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Corporate Candy: Ungentrified Sweets in a Gentrified City

BY MOLLY GARFINKEL AND STEVE ZEITLIN

In the 1976 film *Taxi Driver*, Travis Bickle, played by Robert De Niro, buys some Chuckles jelly candies from the concession stand at the adult cinema. He tells the concession girl that he prefers Jujubes because they last longer. If he were in a movie theater today, he certainly would not find Jujubes and probably not Chuckles, either. He would be given a choice of mostly Haribo candies and varieties of its juggernaut gummy bears. These are today's gentrified candies. Although the German gummy bear has been around since 1922, the Haribo company recently swallowed up a slew of other confections manufacturers all over the world and churns out over a hundred million bears of different varieties every day.

If De Niro were looking for Jujubes now, his best bet would be Economy Candy, at 108 Rivington Street, on the Lower East Side, which opened its doors in 1937, and which thankfully is *not* endangered. Where else can you find not only Jujubes but also Dots, Gobstoppers, Licorice Pipes, Nerds, Cinnamon Bears, Charleston Chews, a five-pound Hershey's bar, or a Betty Boop Pez dispenser? This is a place to go for what we call ungentrified candy. It's a place that offers a plethora of flavors and shapes that you can't find anywhere else, at least not all

together in one extravagant "Big Rock Candy Mountain." Economy Candy sells the sweets that many of us of a certain age delighted in as children. It's a place that resonates with

our memories of taste, a place that can still surprise us. This variety of tastes and experiences, this historic resonance, is what the city should—and sometimes does—offer, but not without our vigilance and advocacy.

Let's imagine that New York City was made of candy. The city's glass towers and big-box stores would be the Haribo gummy bears: crystalized corporate candy. Places like Economy Candy, Katz's Delicatessen, Yonah Schimmel's Knish Bakery, and the Eldridge Street Synagogue might be the venerable but still extant Jujubes, Licorice Pipes, Chuckles, and Spearmint Leaves—or the spice drops in your grandmother's crystal candy jar that, like older buildings, smack of yesterday. Many candies are now extinct, though: Chiclets, Black Licorice Dollars, Mary Janes, and now—say it ain't so!—Necco Wafers. They remind us of the city's bygone places—Mars Bar (the Lower



East Side dive bar, not the candy bar), 5 Pointz (the famous Queens mural space), CBGB, the Domino Sugar Factory, the Lenox Lounge, the house under the roller coaster in Coney Island, Music Row, and now, even the Cornelia Street Cafe.

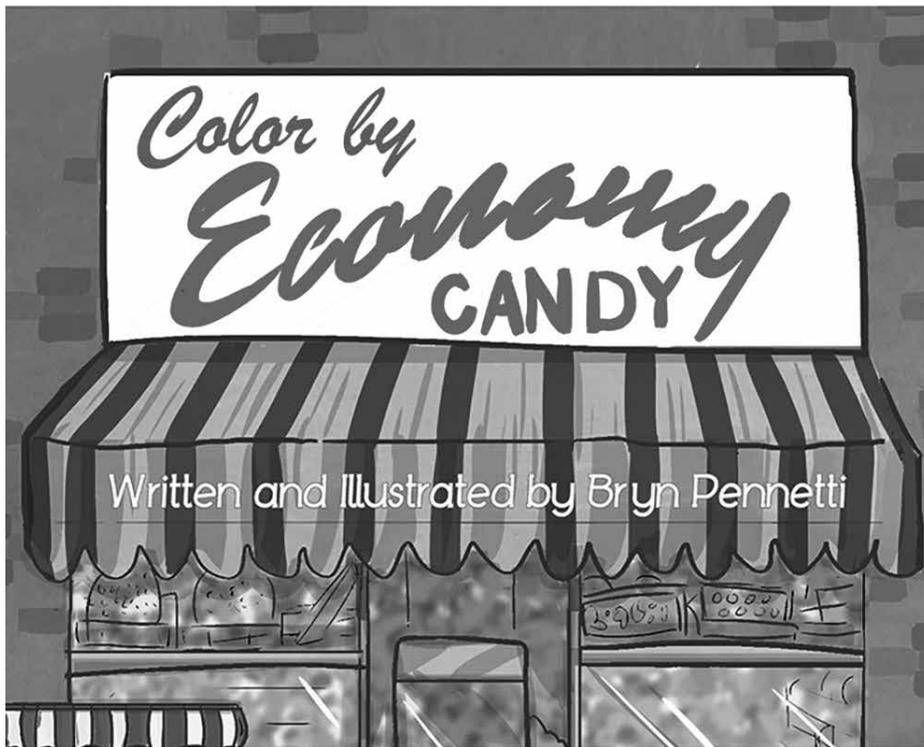
It's not that we care so much about candy, but we do care about a diversity of tastes, of experiences in the city. We care about the experiential difference between buying a piece of penny candy from a friendly soul at a neighborhood bodega and trying to even find a human being to ask where an item is located in a big-box store.

The iconic Economy Candy is a metaphor for these tastes and experiences. The shop has been in the Lower East Side for over 60 years. Before the Great Depression, the storefront housed a hat and shoe store, with a vendor selling candy from a pushcart outside its doors. During the

Candy Index Match the candy to its history!

	<p>Reese's Peanut Butter Cups originated from a Pennsylvania farmer named H.B. Reese who began working for Milton S. Hershey (of Hershey Chocolate) in 1917. Reese had 16 children at the time and needed more work! After years at Hershey Dairy Farm, Reese decided to make his own confections using the same chocolate. He would name his candies after his children and soon opened his own</p>	<p>candy company. One of his most successful candies were "peppy cups": peanut butter chocolate cups that only cost one penny. In 1928, Reese grew his business and began selling his candies nationwide. By the 1950s, Reese passed away and his family sold his business to Hershey who has since deliciously expanded the peanut butter cup market.</p>		<p>Napoleon Sour Lemon Candies have been made since 1912 in Antwerp, Belgium. Louis Janssen opened a bakery called in the Nestlé factory where he began experimenting with candy science in his store basement. He created the lemon candy, but needed a name. A chocolatier and friend of Janssen's had recently named one of his truffles "Caesar" so</p>	<p>Janssen decided to name his lemon candies "Napoleon" as an inside joke. Over the years his "golden bobsons" became so popular he had to expand the factory twice. Today the Napoleon factory is located in Breda, Netherlands and produces several other hard candy and licorice varieties.</p>
	<p>Gummy Peaches are a popular type of gummy candy that has been sold by Haribo since the 1920s. Originally, Haribo candies were made in Germany in 1922 and came in one shape: the gummy bear. Gummy candy began as a popular street fair food and was once very hard to chew.</p>	<p>After discovering that adding gelatin could create a softer, easy to chew treat, they were shaped into dancing bears, a popular European entertainment animal. Since then, Haribo has perfected its own recipes and the company has expanded worldwide.</p>		<p>Candy Bananas have been sold in Runtz packages since 1982 as part of Willy Wonka's original candy varieties produced by the Nestlé company. The candies began as a promotional tool for the 1971 <i>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</i> movie at a request from the director's daughter. They came in small boxes containing five hard candy fruit flavors, which have been changed every decade or so. The flavor of these tiny bananas has been heavily disputed. The artificial</p>	<p>flavor was said to be created in the mid 1900s from an almost extinct variety of banana, the Gros Michel. However, many scientists have begun to disprove the myth saying the banana flavor comes from a chemical compound created by candy scientists that mimic the flavor of actual banana. No matter where the flavor comes from, candy bananas are still found in Runtz boxes today.</p>
	<p>Candy Corn was invented in the 1880s by a Waukesha, Wisconsin candy maker named George Renninger. After Waukesha was bought out, the candy is since produced by the Goelitz Candy Company (now Jelly Belly).</p>	<p>The candy is made by creating a corn-syrup slurry that is then poured into kernel shaped molds. Since the 1950s, candy corn has become a popular Halloween candy because of its relation to the corn and the harvest.</p>		<p>Lemonheads were created by Italian immigrant baker, Salvatore Ferrara, in 1900. He began his living selling pastries, and candy coated almonds in Chicago, going on to expand his business and create Lemonheads in 1962. The candies were made using the same process as Red Hots, a hard, spicy candy made by the same company.</p>	<p>The candies are made by mixing, heating, and pulling corn syrup that is then pressed into a ball shape between two rollers. They are spun in corn syrup and then coated in sugar over and over to create the lemonhead layers. Over 500 million Lemonheads are made each year!</p>
	<p>Chick O' Stick is a honeycomb candy that has been made by the Atkinson Candy Company in Texas since the 1930s. The company used to sell tobacco and candy wholesale but narrowed their products down to just candy by 1938.</p>	<p>Chick O' Sticks were modeled after a small, hard candy called Chicken Bones (made of honeycomb, molasses, and peanut butter). The Atkinson's decided to roll the popular treat in coconut and the Chick O' Stick was born!</p>		<p>Mary Janes were created in 1884 by Charles H. Miller who had never made candy before he opened his first storefront! He and three sons made candy out of his home in Boston and created the sticky molasses and peanut butter treat named after Miller's aunt Mary Jane (though this myth has been disputed and the candy may have been</p>	<p>named after a character in the popular Buster Brown comic). In 1914, Mary Janes were sold for a penny along with the slogan "use your change for Mary Janes". Today, Mary Janes are owned and sold by NECCO who continues to produce the candies in Revere, Massachusetts.</p>
	<p>Perugina Sorrento Spicci candies are made by the Perugina candy company in Perugia, Italy. The company was founded in 1907 and makes other popular Italian confections such as Baci hazelnut chocolate, specialty chocolate bars, and chocolate covered cherries. The first Perugina chocolates</p>	<p>and hard candies were introduced to the United States at the 1939 World's Fair in New York City. Perugina was purchased by the Nestlé company in 1988 and still sells a wide variety of decadent chocolate and fruity treats.</p>		<p>Butterfinger Bars were originally made by the Curtis Candy Company in Chicago, Illinois in 1922. Otto Schnering created the candy in 1923 and held a contest to choose its name. A klutz man with "buttermilk" from Chicago won the contest. As a marketing tactic, Schnering had Baby Ruths (another candy made by Schnering) and Butterfingers</p>	<p>dropped from airplanes across the U.S. The candy was also featured in the 1934 Shirley Temple movie, <i>Baby Take a Bow</i>. The company was bought by Nabisco in 1981, and then by Nestlé in 1990. Today, Nestlé makes over 120 million dollars a year selling Butterfingers.</p>

All artwork by Bryn Pennetti (www.brynpennetti.com/economy-candy-concept-book)



Depression, the candy started selling better than the shoes and hats. When Morris “Moishe” Cohen and his brother-in-law returned from the Second World War, they took over the business. Moishe’s son Jerry and Jerry’s wife, Irene, inherited the shop in the 1980s, and like Moishe, took pride in kibitzing with the customers. Currently, Jerry works part-time, and their son and his wife run the store.

Today, the Lower East Side emporium, which we were pleased to honor in 2011 with a Place Matters Award (<https://www.placematters.net/awards>), is a thriving pilgrimage site. Neon marshmallow Peeps seem to glow from the counters, hollow chocolate bunnies patiently perch on beds of plastic grass, and bins stacked nearly to the ceiling contain every jellybean flavor on record. In parts of the store, mirrors reflect the merchandise below, so shoppers can feel gleefully surrounded by candy.

At City Lore, we have been inspired by the San Francisco Legacy Business Registry (<https://sfplanning.org/project/legacy-business-registry>), which, as its website states, “works to save longstanding, community-serving businesses that so often serve as valuable cultural assets,” and which uses a nomination process similar to that used for historic landmarks. We urge New York City to follow suit, but with some key differences.

First, the San Francisco registry, which is itself endangered, relies on the government giving grants to landlords to keep legacy businesses affordable. Grants to landlords? Even the registry has come to realize this is not sustainable. Second, commercial rent control is simply anathema to recent New York City mayors and most city council members. When we brought up cultural landmarking at a city council meeting years ago, we were laughed out of the room for suggesting something so economically infeasible. Thankfully, the Small Business Jobs

Survival Act (<http://takebacknyc.nyc/sbjsa/>), which was first introduced in 1986, is currently being reconsidered. We strongly support it.

City Lore’s also proposes a Community Anchors rent-subsidy program for cultural landmarks. Small businesses would be nominated for the program with petitions based on their contributions to neighborhood stability and quality of life. If it’s possible to do this for historic landmarks, as the city already does, we believe it’s possible to do this for cultural landmarks. The number of Community Anchors, however, would be limited, so as not to have a significant effect on the overall city economy: this program would *not* be commercial rent control to upend the city’s economic viability. We would limit the number of Community Anchors whose rent increases would be restricted to perhaps less than 2 percent of any landlord’s properties, with a negligible effect on their profits. City politicians are hesitant to consider or strategize about this, claiming that the New York State Constitution forbids it; yet, commercial rent control did exist in the City between 1945 and 1963 under a special law. Yes, it will take a bit of creativity on all sides, because, last we heard, the people make the laws and their purpose is not to serve as straitjackets for the commonsense reforms that this rapidly gentrifying city sorely needs.

New York is in a constant state of change. If it weren’t, Economy Candy would still be a shoe and hat shop. Thankfully, there are still ungentrified newsstands where you can buy a pack of Chuckles, but let’s also find a way to protect Community Anchors. If we don’t, then as the folklorist Alan Lomax once put it, “Soon there will be nowhere to visit and no place to truly call home.” As for the gentrified candies, we’ll just swallow hard. ▼

Molly Garfinkel, director of the Place Matters program, researches community and public history, urban traditions, and perceptions of space and place.

Steve Zeitlin, City Lore’s founding director, is interested in family stories, children’s rhymes, subway stories, oral poetry traditions from around the world, and the poetry of everyday life.



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