

McIlhenny's Gold

When Edmund McIlhenny won a trademark on the word “tabasco” back in 1906, his competitors were stunned. “It was as if someone had claimed the word ‘mustard,’” writes Mark Robichaux in a *Wall Street Journal* review of *McIlhenny's Gold* by Jeffrey Rothfeder.

Not only that, but McIlhenny's Tabasco sauce consisted of just “three simple ingredients — vinegar, pepper mash and salt.” That recipe hasn't changed in 138 years: “hand-picked peppers a particular shade of red, mixed with salt and vinegar, and aged three years in wooden barrels that formerly held Jack Daniels whiskey.”

Interesting thing is, Edmund used “intuition, not laboratory tests, to mix his recipe.” He arrived at it working with “a small group of ex-slaves and close friends.” McIlhenny still operates from the same location — “remote Avery Island, part of southern Louisiana's Acadian Gothic landscape of high canopies and moss-hung cypress trees.”

Today, McIlhenny Company is a \$250 million business, producing “as many as 600,000 two-ounce bottles ... a day, selling it in more than 100 countries, with profit margins ... of 25 percent of more.” It remains family-run by Paul McIlhenny, and jointly held by some 200 heirs.

Super Crunchers

Ian Ayres thought *The End of Intuition* would be a great name for his new book — until he ran the numbers and saw that more people would buy a book called *Super Crunchers*, reports *The Economist*.

After all, this is a book about how “data and the computer power now available make it possible for automated processes to surpass human experts in fields as diverse as rating wines, writing film dialogue and choosing titles for books.”

Ian, a Yale University professor of law and management, sees automated decision-making as posing a threat to a range of job professions. For example, bank-loan officers, who used to be “well-paid and responsible” have been reduced to call-center operatives, “paid peanuts to parrot the words a computer prompts.”

Super Crunchers does not, however, “touch on what Nicholas Nassim Taleb calls ‘Black Swans’: rare events that are unpredictable with or without crunching numbers.” David Leonhardt, in a *New York Times* review, also thinks Ian “is simply too optimistic about the impact data analysis is having,” noting, for example, that “evidence-based medical treatment ... is still far from the norm in this country.”

He concludes: “The Super Crunchers, aided by the explosion of inexpensive computing power, do their job remarkably well. The next step is finding some Super Persuaders.”

The Myth of Mars and Venus

In her latest book, an Oxford language professor takes on what she calls the “myth” that men and women communicate differently. The book, *The Myth of Mars and Venus*, by Deborah Cameron, is excerpted online, in three parts, by *Guardian Unlimited*.

In the first excerpt, Deborah takes apart “the idea that men and women ‘speak different languages’” as “dogma” based on faulty, self-fulfilling research grounded in little more than long-held prejudices against both genders.

For example, she challenges notions that women talk more than men, are more verbally skilled than men, and that “men talk more about facts, whereas women talk about people, relationships and feelings.”

At the heart of Deborah's thesis is her assertion that research suggesting differences in the way men and women communicate is flawed. “Most research studies investigating the behavior of men and women are designed around the question: is there a difference? And the presumption is usually that there will be,” says Deborah.

She takes special aim at a book called *The Female Brain*, in which it is claimed that women say 20,000 words a day versus men, who say just 7,000. According to Deborah, there is no “actual research” to support the claim, and yet it was disseminated widely by the news media.

Instead, she points to “meta-research” by Janet S. Hyde, which collates “many different research findings,” is therefore more reliable, and which shows that there are more similarities than differences in the way men and women communicate.

