger drinkers wanted to drink something different from their parents
- Bourbon producers tried different ways to compete
  - Marketing suggesting mixing with O.J.
  - Making vodka
  - Making lighter colored bourbon
  - Removing all color from bourbon in a product known as Frost 8-80 (Brown-Forman)
    - Frost sold very well in test markets but mostly sat on shelves as customers struggled to understand what it was.
    - Brown-Forman collected the remaining bottles and buried them. Frost was forbidden to be talked about by their employees for years.
- In 1975, vodka surpasses bourbon as the best-selling spirit in the U.S.
- By 1984, there were nearly 400 vodkas on the market; and this was before all of the flavored vodkas.

(Minnick 176-187)

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(Minnick 202, 205, 208, 217, 218)

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(Minnick 215, 217, 221-225, 229)

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## Maker's Mark Lowers Proof

*Everyone loses their mind*

- Maker's Mark lowers proof in 2013, from 90 to 84 and faces a huge backlash from customers.
- Other bourbons had done this without being as open about it.
- Rob Samuels said that was the only way to meet demand without lowering the age or increasing the price. Bill Samuels Jr. came to his son's defense, saying that they did not anticipate the spike in demand.
- Customers were not pacified, and Maker's Mark went back to 90 proof and released an ad: "We listened".

(Minnick 223)

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(Minnick 230-231, 234)

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**Questions?**

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