

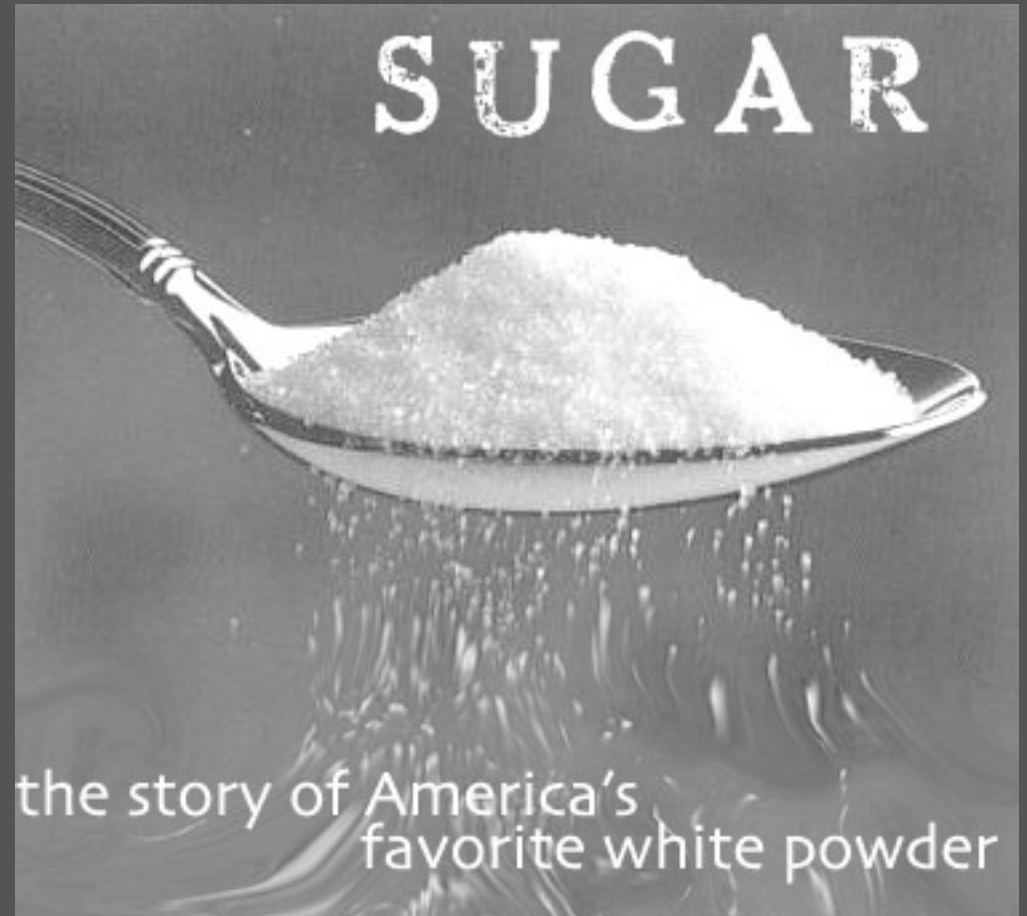
TIPS FOR KICKING SUGAR ☼ Eat five or six protein-rich meals a day to balance your blood sugar and keep your energy up ☼ Organic fruit! ☼ Chew on a cinnamon stick, or if you have money, the fancy cinnamon tea tree toothpicks you can find at natural foods stores ☼ Use spices like coriander, nutmeg, ginger, cardamom, and natural vanilla extracts to flavor and sweeten your cooking ☼ If you're prone to a sweet breakfast, try toast—toasting converts some starches to sugars—and add a dab of butter and sprinkle it with cinnamon.



(1) Gittleman, Ann Louise. *Get the Sugar Out: 501 Simple Ways to Cut the Sugar Out of Any Diet*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1996, p. 36. (2) Macinnis, Peter. *Bittersweet: The Story of Sugar*. Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2002, p. 2. (3) Duffy, William. *Sugar Blues*. NY: Warner Books, 1975, p. 32. (4) Ibid, p. 35. (5) Wilkinson, Alec. *Big Sugar*. New York: Knopf, 1989, p. 3. (6) Duffy, 36. (7) As quoted on www.globalexchange.org. (8) Engler, Mark. "Farming the Everglades", reprinted at <http://www.democracyuprising.com/articles/2003/sugar.php>. (9) Ibid. (10) Statistic according to the General Accounting Office, as reported by Citizens Against Government Waste: http://www.cagw.org/site/PageServer?pagename=policy_Sugar_Subsidies. (11) as reported by Sarah Bosely, "Sugar industry threatens to scupper WHO," in *The Guardian*, 21 April 2003. (12) Duffy, 137. (13) Gittleman, xxiv. (14) DesMaisons, Kathleen. *The Sugar Addict's Total Recovery Program*. New York: Ballantine, 2000, p. 25. (15) Ibid, p. 27. (16) Gittleman, 13.

* another work of Literature // 2005 * www.createdestroyenjoy.net *

Granola, which has a reputation for healthiness, is often super-sweetened—make your own muesli with rolled oats, unsweetened puffed cereals, dried fruit, seeds, and nuts ☼ My personal weakness is ice cream, but there's a version of Soy Delicious frozen dessert that's fruit sweetened... ☼ For chocolate cravings, mix some unsweetened cocoa powder in a saucepan over low heat with milk or rice milk and a little bit of honey: hot chocolate. ☼ Get plain yogurt and add fruit to it yourself, which tastes a lot better anyway.



The average American consumes 160 lbs. of sugar per year. How much sugar do you eat? It will take a few minutes of peering at the labels of your food to find this out, because nearly everything you buy in a supermarket has this stuff added to it. Even "healthy" things are laden with sugar. A loaf of whole-grain bread, a can of beans, a cup of yogurt... I often wander the fluorescent-lit floors of the grocery store, checking on the hummus with high fructose corn syrup and the organic peas with evaporated cane juice. Sugar consumption has risen 1500 percent in the last two hundred years (faster, of course, than our physical evolution can keep up with).¹ Just why is all our food laden with this substance? What effects might it have—on our bodies, our minds, the land, and our society?

There's a story to be told here, and it starts in New Guinea, 9000 years ago, when humans first began harvesting cane on the slopes of fertile volcanoes. The use of sugar then spread across Indonesia and India, though for many thousands of years it wasn't widespread—few scriptures from around the world make much mention of sugarcane, save for Buddha, who warns against seeking *gur*—sugar—when one is not sick.² Cane really set its roots down, though, in the “New World” during the time of the Conquistadors. Columbus suggested transporting West Indian natives to work in the Spanish cane plantations;³ Portuguese criminals were shipped to Brazil to grow sugarcane; and during the 1500s, the English and Dutch got in on the action.

This is where America's bloody involvement with sugar begins. “Although some American historians like to argue that it was the British tax on tea that precipitated the War of Independence, others point to the Molasses Act of 1733, which levied a heavy tax on sugar and molasses coming from anywhere except the British sugar islands in the Caribbean,” writes William Duffy. His book *Sugar Blues* explains how this Molasses Act posed a grave threat to the colonial trade cycle and America's thirst for rum.⁴ A trade triangle had developed between America, Europe, and Africa involving rum, molasses, and slavery. The trafficking of sugar was one of the

things the industrial era, and our independent American Empire today, was built upon.

Today, harvesting cane is still backbreaking work, often done by hand in steamy, sticky tropical climes. The hands are usually black or brown, and as in the past, they are often the hands of people who have little other choice. Rather than attempt to explore the conditions of cane fields around the world, I would like

to share a little bit about sugar in America—and for that, we must look to Florida, which grows over half the nation's sugarcane.

What is life like in the Florida fields? To understand this, we must look at the people and their conditions. “The most perilous work in America is the harvest by hand of sugar cane in south Florida,” asserts Alec Wilkinson in his 1989 study of sugar cane harvesting.⁵

You get cut, you wrench your back, you live in concrete barracks and get paid a complicated “task rate” based on how many rows of cane you can cut; you're given a few minutes break to wolf down rice, and keep yourself going with a sweet brew of Guinness and egg nog. At least, that's how it was ten years ago. From 1939 to the mid-1990s, this work was done by people from Jamaica, Barbados, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, and other West Indian countries, here through the H-2 temporary visa program. But despite the constant threat of deportation, many of these workers managed to sue for higher



Here's a brief run-down on sweeteners. The synthetic ones are pretty sketchy—the use of aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal, Sweet n' Low) can increase sugar cravings; saccharin is a cocarcinogenic petroleum derivative; mannitol, sorbitol, xylitol, and hydrogen starch hydrolysate are classified as sugar alcohols and are laxatives that can cause gastrointestinal bloating, cramps, diarrhea.¹⁶ Those are the ones you'll find in low-carb Atkins-era food and in lots of things that are advertised as sugar-free. Organic evaporated cane juice and the “natural” cane sweeteners are better than white refined sugar, and Sucanat—dehydrated cane-juice crystals—contains the nutrients that naturally occur in sugarcane. However, this doesn't avoid all the problems with the sugar cane industry (granted, every modern industry has its problems—but a lot of evaporated cane juice products are manufactured by Florida Crystals, which is owned by the Fanjul family, one of the powerful sugar barons*). Beware of brown sugar, which is often white sugar with molasses added. If you're going to go with molasses (which is the residue after the sugar crystals are removed), this is another degree better because it has nutrients, but go with organic blackstrap molasses, which is the best nutritionally.

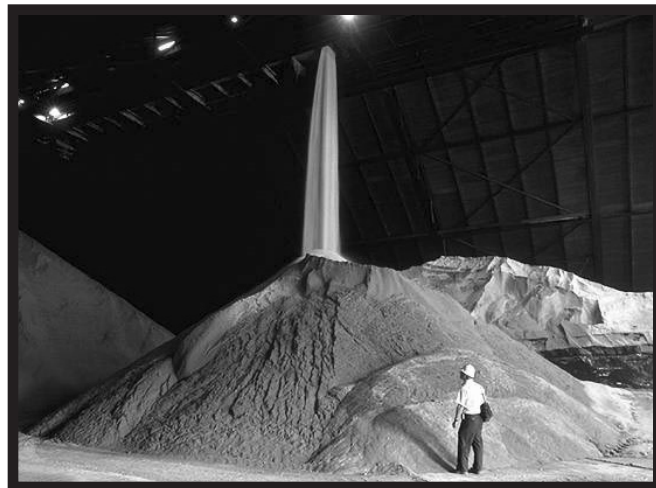
Maple syrup, honey, fruit juice, date, brown rice syrup, agave nectar, and stevia are my natural sweeteners of choice. Maple syrup is potent, and it has potassium and calcium. Honey doesn't upset your body's balance as much as sugar, and baked goods made with honey stay fresher longer. Plus, eating local honey helps with pollen allergies. You can buy granulated date sugar—pulverized dates—to use in baking. In lots of recipes, you can also use applesauce, banana, or mashed sweet potatoes. And then there's stevia, a herb from the Chrysanthemum family that's approved by the FDA as a dietary supplement—but not for use in foods. (Some people, myself included, find this pretty dodgy, given the power of the sugar industry in Washington). It has been used in South America for centuries, and is widely used in Japan without any ill effects. Stevia is wonderful because it's DIY—you can grow it yourself, unlike most sweeteners. The extract is hundreds of times sweeter than sugar, and to use it, you can dissolve a teaspoon of stevia in a couple of tablespoons of water. This will replace a cup of sugar.

Even with these substitutions, the habit may be hard to break. But once you're off sugar for a couple weeks or months, it's unlikely that you'll even want to go back to eating it... foods with added sugar will probably seem acridly sweet. At first, you may find yourself eating a remarkable number of dates, or going through a lot of honey, which some people will take nutritional issues with, too... but this is beyond your own nutrition and health. It's about the land, too, and the people that work the land / it's about this whole modern system we've created; a systemic problem. When we can start to see how spooning some sugar into our coffee or tea affects people the world round, we're a step closer to repairing some of the damage to our beautiful planet. The End.

* A twenty-minute call from Alfonso Fanjul interrupted a tryst between Clinton and Monica Lewinsky in 1996, according to the Starr report. Fanjul was calling to complain that Gore wanted to tax sugar to pay for Everglades cleanup; after the call, the proposed tax was nixed.

So you've got this shady industry that's affecting our government, the land, and the impoverished people who work for it. But what about your body? It's clear that the scientific evidence about what sugar does to you is politically charged—and therefore potentially slanted. It's common knowledge, now, that sugar causes tooth decay, as any second-grader who's ever sat in science class and watched a cup of coca-cola devour an eggshell knows. Then there's obesity: refined sugar gives you empty calories, which you have to eliminate. Not only does sugar not give you anything, it debilitates your body. "Sugar is worse than nothing because it drains and leeches the body of precious vitamins and minerals through the demand its digestion, detoxification, and elimination make upon one's entire system," explains William Duffy.¹² Similarly, nutritionist Ann Louise Gittleman notes, "Important nutrients such as chromium, manganese, cobalt, copper, zinc, and magnesium are stripped away in sugar refining, and our bodies actually have to use their own mineral reserves just to digest it." Then there's diseases—sugar suppresses your immune system, it may play a role in heart disease, it feeds cancer cells and can accelerate tumor growth,¹³ and it definitely is a culprit in diabetes—a leading cause of death that didn't even exist before the high consumption of sugar.

Sugar's rough on both body and mind. It's been found that sugar influences moods and emotions. "Sugar, like heroin, alcohol, and morphine, activates beta-endorphin," writes Kathleen DesMaisons, who explains that "if you have low levels of beta-endorphin, you can feel lonely and disenfranchised from the world"; for sugar-sensitive people, sugar can play a role in self-esteem, self-confidence, and shyness.¹⁴ Scientists have also found that in testing with sugar-sensitive mice, the "isolation distress" of baby mice taken from their mothers was lessened by sugar,¹⁵ giving new meaning to the term "comfort food." (An adulterant that works with your sense of alienation: the perfect capitalist commodity?) If you find yourself craving this food additive—which is, I want to point out, an *additive* that's been insidiously slipped into our foods for decades now, at the command of a powerful industry with a bloody history—if you find that you need it to feel better, you just might have a problem.



What is to be done?

Given everything mentioned thus far, I ask you: do you really want this stuff in your body all the time? Probably not, but like any white powder, it's not easy to kick, and this one is especially difficult to get off because it's added to nearly everything. You really have to shift your diet and even your lifestyle to get off it. But there are plenty of alternatives out there for you to explore—so many that they might seem confusing.

Early Fair Trade

People had some awareness of the brutal nature of this trade. Subversive Quakers in Britain began cultivating sugar beets, "as an antislavery gesture," but the sugar industry demanded that these were uprooted—so the beets got fed to the cows. The British East India company, though, tried using the moral pitch in its advertising: one of their slogans was, "East India Sugar not made by slaves"—"A family that uses five pounds of sugar per week will, by using East India instead of West India for 21 months, prevent the Slavery or Murder of one Fellow Creature. Eight such families in 19 1/2 years will prevent the slavery or murder of 100."⁶

Drowning in Sugar: The Great Molasses Flood

Before Prohibition was scheduled to go into effect, people were in a mad rush to import molasses to make their last batches of rum. On January 15, 1919, an overfilled storage tank of molasses at Purity Distilling burst above the city of Boston—launching a thirty-foot wave of molasses that surged through the city at 35 miles per hour. The 2.3 million gallons of molasses knocked over a fire station, crumpled an elevated train support, and killed twenty-one people. Purity's parent company, United States Industrial Alcohol Co., tried to blame the exploding tank on neighborhood Italian anarchists, but it didn't work.

CAFTA

As you may or may not know, there's a legislative battle on this summer over CAFTA: the Central American Free Trade Agreement. Here, Big Sugar and antiglobalization activists are unlikely bedfellows—for completely opposite reasons, of course. Activists contend that "if passed, the Central American Free Trade Agreement would undermine workers rights, drive countless family farmers off their land, and expose communities throughout Central America and the U.S. to privatization of essential public services like water, electricity, health care and education."⁷ It would promote sweatshops and expand corporate power. The sugar industry is fiercely lobbying against CAFTA because Central Americans can grow sugar for cheaper under less stringent conditions (cheaper labor, less environmental regulations, etc.). Even though sugar growers still get special concessions under CAFTA, it will drive US sugar prices down. Check out www.stopcafta.org to see what you can do to fight CAFTA.

wages— it worked out that they were only getting about 3.70 an hour—and now, most harvesting is mechanized or done by illegal immigrants. The H-2 program still exists today, but it is cheaper and less of a hassle for farmers to employ illegal labor. So today, the people who work in the fields are from Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. Some still live in leftover concrete encampments near the fields; they sit on the stoop, or spend the evenings fishing in the irrigation canals. Everything there is flat and still, parsed by these canals and levees.... splotches of bright blue fertilizer stain the gravel roads... even early morning hangs heavy and orange, under the whine of the crop duster... There are towns, too, a few. There is Clewiston, where the headquarters of U.S. Sugar is; it is the town with a Wal-Mart. There is South Bay, and Belle Glade, which is like an inner-city ghetto without a city; ten percent of the housing lacks plumbing and kitchen facilities and a third of the people live beneath the “poverty line”... Belle Glade where her soil is her fortune, where the culture and poverty come from the soil and the sugar... the kind of landscape that sugar produces.*

I mention these places because to understand what life is like here, we must also understand the history of this land and what’s been done to it. It’s hard to wrap a mind around. I can say what happened—that an entire landscape was completely altered, that no unmediated space remains, save for the southern tip which is a national park— but it’s hard to convey what this looks or feels like. “Before developers set out to drain, channel, and control the famous wetlands, the bio-region consisted of a unique 6,000-year-old “river of grass” that stretched 100 miles from Lake Okeechobee to the Florida Bay, Mark Engler describes in the *New Internationalist*. He explains how during the 1940s, private interests and the Army Corps of Engineers drained the land, “reclaiming” it so it could be put to agricultural use with a complex system of levees and canals:

The area now preserved as Everglades National Park is in fact only a dying remnant of the complete ecosystem. To its north is a large swath of land divided into Water Conservation Areas, which keep coastal residents of Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach supplied with drinking water and protected from natural flooding ... Further North, the land closest to Lake Okeechobee is now known as the Everglades Agricultural Area.

It is a massive farm, containing 700,000 acres used in the production of sugar cane.

Sugar cane is not easy on the land. There’s the fact that the land was supposed to be a swamp to begin with (habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity), but there’s also the pollution from phosphorus and other fertilizers; there’s the effluent from the refining process; there’s the fact that it’s a water-intensive crop that uses valuable fresh water. We’ve heard a lot in the past decade about wetland restoration, but you can guess how that may be going under the governance of the lesser Bush. “In 1998, at the same time cane cutters were pursuing the lawsuits that would result in the mechanization of the sugar harvest, environmentalists also took legal action. That year, the U.S.

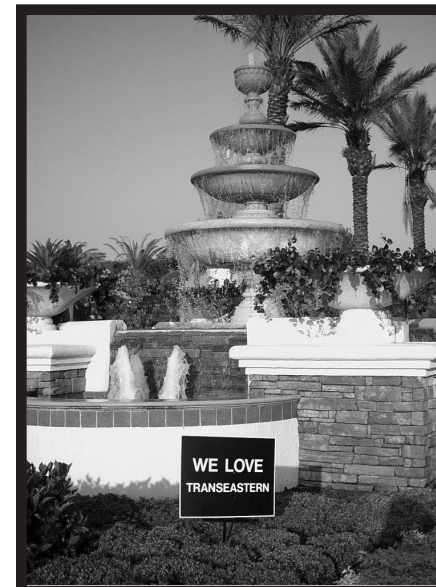
*Belle Glade where 20 percent of the ballots from the 2000 election were discounted; Belle Glade where two years ago a black man, who happened to be dating a white police officer’s daughter, allegedly managed to commit “suicide” and hang himself from a tree by his own T-shirt...

Attorney in Miami sued Florida for failure to enforce clean water regulations. Big Sugar held up the challenge in court for years ... Under the 1994 Everglades Forever Act the federal government and the taxpayers of Florida will ultimately put out \$8 billion to clean up the wetlands, while polluters will pay a pittance. The law caps sugar industry payments towards water filtration systems at \$320 million.”⁹ And, as Engler also reports, “In the most recent chapter of the dispute, Florida Governor Jeb Bush signed a state law in May [2003] that pushes back the deadline for reducing pollution levels to 2016. Under the new law, the state will wait 13 years before fully enforcing a 10 ppb phosphorus standard that was established in the late 1990s.”

The sugar industry receives breaks from the government in many areas—not just pollution. For one, thanks to government subsidies, taxpayers shell out about 3 billion dollars a year in the form of higher prices for foods containing sugar (1.9 billion) and for sugar purchased for government feeding programs (90 million).¹⁰ Obviously, this is a powerful industry which has lots of lobbying power. This power was demonstrated in 2003, when a report commissioned by the World Health Organization declared that sugar should not account for more than 10% of a person’s diet. The sugar industry insisted that 25% of a healthy diet could safely consist of sugar. I repeat: *twenty-five percent of your diet*. Inflamed, the sugar industry ordered the report withdrawn—and threatened to lobby Congress to cut WHO funding. “Taxpayers’ dollars should not be used to support misguided, non-science-based reports which do not add to the health and well-being of Americans, much less the rest of the world,” the industry wrote, adding: “If necessary we will promote and encourage new laws which require future WHO funding to be provided only if the organisation accepts that all reports must be supported by the preponderance of science.”¹¹ Eight months later, the Department of Health and Human Services obediently sent a letter to the WHO objecting to some of the findings and recommendations in the report.

...the real threat?

Big Sugar argues, with some validity, that it’s not the real threat to the Glades anymore. That honor goes to suburbia, which is moving from the coasts inland at an incredible rate. Bordering the cane fields are vast wastelands of suburban homes and high-end gated communities. There’s also a lot of land devoted to rock mining, and the sugar companies are getting in on both these games. Florida Crystals is proposing to develop 14,500 acres of its cane fields, and U.S. Sugar is turning 4,000 acres into a rock mine. If CAFTA passes, and the sugar growers lose more money, suburbia begins to look even more profitable.



left— one of many gated “communities” in South Florida