WN *This issue*

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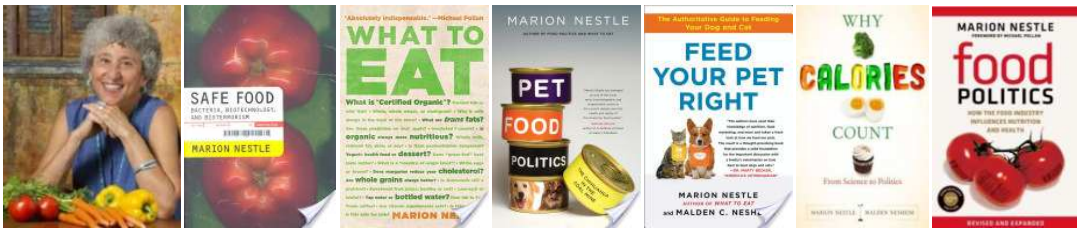
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Editorial note. Every month 'This issue' will cover two types of theme. One type is what is in the month's *WN*. The other type is a general topic arising from what's in the contributions of the month that we think deserves attention. Hence 'this issue', which might we suppose have been called 'these issues'. This month we start with our cover superstar Marion Nestle. Then we turn to the misleading use of words and terms in our field, featured in our 'What do you think?' column this month. Then arising from the writers we feature between March and June this year, we note that *The New York Times* has become our 'must-read', the world's leading newspaper in the field of public health nutrition. Then we boast about all our new contributors.

Marion Nestle
Food is a political issue

Access WN this month's Marion Nestle Food Politics extract here



Marion Nestle and six books: Food Politics (2002), Safe Food (2003), What to Eat (2007), Pet Food Politics (2008), Feed Your Pet Right (2010), Why Calories Count* (2012); plus the 10th year Food Politics (2013) * with Malden Nesheim*

This is the month of *Food Politics:* 1 May is publication of the tenth anniversary edition of Marion Nestle's penetrating, persuasive, charming analysis, exposing the impact of Big Food on the US food system and that nation's health and well-being. Details of how to order the book are on Marion's website, whose twitter facility, voted one of the 100 best in the world, now is 100,000 strong. Reach it and her on *fhttp://www.foodpolitics.com /food-politics-how-the-food-industry-influences-nutrition-and-health/.*

So this month Marion is the *WN* cover star. Our main feature is homage to her, and includes her new introduction and extracts from the new final chapter.

What Food Politics is all about

The US is the land of individualism and 'free choice'. But, says Marion: 'I wrote Food Politics to refocus attention on the environmental – that is, the social, commercial, and institutional – influences on food choice, rather than on the personal. If poor food choices were only a matter of personal responsibility, then public health efforts would have to le focus on educating people to eat better. But if the food environment makes it difficult to eat healthfully, public health must focus on political strategies to change society to make healthful choices the easier choices.

'Today's food movement aims to transform the environment of food choice so as to promote health, protect the environment and support personal responsibility for food choice with collective social responsibility for making healthful choices easier. The effects of the food movement can be seen in the removal of junk foods from schools, and the introduction of fresh fruits and vegetables into inner city areas. They also can be seen in attempts to tax and restrict the size of sodas, remove toys from fast food meals for children, and permit marketing only of foods that meet defined nutritional standards.

'The success of the movement can be measured by the intensity of pushback by the food and beverage industry. Its trade associations are working overtime to deny responsibility for obesity, undermine credibility of the science linking their products to poor health, attack critics, continue to market to young children, fight soda taxes, and lobby behind the scenes to make sure that no local, state, or federal agency imposes regulations that might impede sales. Food companies unable to increase sales in the US have moved marketing campaigns to Asia, Africa, and Latin America, with predictable effects on the bodyweights and health of their populations.

Despite – or perhaps because of – this pushback, now is a thrilling time to be an advocate for better food and nutrition, for the health of children, and for greater corporate accountability… Plenty of food issues are worth working on, and plenty of groups are working on them. Join them. Eating more healthfully, and encouraging others to do so, can improve lives and is thoroughly consistent with the best practices of democratic societies'.

Marion is unique. A very senior academic who has directed a big university department with special attention to food and cooking, with many years of direct experience of working for the US government and as a UN advisor, she is with Walter Willett the leading formally trained public health nutrition activist in the US, and with immense international credibility. She is also direct and pleasant, and has all the natural art and trained skill that long-experienced journalists may envy.

Terminology
Watch our language!

Access WN this month's Geoffrey Cannon column here

Here is a taster of the 'What do you think?' column this month. 'George Orwell was not the first writer to notice how words and phrases are used deceptively. Take an example that affects us all: 'the free market'. That sounds good. "Freedom" is not a word that is ever likely to be defined negatively, and "market" suggests a bustling collection of stalls crowded with eager people buying and selling fresh produce'.
]





Left: 'The free market' is an odd name for a political and economic ideology whose practice involves global child labour, as here in Andhra Pradesh, India. Right: 'Hunter-gatherer'. Are we really sure that the palaeolithic diet humans are evolved with was mainly hunted by men, rather than gathered by women?

'But what "the free market" actually refers to is a political and economic system in which regulation of business is minimal or absent. The freedom is for those who are thus best able to increase their wealth and power. "The free market" is in fact, unrestrained capitalism, of the type that drives prices down and profits up by use of child labour in impoverished countries' – as illustrated in the picture above, left.

The picture on the right illustrates 'the view of feminist archaeologists and anthropologists that the term 'hunter-gatherer', implying primacy for men and to meat, is wrong. They propose, based on good and consistent evidence from middens and other sources, that many tens of thousands of years ago it was the women who did the work collecting plants, and animal food from small game, insects and so on.

In other words, the palaeolithic culture was not hunter-gatherer, it was gatherer-hunter, and the food system was plant-based except at times of locust gluts. And the men? Maybe as always: the primaeval equivalent of playing cards, arguing politics and running off with other men's wives, occasionally pausing to spear a decrepit mastodon that staggered past the cave entrance and then singing songs about their heroism.



Left: 'Developing country' does not hit the spot, used for China with its 4000 years of continuous civilisation, as exemplified here on Hangzhou's West Lake

As a third example, these days 'developing' and 'developed' country tends at last to be set aside, in favour of 'low/middle/high income country'. A recent visit to Hangzhou in China (above) is a reminder of the absurd insult of 'developing' country. Read more in 'As I see you' – the link is above.

Food and nutrition movement
The changed *Times*

Access August 2002 New York Times Gary Taubes on 'big fat lies' here
Access May 2010 New York Times Michael Moss on salt here
Access September 2011 New York Times Mark Bittman on junk food here
Access March 2013 WN Geoffrey Cannon on Michael Moss here
Access April 2013 New York Times Mark Bittman on Moss and Warner here
Access this month's WN Michael Pollan appraisal here



Nutrition writers in a must-read New York Times: Jane Brody, Marion Burros, Gary Taubes, Michael Pollan, Michael Moss, Mark Bittman, Melanie Warner

Tipping point? Paradigm shift? Big Food continues to penetrate into the food systems of the global South. But the corporations are losing the media wars. As Michael Pollan

himself states in *our second appraisal of his work* this month, there now are sure signs, at least in the USA, that the newer leaders of the food and nutrition movement have seized the high ground, ethically and intellectually, and also in media coverage. Like Marion Nestle above, he writes about the US food movement. He says:

'The food movement's strongest claim on public attention today is the fact that the American diet of highly processed food laced with added fats and sugars is responsible for the epidemic of chronic diseases that threatens to bankrupt the health care system… The health care crisis probably cannot be addressed without addressing the catastrophe of the American diet, and the fact that diet is the direct (even if unintended) result of the way that our agriculture and food industries have been organized'.

Our journal

This food and nutrition movement also has its journal: *The New York Times*, with its leading writers, pictured above. Throughout the 1980s *The Nutrition Book*, written by Jane Brody (left, above), based on her *NYT* columns on delicious and healthy food and healthy living as from 1976, kept up with the latest mainstream progressive thinking on nutrition (1) As from the early 1980s the gastronome Marion Burros (second from left) joined the *NYT* staff and over the years became the second veteran reporter and commentator on good food with health in mind. The power of this arrangement was because of the position of the *NYT* itself as the leading serious newspaper in the US, and because of the tradition of tie-ins involving mutual publicity with leading book publishers, which in the US are mostly based in New York City.

In the 1990s and a little later, the *NYT*'s coverage of food, nutrition and health became confused, and a number of prominent features took a rather aggressive line in tune with that of food manufacturers. The game began to change with publication in 2002 of Gary Taubes's blockbuster *NYT* magazine cover feature 'What if it's all been a big fat lie?' (2). This typified the *NYT*'s use of its muscle. Gary Taubes, a distinguished science writer (third from left above) was given resources and time to do original research, to interview key scientists, to write a feature which as published weighed in at 7800 words, and to gather enough source material for a book.

In another way the feature (access it above), was a one-off. As indicated by its title, it is a brutal attack on what is now generally accepted nutrition science and dietary policy. On obesity, it claims that the best science supports the intensely controversial very low carbohydrate dieting regime popularised by Robert Atkins (3). The publicity for the feature, amplified by the electronic and print coverage a leading media outlet can achieve in New York City, kick-started the 'no-carb' dieting craze throughout the US and also internationally, all over again. The leading New York publisher Knopf then gave Gary Taubes a $US 650,000 advance to write a 600 page book, published in 2007 (4).

Michael Pollan, Michael Moss, Mark Bittman and now also Melanie Warner (from the left, the others pictured above), all *New York Times* journalists and authors of books deriving from their *NYT* contributions, are more collegiate. They admire and support one another. *WN* ran an extract from Michael Pollan's new book *Cooked* (5) last month. It is now a best-seller. We featured Michael Moss's book *Salt Sugar Fat* (6), the fruit of three years' research, in our March issue. It is now a best-seller. (Access this, and also Michael Moss on salt, above).

Mark Bittman, a *NYT* columnist since 1997, author of best-selling books on simple cooking, now incorporates the politics of industry, food and nutrition into brilliantly written columns. These include a recent enthusiastic review of Michael Moss, and a rave review of *NYT* journalist Melanie Warner's new book *Pandora's Lunchbox*. (Access this and also his piece on the cost of junk food, above). Melanie Warner's book, which like *Salt Sugar Fat* draws on and acknowledges the work of 'The Food System' project regularly published in *World Nutrition*, will be featured in *WN* next month.

Push – and push-back

Overall the credit for this massive push for freshly prepared meals and dishes and healthy food generally, and what amounts to a concerted attack on the perpetrators of ultra-processed products, goes to the *New York Times* editors. They have discovered that it pays to support writers and to put major resources into coverage of food, nutrition and health which emphasises the colossal impact of the nature and quality of food systems and supplies on human health and welfare. Scores of features by the writers mentioned here are fully available on the internet, and the *NYT* cleverly allows ten downloads a month, five of which can be downloaded as shown above.

'Big Food has gone very quiet lately', one of the *NYT* writers pictured above, said to us as we wrote this editorial. When it comes, as it will we will report the push-back from the ultra-processed product manufacturers and their public affairs agencies.

References

1 Brody J. *Jane Brody's Nutrition Book*. New York: Norton, 1981. [Many updated editions since then]

2 Taubes G. What if it's all been a big fat lie? *New York Times Magazine,* 7 July 2002. *Access pdf here*

3 Atkins R. *Dr Atkins' New Diet Revolution*. New York: Avon paperback 1999.

4 Taubes G. *Good Calories Bad Calories. Challenging the Conventional Wisdom on Diet, Weight Control, and Disease*. New York: Knopf, 2007.

5 Pollan M. *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation.* New York: Penguin, 2013. *Access this month's appraisal of Michael Pollan here*

5 Moss M. *Salt Sugar Fat. How the Food Giants Hooked Us*. New York: Random House, 2013. *Access WN March commentary on the book here*

World Nutrition
Our contributors

Access WN this month's Michael Pollan appraisal here



Top row: Joan Gussow, Fred Kirschenmann, Simon Schama, Ricardo Uauy Marion Nestle, Barry Popkin, Geoffrey Cannon, Carlos Monteiro, last month. Next row: Simon Schama, Todd Dawson, Alice Waters, Christopher Gardner Boyd Swinburn, Francine Lima, Isabela Sattamini, Michael Pollan, this month

This month the second appraisal of Michael Pollan's work features eight contributors, five of whom are new to WN. Last month three of our eight contributors are new. We want to let you know this! (Now please access the appraisal, above).

The editors

Status

This issue is reviewed by members of the editorial team. Readers may make use of the material here if acknowledgement is given to the Association, and *WN* is cited. Please cite as: Anon. Marion Nestle. Food is a political issue, and other items. [This issue]. *World Nutrition*, May 2013, **4**,5, 211-217. Obtainable at www.wphna.org. All contributions to *World Nutrition* are the responsibility of their authors. They should not be taken to be the view or policy of the World Public Health Nutrition Association (the Association) or of any of its affiliated or associated bodies, unless this is explicitly stated.

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