

SUNDAY POST VIEW

OPINION

Every legacy is built on sand so all we can do is do our best

*"On the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'"*

– Ozymandias, Percy Bysshe Shelley

There may possibly be a big job to come but, for now, it's all about the legacy for Nicola Sturgeon.

Our first minister, for a few more days anyway, has been busy in her final weeks. From chatting with ITV's Loose Women to valedictory speeches in parliament, she has not stopped placing brick upon brick to build what she hopes will, in the long view, look like lasting achievement. So we have heard about baby boxes and minimum pricing of alcohol, child benefits and progressive income tax.

Last week, she apologised for the savagery inflicted on mothers and their babies by forced adoption, one of the greatest human rights scandals to darken Scotland's modern history. It would be churlish to ask why the first minister waited until her final days in office but it is still worth recording that campaigners, given a voice by our chief reporter Marion Scott, have been asking for that official acknowledgement and apology since 2015, not long after she took charge.

We have also been hearing quite a lot about her party's eight election victories in eight years which, to the SNP, with an unbeatable 40% of the vote, is a glittering achievement, but for others, simply another reminder of how stuck and divided Scotland has become during her time in Bute House.

Sturgeon has been both emotional and bullish but, as even the continuity candidate in the race to succeed her joins the other two in questioning her record, it must feel very different to what she might have hoped when announcing her snap resignation just a few weeks ago.

But you know what, her final speeches, and those of her deputy John Swinney, appealed for more kindness and cooperation in public life and, while opponents may have laughed at the cheek, a little emollient seems overdue.

Our first minister was, and remains, a politician of calibre and raised the stature and reputation of Scotland in these islands and around the world. Her empathy, eloquence and work ethic during the pandemic helped the country through a terrible crisis and her career and abilities have set a shining example to our daughters, a be-what-you-see clarion call urging them to follow their dreams.

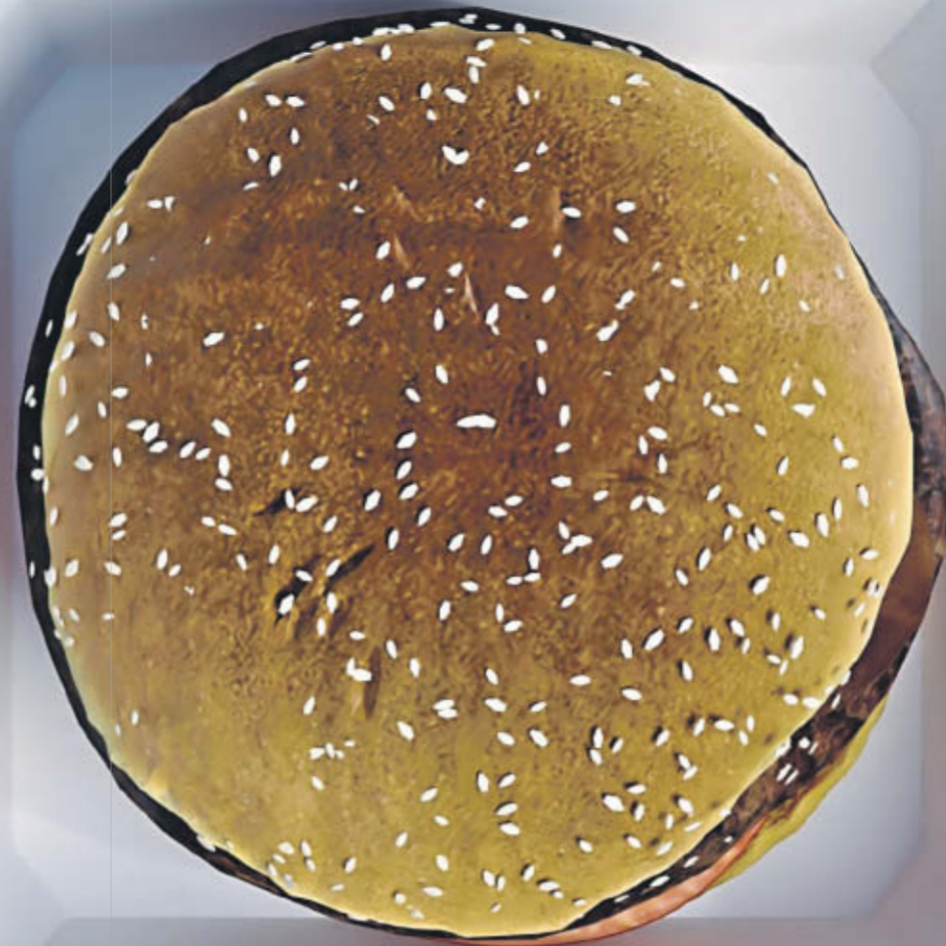
It is certainly not all she will have hoped for after a career – and time in office – that promised so much before getting stuck in the mud of referendums and constitutional hokum but, as far as these things go, that is still not a bad legacy.

In leaving, Swinney, that vanishingly rare type of politician who is respected on all sides, concluded that, whatever he achieved in all his years in government, he did his best and it is most likely his old boss and friend believes she did too.

Ultimately, that is all any of us, mighty or despairing, first minister or king of kings, can strive for.

Junk Inc.

Acclaimed expert reveals why we eat the things we eat



Burgers and other kinds of junk food mean healthy profits for companies but unhealthy diets for customers

By Ross Crae
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It is a simple question but one without simple answers: "What industry would profit if people were healthier?"

It is a question Professor Marion Nestle asks frequently as she works to untangle the politics of the food we eat while interrogating the food industry's marketing practices and influence on government policy and public health. The academic and author, labelled the second most powerful foodie in America after Michelle Obama, wants far greater transparency and consumer education around healthy eating.

Her series of best-selling books shines a light on how the billions of pounds streaming through the food industry have led to unhealthy but highly profitable products being driven into our cupboards, fridges and high streets and exposes how advertising designed to "slip below the radar of critical thinking" has not been slowed as powerful lobbyists quash attempts to rein it in.

Nestle, now 86, will be a special guest speaker at Edinburgh Science Festival, starting this week, where she will be presented with the prestigious Edinburgh Medal for her contributions to science and humanity in trying to change the conversation around what people eat and driving important changes in food policy and nutrition science in the US and beyond.

"You can't really understand why you make the kind of food choices that you do unless you understand the politics around it," she said.

"Politics surrounds every single aspect of food production and consumption, mainly because there's so much money involved in it.

"Everybody eats several times a day, everybody's buying food and in any Western country there's far more food available than anybody needs. That makes the people who are selling it extraordinarily competitive because they're competing for your food dollar and they're trying to do that through making foods look healthy or environmentally sustainable, or whatever.

"Everybody eats, and so everything about food is something very immediate and personal. If you're trying to understand how the oil, drug and other industries work, they're more removed. People learn things faster if they understand that they're personally relevant."

Having switched careers from molecular biology to nutritional science late in her career, Nestle has served in a number of academic and governmental roles in the US related to food policy. Her first book, Food Politics, came as something of a shock to the system when it was released in 2002.

It lifted the lid on the machinations away from public view where, like in the tobacco, drugs and weapons industries, interests and influences meant strategic decisions in the US were driven by economics rather than science or nutrition.

"I thought I was describing the obvious and people were just absolutely shocked by it," said Nestle, who is professor of nutrition, food studies and public health emerita at New York University. "They never considered that companies treated foods as widgets or any other kind of thing

that you are going to sell. But that's in fact how it works. Once you get that, a lot of what goes on in the food system makes sense in a way it never did before. When you understand food companies are not social services, they're trying to sell you something, then a lot of the advertising makes sense; the cartoons on the packaging, the labelling, all of these things.

"You need food to live and the food industry produces that and sells it to you at a price that hopefully you can afford. People think of it as a purchaser's market when, in fact, it's a seller's market. All of the things that are really bad for you are very profitable and personal. If you're pushed so hard. Once you see that, then I think it changes things and it helps people eat more helpfully."

Nestle believes people are gradually becoming more attuned to seeing beyond the marketing and questioning why the systems are the way they are. The experience of the pandemic, when workers delivering, producing and stocking food were just behind nurses and doctors in the pantheon of everyday heroes, helped spotlight some of the issues.

"The pandemic revealed things about the food system that nobody had ever seen before, the profound inequities," she said. "Nobody ever paid attention to people who deliver food or clerks in grocery stores and, all of a sudden, these people were at the forefront.

"It was really pretty rough. People saw how those in meat-packing plants were forced to keep working. With the consolidation of the US meat industry and the fact that four companies run basically 85% of meat production over here, when something went wrong with those



Leading US nutritionist Professor Marion Nestle, who will make a special guest appearance at Edinburgh Science Festival

supply chains there was no meat available. Farmers were destroying animals because they had no place for the meat to go or couldn't get them slaughtered. Things that were completely invisible became visible.

"That was very interesting and also the idea that food was being destroyed at the same time people were lining up at food banks was shocking. This was on the front pages of newspapers, so you couldn't miss it.

"These were food system ideas nobody had ever thought about before. It's certainly made it easier to talk about a capitalist economic system where nobody ever wants to hear the word capitalism mentioned. But now everybody's talking about it."

Nestle watches the UK which has had its own food-supply issues due to Brexit and climate conditions on the continent. She has noted with interest efforts to tackle childhood obesity with a proposed ban on junk food advertising before 9pm and the

public health, what the food industry is doing is making sense. From their standpoint, they just want to sell products. They don't care what the effects of those products are.

"Any attempt to do any of those things in the United States is impossible politically, at this point. We just don't have any kind of public health orientation. The country is so divided on every possible subject that it's pretty tough to get anything done.

"We need to do lots and lots of policies all at once if we're going to do anything to reverse the rising prevalence of obesity. Three-quarters of American adults are overweight and therefore it's normal and nobody wants to do anything about it.

"And I think it's very much in the interests of the food industry to keep people confused, because that way they can sell their products."

When it comes to her own diet, Nestle – whose name bears no relation to the Swiss food giant – follows her own advice and makes informed choices. "I would never advise anybody to do anything that I wouldn't do," she said. "Dietary advice is so simple that I like to quote the journalist Michael Pollan, who does it in seven words: 'Eat food, not too much, mostly plants.' And that's really all there is to it.

"Once you define food as real food and not junk food or processed foods, it's really pretty simple. And that isn't to say that you should never eat those things. You just have to have them as a small part of your diet. So I don't find that very difficult to follow."

Nestle recently released her memoir, Slow Cooked, detailing the path that led her to publish her first book later in life. "I didn't really get started until I was in my mid-60s," she said. "I'm not the only person like that, I'm seeing a lot of stories from women particularly who raised children and then went to work and made up for lost time. I was very fortunate in having that opportunity.

"When I was growing up, there weren't those kind of opportunities. Your life's work was to get married, have children and do that as quickly as possible.

"It was a much narrower world but the women's movement opened up doors when I was knocking. In some way it's much easier for women now and in some it's much harder because if you have no restrictions on opportunity you have to figure out what you want to do.

"One of the reactions I've gotten to my memoir which I find very interesting is the enormous relief that people feel who read it that they don't have to make those decisions in their 20s, they can experiment, try things and then if it doesn't work out it's not the end of the world. That's hard to see when you're young."

Nestle has received numerous awards and honours throughout her career, and the latest will be presented as part of Edinburgh Science Festival. Previous recipients of the annual Edinburgh Medal include theoretical physicist Professor Peter Higgs, Sir David Attenborough and philosopher Mary Midgley.

"It's very exciting. A very large contingent of my family is coming," said Nestle. "I was shocked by it, so shocked that I had to ask them 'why me!' It feels like an enormous honour.

"I almost don't think of myself as a scientist any more because it has been such a long time. I describe myself more of a lapsed molecular biologist. Science underpins everything that I do though."

Edinburgh Science Festival, April 1-16, sciencefestival.co.uk

'We must make it easier to eat well and live longer in poorest postcodes'

By Stephen Stewart
HOME AFFAIRS EDITOR

Scotland must build better high streets to combat the health gap between Scotland's poorest and wealthiest postcodes, according to a leading thinktank.

Frances Bain, healthy life expert for charity Nesta in Scotland, said health inequalities were "heading the wrong way" and getting worse.

She said healthy food options needed to be readily available on every high street while fast-food advertising had to be reduced.

The Sunday Post last week published a special report exposing the health inequalities cutting lives short in the poorest communities in Scotland and Bain, who has helped shape public health policy at a national and local level, said: "There are some very unfair health inequalities – people in wealthier areas live up to 20 years longer than people who live in less affluent areas.

"These inequalities can be seen in other areas such as chronic conditions such as cancer, heart disease and most other health outcomes in Scotland. There are a lot of inequalities around poverty and people

having less access to resources to support a healthy lifestyle.

"This includes factors such as access to a good diet and the facilities to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Scotland has some of the highest health inequalities in Europe and things are getting worse rather than better."

The news comes as the annual monitoring report from the Scottish Government, published last week, showed relative inequality in healthy life expectancy for males and females at its highest level since reporting began in 2013.

She added: "We are going the wrong way. We need to have some bold actions to address this. There is a political will but there is no silver bullet.

"We have to make dealing with health inequalities part of every policy we do. There needs to be a layered number of interventions over a long period. Healthy food needs to be accessible to everyone and we need to reduce the bombardment of advertising of junk food and less healthy food options.

"We are all part of a system and it's about changing that system. It's not blaming people, it's about making the system more equitable and changing the focus to help people in more deprived areas. We must create the conditions where it's easier to make a healthier choice and we are less likely to choose food which might harm our health.

"There are also questions that remain around the scale of the impact of calorie labelling and the supply of nutritional information on the foods we buy out-of-home.

"The main benefit may be that the introduction of calorie labelling encourages retailers to reduce the calorie content, lowering the calories available to order as well as encouraging the choice of lower calorie options.

"No one can argue that improving the supply of healthy food from the public sector and in our communities is anything other than a positive move.

"Doing this in a way that retains personal choice over the food we eat, maintains the positive public opinion of food interventions and also reduces obesity will be challenging."

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