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Culture

**Sweet Stuff: An American History of Sweeteners from Sugar to Sucralose**
Deborah Jean Warner
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It seems that sugar and artificial sweeteners are currently considered by some nutritionists and other food experts to be part of an unholy trinity, along with fat and salt. The rising obesity problem, which is sending diabetes rates soaring, has many people considering their intake of sweeteners, and for good reason.

Although the sweet stuff may be bad for the waistline and overall health, it sure makes for a lively subject of a biography.

Deborah Jean Warner, a curator at the National Museum of American History, provides a stunningly well-researched, lucidly written, and detailed look at how sugar went from being a very rare treat in the Western world until the late 1600s, to a mass-produced daily foodstuff today.

The average American consumes about 150 pounds of sugars per year, she notes, and many ingest a substantial amount of artificial sweeteners. How an occasional and expensive indulgence transformed into a panoply of industrialized products and natural sweeteners is an almost epic journey.

Skipping most of sugar's early cultivation history, the author begins with sugar refining in New York City in the mid-1800s, and moves into the roles played by molasses, cane sugar, beet sugar, and cane syrup. She goes into the development of high-fructose corn syrup and dextrose, giving a well-articulated and non-opinionated view of those now-controversial sweeteners.

Overall, Warner's level of detail is impressive. Not only does she tackle every aspect of natural and artificial sweeteners' agricultural and manufacturing history, she weaves together the cultural, economic, legislative, and social factors that provided a fertile ground for more production. Particularly compelling are the chapters on artificial sweeteners, which blend descriptions of aggressive advertising campaigns with details of backlash against products like

saccharin and cyclamate.

Whether someone is attempting to cut down on sugar consumption or not, Warner's in-depth history gives context and meaning to one of America's most beloved ingredients.

*Elizabeth Millard*