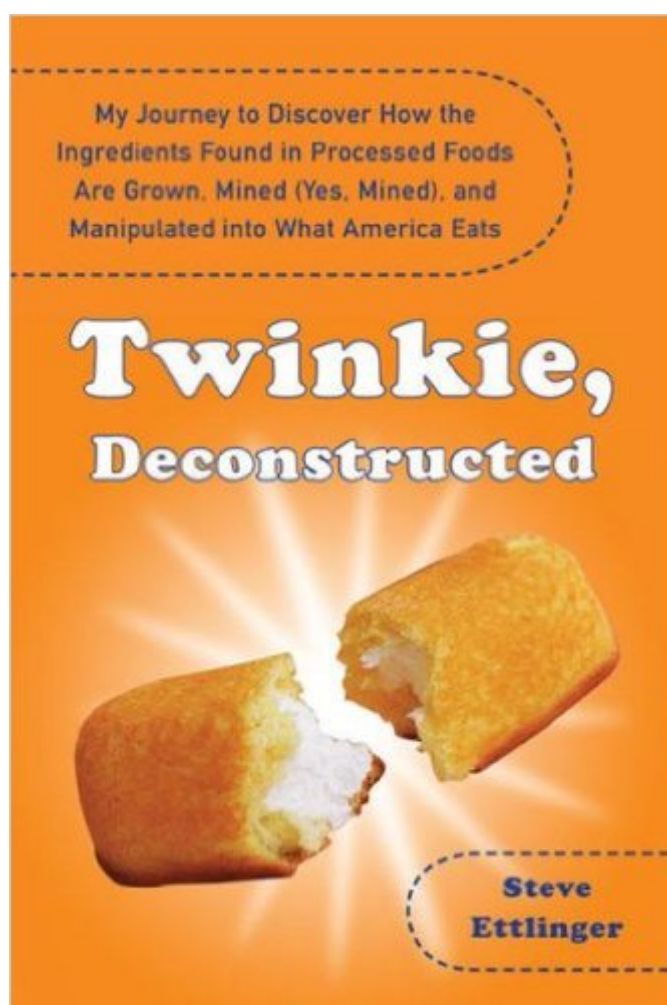


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Twinkie, Deconstructed: My Journey To Discover How The Ingredients Found In Processed Foods Are Grown, Mined (Yes, Mined), And Manipulated Into What America Eats



Synopsis

A pop-science journey into the surprising ingredients found in dozens of common packaged foods, using the Twinkie label as a guide. Like most Americans, Steve Ettlinger eats processed foods. And, like most consumers, he often reads the ingredients label without a clue as to what most of it means. So when his young daughter asked, "Daddy, what's polysorbate 60?" he was at a loss and determined to find out. From the phosphate mines in Idaho to the corn fields in Iowa, from gypsum mines in Oklahoma to the vanilla harvest in Madagascar, *Twinkie, Deconstructed* is a fascinating, thoroughly researched romp of a narrative that demystifies some of the most common processed food ingredients where they come from, how they are made, how they are used and why. Beginning at the source (hint: they're often more closely linked to rock and petroleum than any of the four food groups), we follow each Twinkie ingredient through the process of being crushed, baked, fermented, refined, and/or reacted into a totally unrecognizable goo or powder with a strange name all for the sake of creating a simple snack cake. An insightful exploration into the food industry, if you've ever wondered what you're eating when you consume foods containing mono- and diglycerides or calcium sulfate (the latter, a food-grade equivalent) this book is for you.

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Customer Reviews

Steve Ettlinger is an interesting man. In about a dozen previous books, he has often demonstrated not only his interest in and concerns about various consumer issues and realities, but has investigated each to a degree not commonly found in books written for the general public. For

example, *The Complete Guide To Everything Sold In Hardware Stores*, *The Complete Guide To Everything Sold In Garden Centers*, *The Complete Guide To Everything Sold In Marine Supply Stores*, and *Guides For Dummies* to both French and Italian wines, he probes each seemingly obvious area to a degree of depth and detail so that more than information is provided: Reading his books can be more accurately characterized as an experience. In the volume at hand, his newest published effort to date, he chooses one seemingly simple, immensely popular and globally ubiquitous food snack item, the Twinkie to scrutinize, one ingredient at a time, as a sometimes humorous and sometimes gut wrenching example of what has come to pass as food in our times. He is not picking on these readily recognizable little cream-filled snack cakes. Rather, he is using them as a paradigm representative example of how foods and non-foods alike are processed and folded into our intake supply. He raises more questions than he answers - seeing his responsibility as primarily that of providing consumers with information that might be helpful to them. He researches, visits manufacturing plants, speaks with various company people and winds up with a chapter by chapter analysis of the etiology, processing and purpose of each and every ingredient listed on the Twinkies label.

Asked by his children what the ingredients in a Twinkie creme-filled cake really were, and where they came from, Steve traveled the world to find out, interviewing over a hundred people in the process. The book is well-written in the sense that it can be read very fast, and is entertaining until the number of technical errors and chemophobia intrude, which for me began on p8. I happen to enjoy processing plant and mine tours, even vicariously, and do not shy from hundreds of facts and factoids. It was fascinating to find where the biggest plants were that made the ingredients of a Twinkie, which are: wheat flour, bleach, iron(II) sulfate, vitamins B1, B2, B3, sugar, corn sweeteners, corn thickeners, water, partially hydrogenated soybean oil, lecithin and soy protein isolate, eggs, cellulose gum, whey, leavenings, baking soda, sodium acid pyrophosphate, monocalcium phosphate, salt, mono and diglycerides, polysorbate 60, natural and artificial flavors, sodium stearoyl lactylate, sodium and calcium caseinates, calcium sulfate, sorbic acid, FD&C Yellow No. 5 and Red. No. 40. All but 2 of the chapter headings follow this ingredient list. There is an inadequate index and no references, an ominous sign of what is to follow. There are no pictures or drawings, which this topic screams for. The concept was excellent, as were the metaphors. Between that and the potential entertainment value my rating would have been 5-star, even though the target audience was 12-14 years old, IMHO. A fine appreciation of food chemistry was finally given on p258-260: "The fact that chemicals, especially those in foods, are part of nature..."

My wife has worked for years as a safety manager in the food industry, so I didn't expect too many surprises when I read this book. After all, I had been hearing about some of these products for about 15 years, in one fashion or another. And it didn't come as a shock that what is in snack cakes is also found in chips and cereal, as much of highly processed food is similar in content; it's just the arrangement that changes. Maybe I took these materials for granted, as I have seen them in their finished state in boxes which the companies were getting ready to use. Somehow a material that is labeled "... Company Concentrated Chip Spice (Sour Cream & Onion)" just does not seem as intimidating as the chemicals presented in this book. I was disgusted by the manufacturing technique of many of the chemicals, but realize that the science of chemistry is taking one molecule and making it into an entirely different molecule in the quickest and cheapest method possible. As long as the hazardous reactants are removed, I'm not really that terrified by eating most of these compounds, although I'm not that thrilled, either. I can't wait to show my daughter this book, as she insists that canned spray cheese is really cheese, even though I keep telling her it is cheese food product. Reading this book will make her realize the difference between cheese food product and real cheese! I did find the book fascinating and easy to read. The author did a wonderful job of blending the material with its source, its manufacture and then with its need within the recipe for the finished product. It was somewhat like reading a travelogue, a cookbook and a chemistry book rolled into one.

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