

### Appetite for America

Before Howard Johnson built a quick-serve empire along America's highways, Fred Harvey did so along its railways, reports Jonathan Eig in a *Wall Street Journal* review of *Appetite for America*, by Stephen Fried (3/20/10).

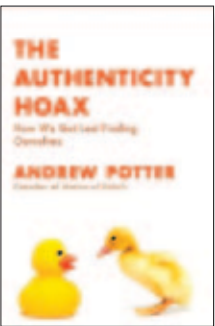


In fact, “beginning in the 1870s,” Fred Harvey not only built the first national restaurant chain, but also “the first national chain of hotels and the first chain of bookstores.” In other words, as Stephen Fried writes, Fred Harvey created “the first national chain of anything.”

It was a brand built not only on his name—Fred Harvey—but also “his own personal standards of excellence... Fred was certain it was possible to serve the finest cuisine imaginable along the train tracks in the middle of nowhere,” Stephen writes.

He imagined it possible for a traveler to stop and enjoy a decent meal, served “in time to get him back on the train before it pulled out of the station.”

The Fred Harvey franchise grew to “65 restaurants and lunch counters, 60 dining cars and a dozen large Harvey-owned hotels.” It survived “through three generations of family management,” before being done in by the rise of the automobile, and Howard Johnson, in the 1930s and '40s.



### The Authenticity Hoax

Andrew Potter, author of *The Authenticity Hoax*, thinks that consumer interest in organic foods is really more about self-image than healthy living, reports Paul Beston in the *Wall Street Journal* (4/13/10).

Same thing with local food—Andrew thinks that's not really about authenticity or protecting the environment but rather “a status-seeking game.” That sort of search for authenticity, he says is “a positional good, which is valuable precisely because not everyone can have it.”

So, organic, local—it's just a competition “to see who is more authentic,” where the winners are, in fact, the biggest phonies—whether it's a coolhunt “for authentic jeans, pristine vacation spots or mud

flooring... The overarching goal is less to possess the thing itself than to make a claim to refined taste and moral superiority.”

Andrew believes we are mired in “a dopey nostalgia for a non-existent past, a one-sided suspicion of the modern world, and stagnant and reactionary politics masquerading as something personally meaningful and socially progressive.”

His solution is “that we simply make peace with modernity and accept its trade-offs” and that we “rehabilitate the very idea of progress” which, he says, is not that things always get better, but that people eventually figure things out.

### Sugar

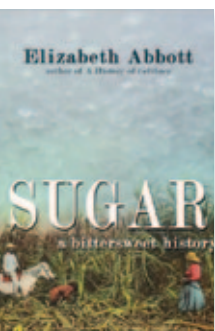
A consumer boycott of sugar helped put an end to slavery in England and “inspired abolitionists in the U.S.,” writes Fergus M. Bordewich in a *Wall Street Journal* review of *Sugar: A Bittersweet History*, by Elizabeth Abbott (3/31/10).

Of course, it was consumer demand for sugar that created “the trans-Atlantic slave trade, wrecked the lives of millions of Africans, and brought fabulous wealth to white planters and absentee investors.” Slaves, as Elizabeth Abbott puts it, were “sugar machines.”

The slaves, according to Elizabeth, survived only an average of seven years in the field, between the brutal Caribbean sun and the regular whippings for those who didn't work fast enough. Sugar, writes Elizabeth, was “literally polluted with slaves' blood.”

Abolitionists figured that a sugar boycott might change things, calculating “that if every family using five pounds of sugar and rum per week refused to consume slave-grown sugar, every 21 months they would save one African from enslavement and death.

Cynics scoffed. But by the 1790s, 300,000 English were abstaining from West Indian sugar, while grocers and importers sought new sources of “free sugar” in East Asia. Parliament voted to abolish slavery in Britain in 1807 and then in the West Indies in the 1830s,” which further emboldened abolitionists in the United States.

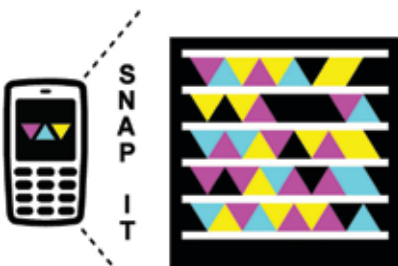




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