

Road Kill on a Plate

by G. Murphy Donovan (August 2014)

“Your body will not absorb cholesterol if you take it from someone else’s plate.”

– Dave Barry

Once upon a time, the only question about food was quantity; too much here, too little there. “Here” usually meant America or the free world and “there” was usually the undeveloped or Third World. The clear broth of hunger and poverty has now been muddied by political rhetoric; the “have nots” are now patronized by ambiguous phrases like “the developing world.” Individual victims of poverty are called underserved or less “fortunate,” as if luck or the whims of Gods were in play. If *Fortuna* plays any role in social improvement schemes, surely she helps those who help themselves.

All nations are developing in one way or another. The problem with the optimism of gerunds is that words like “developing” are meant to suggest a process, positive progress. The alternative, social recidivism is seldom discussed or even expected. The Muslim world and Africa are but two examples of cultures where progress defies aid, assistance, history, and the best intentions. Domestic minority communities have developed similar immunities. Nonetheless, hope and wishful thinking are still the perennial toppings for most international or domestic social buffets.

Alas, the welfare state drains the energy of poverty at the expense of motivation, achievement, and initiative. To mix a metaphor, the wolf at the door has been tamed by national, state, and municipal sugar teats. Yet, poverty is still the rapier of politics. No matter that “poor” in America means subsidized housing, bad food, an automobile, air conditioning, television, the internet, obesity, and a government check.

Cynical politicians are wont to save us from ourselves for a price. Dependents make for a permanent voting bloc. Political parties give back just enough to pacify, insure loyalty, and stifle ambition.

Rhetoric plays a major role in poverty manipulations. A handout is now a “hand up.” A sorry meal in a feral school is an “investment.” The president’s wife has now commandeered the bully pulpit on poverty; especially, the subordinate [issues](#) of diet, nutrition, and exercise.

The idea that the First Lady gardens, goes to the market, or prepares food for her children is an insult to common sense. Michelle Obama has access to the best take-out, health care, and life-style coaching in Washington, DC – at tax payer expense. Indeed, the First Lady's posturing on weight control is disingenuous also.



This is not to suggest the president's wife doesn't have a little junk in her trunk too, but Michelle's figure, like that of any American woman, is more a function of genetics, domestic culture, and social class than it is of eating habits. Thin says as much about class as diction.

The fat [shaming](#) that comes from the White House is weak gruel, not unlike the personal poverty posturing we hear from Bill and Hillary Clinton these days. Mrs Obama's insensitivity about the zaftig demographic is of a piece with her ignorance about Gypsies when she or her husband refers to frauds as "gypts." *MS Magazine* put it best when they took Michelle to task with an editorial about "Health and Hatred."

American taxpayers subsidize an overweight demographic and then ultimately pay for the predictable health consequences of obesity. Free lunch and free health care are package deals sustained by social fictions. There are no incentives for restraint with means or ends. Individual intemperance is aggravated by pork barrels, self-serving rent seekers, and lobbyists countrywide.

America has the only obese poor on the planet. Michelle's target audience isn't poverty stricken so much as they are victims of affluence. The dependent demographic has access to all things necessary to be fat, dumb, unhealthy, and unhappy. Drugs, alcohol, and a junk diet often make for a critical mass of dysfunction. Government with no sense of restraint is not likely to cultivate that public virtue among the underclass.

The end game is political. A dependent political demographic is a permanent voting bloc. Democracy always contains the potential to succumb to the lowest common denominators. Modern social democracy, especially, has all the earmarks of an elaborate vote buying scheme.

Eric [Hoffer](#) put it best: "Every great cause begins as a movement, becomes a business, and eventually degenerates into a racket" The poor and uneducated may not have much, but they do have the vote – and the fate of nations in their hands.

The predicate of politics today, Left or Right, is some kind of government piñata. Few

politicians get elected on a restraint plank. We send men and women to the city council, state house, or Congress to give us stuff. Agribusiness and the food retail trades prime the pump by using government food programs as a dump for surplus, and often inferior, processed food stuffs.

Everyone seems to benefit except kids. Children in turn do what any intelligent waif does. Kids don't eat food they don't like.



Modern palates are educated by fast foods; salt, sugar, fat, and carbohydrates. The junk food industry knows what children like. With the assistance of clueless, lazy parents and venal politicians, the child marketing niche is a free fire zone. Eating in a government financed cafeteria is also an exercise in humiliation, an admission that parents cannot or will not prepare a healthy, edible meal.

More to the point, kids don't eat government food because it's awful; ill prepared and badly presented. Most school cafeteria food looks like road kill on a plate. If Michelle Obama wants to understand what's wrong with the diet of poor children; she, and her daughters, need to try to eat 15 meals a week at a public school cafeteria. Indeed, every school principal, teacher, and education bureaucrat should be forced to eat at public school cafeterias too. If politicians and administrative deadwood ate at the government trough, then and only then, they would know what kids know.

The food stinks!

School cafeteria chow is not just awful. Much of what is served ends up in the [trash](#). Eating is not just another political hustle; it's a matter of taste and habit. Ignoring qualitative factors (setting, presentation, and taste) in the child diet equation is a little trying to hit a fastball with a jump rope.

The junk food industry may not know much about health food, but they do know everything about setting and taste. How many fast food restaurants are located in basements? And junk food moguls test what they sell too. If a grasshopper burrito doesn't sell, it's off the menu. Only when government food programs worry as much about preparation and taste as they do about poverty propaganda will free lunch be a good "investment."

Some university presidents make a million dollars or more as public servants. Principals, education apparatchiks, and tenured teachers routinely make six figure salaries with elaborate

benefits. What is the average food service manager paid at any public school?



Better still, take a long look at the average school cafeteria worker; overweight, overworked, underpaid, tattooed, and truly scary in hairnets. Have you ever seen Wolfgang Puck, Rachael Ray, or Papa John preparing food in a hairnet? What's the point of keeping hair, or toenails for that matter, out of food that's inedible anyway?

Food in public cafeterias is not just bad; the windowless, basement settings – and the employees – would mute the appetite of vampires. Urban school cafeterias are like municipal post offices, employers of last resort.

The tax dollars that might be saved from waste alone by local school districts could hire the best executive chefs, cooks, and attractive kitchen staffs. A school lunch in could be equal of any Sunday brunch out.

If academic outcomes are a measure of effectiveness, [pricey](#) education bureaucrats are a poor investment. A competent chef, cook, or school food service manager is another, indeed an a *priori*, matter. The proof is in the eating. The effects of good cooking, like good parenting, are measurable.

Parents seem unwilling or unable to prepare food for children. Why not invest in better dining rooms, better kitchens, and only the best food service professionals for schools? Call it affirmative action eating. We are all, after all, what we eat. Lip service from the Oval Office on hunger and poverty is no substitute for a sunny room and the flavor and taste of a good spinach pie.

The author keeps a garden and cooks nearly every day. He believes that good ingredients and a tasty lunch are national security issues.

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