

# Fast food nation chapter summaries essay sample

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## Introduction

“ The whole experience of buying fast food has become so routine, so thoroughly unexceptional and mundane, that it is now taken for granted, like brushing your teeth or stopping for a red light. It has become a social custom as American as a small, rectangular, hand-held, frozen, and reheated apple pie.” Schlosser descriptively sets the scene for the backdrop of his book, the city of Colorado Springs, Colorado. Cheyenne Mountain looks like any other beautiful Rocky Mountain vista, but in reality, it surreptitiously houses the North American Aerospace Command. During the 1950s, the US government feared their air defenses were vulnerable to attack and chose Cheyenne Mountain to be the underground combat operations center. Hollowed out, the mountain contains 15 three-story buildings inside and 1, 500 people work inside everyday. The complex even has its own cafeteria, fitness center, dentist, chapel and barber shop.

Whenever the people stationed at the base want something new to eat, someone is often called to deliver Domino’s or pick up fast food from the nearby town. The author playfully muses that, should America be attacked in the future, Cheyenne Mountain may be the only place with artifacts of our civilization - “ Burger King wrappers, hardened crusts of Cheesy Bread, Barbeque Wings bones, and the red, white, and blue of a Domino’s pizza box.” What started as a small food stand in southern California has now spread all over the nation. Schlosser says fast food “ has infiltrated every nook and cranny of American society.” Shockingly, Americans spend more today on fast food than higher education, computers, or new cars. Schlosser

estimates, “ On any given day in the United States about one-quarter of the country’s adult population visits a fast food restaurant.”

The author argues that the powerful rise of fast food industry happened quickly and “ not only transformed the American diet, but also out landscape, economy, workforce, and popular culture.” Importantly, Schlosser draws parallels between Cheyenne Mountain and today’s fast food industry. Both “ conceal remarkable technological advances behind an ordinary-looking facade.” Colorado Springs was chosen as a focal point for book because the changes in this city reflect those of the fast food industry. Schlosser says the city’s population has more than doubled in the last few decades and “ the Rocky Mountain region as a whole has the fastest-growing economy in the United States, mixing high-tech and service industries in a way that may define America’s workforce to come.” Schlosser admits that during the writing process of this book, he ate a lot of fast food and that he does not look down on it in an “ elitist” or “ aesthetic” way. His greater concern is the way fast food is marketed to children and is prepared by people that are only a few years older. He feels consumers are attracted to fast food for three simple reasons: \* it tastes good

\* it is inexpensive

\* it is convenient

#### Chapter 1: Founding Fathers

“ What had begun as a series of small, regional businesses became a fast food industry, a major component of the American economy.” This chapter describes the rise of today’s largest fast food restaurants. He begins with Carl N. Karcher, whose modest beginning on a farm in Upper Sandusky, Ohio, <https://assignbuster.com/fast-food-nation-chapter-summaries-essay-sample/>

led to the birth of fast food. Karcher was born in 1917 and dropped out of school in the eighth grade to work full time on his father's farm. Eventually, he was offered a job by one of his uncles in Anaheim, California. Karcher worked at his uncle's Feed and Seed Store selling goods to local farmers and also took a job delivering bread for bakery. He was amazed by the number of local hot dog stands popping up everywhere. When he heard one was for sale nearby, he decided to buy it. At the same time, Los Angeles was growing rapidly and cars were becoming the main form of transportation.

Car culture led to the world's first motel, drive-in bank and curbside service restaurant. By 1944, Karcher owned four hot dog carts in Los Angeles. When a restaurant went up for sale across from his wife's family farm, he decided to buy it, becoming the first Carl's Jr. restaurant in 1956. Initially, the restaurant was a drive-in barbecue place, but when Karcher learned of a restaurant using a self-service system, which did not require expensive skilled and short order cooks, he converted his restaurant too. The McDonald's self-service system was devised by Richard and Maurice McDonald, two brothers who moved to California from New Hampshire during the depression for a better life. They also created the memorable and most famous corporate logos in the world: the letter 'M' in golden arches.

The Speedee Service System was later emulated by future fast food chains like Dunkin' Donuts, Taco Bell, Burger King, Wendy's Old-Fashioned Hamburgers, Domino's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and many others. The biggest fast food chains spread across the nation from 1960-1973. In that time span, the number of McDonald's grew from approximately 250 to 3,000 restaurants. With admiration, Schlosser reflects upon these founders as <https://assignbuster.com/fast-food-nation-chapter-summaries-essay-sample/>

fulfilling the American dream. At the same time, he acknowledges that fast food founders did not know what the unintended consequences of their work would be. Schlosser remarks, "It is the fast food parable about how the industry started and where it can lead." Chapter 2: Your Trusted Friends

"Now you can buy a Happy Meal at the Happiest Place on Earth." This chapter begins with a panorama of the Ray A. Kroc museum. Schlosser emphasizes the "Disneyesque tone" of the museum. The author's goal is to draw parallels between the two corporations and their founders: Both Ray Kroc and Walt Disney were born in Illinois and born one year apart. They served together in the same World War I ambulance corps. They both left the midwest for southern California, where they played integral roles in two American industries. Both leaders dropped out of high school, yet added "formal education" style schools to their companies. For example, Disney trains its theme-park employees at Disneyland University and the McDonald's Hamburger University trains future managers, executives, and franchisees for a "Degree in Hamburgerology." Schlosser notes that more than being great businessmen and entrepreneurs, both men were "masterful salesmen." They figured out how to market their companies well to children.

Ray Kroc's name to fame came while selling milk-shake mixers in 1954 in San Bernardino, California. The McDonald's brothers were two of Kroc's biggest customers. Their McDonald's Self-Service Restaurant used Kroc's unit that could make five milkshakes at once. Kroc was amazed by their self-service system and envisioned the expansion of the restaurant around the country. However, the brothers were less ambitious and content with their <https://assignbuster.com/fast-food-nation-chapter-summaries-essay-sample/>

current success. They had no wish to travel elsewhere. Kroc convinced them to sell him the right to franchise the restaurant nationwide. After an agreement was settled, Kroc reached out to Disney to see if there was an opportunity for McDonald's in the Disneyland Development. Kroc had high hopes, but his proposal went nowhere. Disney's company progressed much more quickly than McDonald's and served as an example for Kroc.

Meanwhile, Walt Disney founded the marketing strategy known as synergy. He allowed other companies to use Disney-licensed characters, like Mickey, with their products and advertisements. Later on, Kroc used similar techniques to expand his franchise.

During the Baby Boom era, Kroc wanted to market the restaurant to families and create a safe All-American place for children. In 1960, one McDonald's franchise cleverly sponsored Bozo's Circus, a local television show in the Washington D. C. area. The clown's appearance in the restaurant often drew large crowds, eventually leading to the creation of McDonald's own Ronald McDonald clown. Kroc added Playlands "playgrounds" to the franchises to increase kid and family appeal. Next, Schlosser discusses how companies began to market to children in the 1980s. The fast food industry created promotional partnerships with toy manufacturers to gain more customers. The idea was give away simple toys with children's meals and sell fancier ones at a discount. Kids would encourage their parents to take them frequently so that they can collect the entire set being advertised on TV. In 1996, Disney signed a ten-year marketing deal with McDonald's and achieved synergy between the two companies.

Schlosser also discusses McDonald's "Trusted Friend" campaign, which attempted to make consumers feel that the restaurant truly cares about them. The company wanted parents to feel like they are being good parents when they take them to McDonald's. The last section of the chapter discusses how fast food has been incorporated into schools. Many fast food chains have offered finances to needy schools in exchange for advertising and marketing of their products throughout the school. Schlosser says most school advertising campaigns are "subtle." He cites a 1998 study that found that teaching materials provided by Consumers Union contained slanted information that favored the sponsor's product or views. Today, about 30 percent of public high schools in the US provide branded fast food in their school cafeteria. Chapter 3: Behind the Counter

"Smile with a greeting and make a positive first impression," a Burger King training manual suggests. "Show them you are GLAD TO SEE THEM. Include eye contact with the cheerful greeting." The author takes the readers back to Colorado Springs onto Academy Boulevard, a new sprawling development where fast food joints repeat every few miles. Full of new housing developments, the area is populated with people that moved from the west coast to the Rockies. Schlosser gives a sense that the place is like Los Angeles in the 1950s, once a "sleepy tourist town" and ripe for economic opportunity. At the outbreak of World War II, the city relied on military spending with the opening of Camp Carson and Peterson Army Air Base in the area. After the war ended, the city gained more military bases. Just the number of army and military personnel grew to larger than the entire city's

population before the war. Many defense contractors were also moved from southern California to Colorado Springs.

The influx of new people, also brought new attitudes that made the city “ a magnet for evangelical Christian groups.” Schlosser stresses that despite the vast tech and aerospace industry, the state’s largest private employer is the restaurant industry. Kroc started growing his franchise by selecting sites that were nearby schools. Years later, McDonald’s began using helicopters to find areas with large growth patterns and cheap land that would end up being close to future suburban communities. In the next section, the author discusses how adolescents play an essential role in the workforce of the fast food industry. Schlosser notes that about two-thirds of the nation’s fast food workers are under the age of 20. “ Instead of relying upon a small, stable, well-paid, and well-trained workforce, the fast food industry seeks out part-time, unskilled workers who are willing to accept low pay.

Teenagers have been the perfect candidates for these jobs, not only because they are less expensive to hire than adults, but also because their youthful inexperience makes them easier to control.” Schlosser attributes business historian Alfred D. Chandler to argue that a high rate of “ throughput” was the most important aspect of mass labor production systems. To clarify, a factory’s throughput is determined that the speed and volume of its flow, rather than how many people work there or the quality of their machinery. The McDonald’s brothers may not have used this particular term, but certainly applied these principles with their speedy self-service system. Another aspect of successful throughput is strict regimentation at fast food



restaurants. Corporations impose strict rules on how a task is to be performed and make tasks so they require as little skill as possible.

Consequently, it is easy to replace workers with new hires, cheaply and efficiently. Schlosser attacks the industry for collecting government subsidies for employee training and using the funding instead to create more technologies to eliminate training for workers. Schlosser also suggests stroking is also another important aspect of the fast food industry. Stroking is a form of positive reinforcement to make workers feel they are valued. For some people, especially teenagers, this “deliberate praise” might be something that they may not receive at home or in school for their contributions. Schlosser says this technique is used because it is cheaper than paying overtime or raising wages. The restaurant industry hires the highest amount of low wage workers with the highest turnover.

Schlosser notes that most of the young workers in Colorado Springs never thought of organizing a union. Teens who did not like their working conditions would quit and find another job elsewhere and “the cycle goes on and on.” Next, Schlosser discusses crime in fast food chains. Schlosser says four to five people are murdered every month during a restaurant robbery. Surprisingly, the people who are employed in these restaurants are the same demographic that is responsible for these violent crimes. In fact, there have been many instances where previous restaurant employees have robbed their place of previous employment. Chapter 4: Success

“Becoming a franchisee is an odd combination of starting your own business and going to work for someone else.” Schlosser decides to take a ride with

pizza delivery guy, Matthew Kabong, in Pueblo, Colorado. Kabong works for Little Caesars and studies electrical engineering at the local college. Kabong explains that Pueblo is the rundown, working class part of Colorado Springs. Despite the socio-economic distinction, the emergence of restaurant chains and big name stores has leveled out the playing field to make Pueblo more like the rest of its surrounding towns. The Little Caesars, where Kabong works, is owned by Dave Feemster, a previous National Hockey League Player. After sustaining a serious injury, Feemster was forced to stop playing and leave his team. A friend suggested that he become a Little Caesars franchisee. He trained as an assistant manager for \$300 a week.

The franchise fee was \$15,000. Once he bought his first franchise, he had to give the company back 5 percent of his revenues and contribute 4 percent to advertising. The franchises also require that the franchisees also provide the capital for the construction of their own restaurant. Schlosser says that before his business even sold a single pizza, Feemster was already \$200,000 in debt. It took him over three years to pay off that debt. Schlosser criticizes the franchise system used by many fast food restaurant chains for misleading franchisees into believing that starting a business as a franchise was less risky than self-starting a business. "In 1998 an IFA Survey claimed 92 percent of all franchisees said they were 'successful.' The survey was based on a somewhat limited sample: franchisees who were still in business. Franchisees who'd gone bankrupt were never asked if they felt unsuccessful."

Schlosser defends his point, citing Timothy Bates, a professor of economics at Wayne State University, who believes that the International Franchise

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Association has vastly overstated the benefits of franchising. Bates conducted a study for a federal loan agency that found that “ within four to five years of opening, 38. 1 percent of new franchised business had failed.” Schlosser finds there is very little to protect franchisees and their employees. Federal law requires full disclosure prior to a sale but cannot dictate how they are governed after. Schlosser notes: “ It is perfectly legal under federal law for a fast food chain to take kickback (known as “ rebates”) from its suppliers, to open a new restaurant next door to an existing franchise, and to evict a franchisee without giving cause or paying any compensation.”

#### Chapter 5: Why the Fries Taste Good

“ The fries on the plate looked wildly out of place in this laboratory setting, this surreal food factory with its computer screens, digital readouts, shiny steel platforms, and evacuation plans in case of ammonia gas leaks.” The second half of this book, “ Meat and Potatoes,” focuses on the food served in fast foods restaurants. This chapter in particular is about fries, how they are made, and how they are processed for fast food restaurants. The author travels to Aberdeen, Idaho to the potato plant of J. R. Simplot. The plant, built in the 1950s, is considered small today, yet it still processes about a million pounds of potatoes every day. Simplot was born in 1909 and grew up working on his father’s farm. He dropped out of school and began working at a potato warehouse to eventually become a potato farmer. Over time, he learned and perfected a new method for drying onions and potatoes.

During the war, Simplot sold dried onions and potatoes to American military food suppliers. He used his profits from the military contracts to buy more potato farms and cattle ranches. By his mid-thirties, Simplot was a success

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at growing his own potatoes and processing them at his own factories. After the war ended, Simplot invested in frozen food, believing it would be the primary means of providing meals in the future. Simplot began selling frozen french fries in 1953. Sales were initially down, because frying them at home did not appeal to busy homemakers. He realized that restaurant owners would see the appeal of frozen fries as time-saving and help maintain the consistency and quality of fries in all locations. Simplot met with Ray Kroc in 1965 and the following year Simplot became the main supplier of french fries to McDonald's. Only two companies are larger than J. R. Simplot Company in frozen fries production in the United States: Lamb Weston, and McCain, who became number two after buying Ore-Ida in 1997.

Schlosser says these three companies control approximately 80 percent of the frozen fries market in America. Because fries have become a bulk commodity, Schlosser says they can be manufactured in high volumes at a low profit margin. This is a tremendous benefit to fast food chains by lowering their wholesale costs. " Out of every \$1. 50 spent on a large order of fries at a fast food restaurant, perhaps 2 cents goes to the farmer who grew the potatoes." Next, Schlosser explains why the fries at fast food chains taste so good. McDonald's used to fry its fries in 7 percent cottonseed oil and 93 percent beef tallow. After receiving much criticism about the cholesterol content in their fries, the chain switched to pure vegetable oil. Now the restaurant was challenged to make the fries taste the same without using the tallow. Today's list of ingredients shows " natural flavor" as the secret ingredient. What exactly is natural flavor? Schlosser says they are " man-made ingredients that give most processed food its taste."

An entire flavor industry is built around giving processed food (anything that has been canned, frozen, dehydrated, etc.) a flavorful taste again. Schlosser quotes Terry Acree, a professor of food science technology at Cornell University, "A natural flavor is a flavor that's been derived with an out-of-date technology." Schlosser stresses that natural flavors are not necessarily healthier, they are simply derived from a different process than artificial flavors. The New Jersey Turnpike is home to the largest companies in the flavor district of America. Schlosser visits the International Flavors & Fragrances (IFF), which is the largest flavor company in the nation.

He was not invited to see the manufacturing areas of the plant, but Schlosser did have an opportunity to sample the flavors. To Schlosser's surprise there was nothing to taste. Small glass bottles were brought to him and he was asked to dip testing filter strips and smell them. "After closing my eyes, I suddenly smelled a grilled hamburger. The aroma was uncanny, almost miraculous. It smelled like someone in the room was flipping burgers on a hot grill. But when I opened my eyes, there was just a narrow strip of white paper and a smiling flavorist." Chapter 6: On the Range

"Hank wanted me to see the difference between his form of ranching and 'raping the land.'"

Schlosser opens the chapter describing the first person he met in Colorado Springs, a local rancher the named Hank. He wanted to learn from Hank how development in the area and the fast food industry mandates were affecting local cattle business. Hank showed Schlosser the new subdivisions that are being built on areas where cattle used to roam. Hank raised his cattle by

moving them from one pasture to the next. The cattle grazed on the greens and then were herded to a new fresh pasture of greens. This method allows for the indigenous flora and fauna to regrow and recover. As they drove by more of the nearby ranches, Schlosser realized that the city grew without much official planning or zoning restrictions. Schlosser outlines numerous problems ranchers are tackling today including, rising land prices, stagnant beef prices, developmental pressures, oversupply of cattle, as well as health concerns and anxiety about the consumption of beef. The most significant problem lies with the rapid growth of the fast food industry and the consolidation of the the meatpacking industry.

For example, McDonald's wanted to increase the uniformity of its product and consequently decided to reduce its number of beef suppliers to five. Many ranchers feel that large corporations are imposing mandates on the market and use unfair methods to lower the price of cattle. In the next section, Schlosser describes the methods used to create the chicken nugget. Tyson actually developed a new breed of chickens to enable the production of McNugget. The " Mr. McDonald" chicken was characteristic for having very large breasts. Ultimately, the new breed changed the system for raising and processing poultry. " Twenty years ago, most chicken was sold whole; today about 90 percent of the chicken sold in the United States has been cut into pieces, cutlets, or nuggets." Schlosser notes that as a result of the McNugget contract, Tyson Foods became the largest producer of chicken in the world.

#### Chapter 7: Cogs in the Great Machine

" The smell is hard to forget but not easy to describe, a combination of live animals, manure, and dead animals being rendered into dog food. The smell

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is worst during the summer months, blanketing Greeley day and night like an invisible fog. Many people who live there no longer notice the smell; it recedes into the background, present but not present, like the sound of traffic for New Yorkers. Others can't stop thinking about the smell, even after years; it permeates everything, gives them headaches, makes them nauseous, interferes with their sleep." Greeley, Colorado is a meatpacking factory town home to ConAgra Beef Company, the country's largest meatpacking complex. ConAgra also operates feedlots and several slaughterhouses nearby. Three months before slaughter, the cattle are fed grain instead of blue grama to fatten them up quickly.

A steer will eat more than 3, 000 pounds of grain while he is in the feedlot. This method was developed during the depression, when a local school teacher, Warren Monfort, started to feed his cattle grain instead of grass. He soon became the nation's first large-scale cattle feeder. He was able to feed his cattle year-round and time his livestock sales to receive the best prices. He also found that the meat of the grain fed cattle was tender and fattier than meat of the grass-fed cattle. The other advantage was that the beef did not need to be aged and could be eaten within a few days of slaughter. Monfort's method was perfect for the fast food industry demands. Monfort and his son opened the first slaughterhouse in Greeley in 1960. Before coming to rural towns like Greeley, Chicago was considered the meatpacking capital of the United States and home to the Beef Trust.

These meatpacking firms were infamous for their working conditions. " In The Jungle (1906) Upton Sinclair described a litany of horrors: severe back and shoulder injuries, lacerations, amputations, exposure to dangerous

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chemicals, and memorably, a workplace accident in which a man fell into a vat and got turned into lard. The plant kept running and the lard was sold to unsuspecting consumers. Human beings, Sinclair argued, had been made “cogs in the great packing machine,” easily replaced and entirely disposable.” The book’s accuracy was later verified by several federal investigations, which eventually led to the creation of food safety legislation in 1906.

According to Schlosser, after World War II, meatpackers wages were increased and it proved to be a “desirable” and “stable job.” In the 1960s, a slaughterhouse named the Iowa Beef Packers (IBP) opened, which applied the same techniques as the Speedee Service System of McDonald’s.

The IBP plant featured a disassembly line, which dismissed the need for skilled workers for various tasks. Each worker was responsible for making one cut over and over again in the line. They also added feedlots near the slaughterhouses and moved everything over to more rural areas to avoid the urban labor union ideals. Currier J. Holman, one of the founders of IBP, was later tried and convicted for bribing union leaders and meat wholesalers. The low-cost production of beef from IBP forced Chicago meatpackers to also move West into more rural “anti-labor union” areas. The new plants paid 50 percent lower wages than what Chicago’s union workers were paid. In the 1980s at the slaughterhouse in Greeley, Monfort started hiring immigrants at the beef plant. Schlosser believes that the idea was to create a high turnover rate to help create a “workforce that is harder unionize and much easier to control.”

IBP was the first company to realize that immigrants are willing to work for lower wages than US citizens. IBP actually sends recruitment teams to poor

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communities to offer them low-wage employment. IBP hires buses to bring these workers from distant places to work in their slaughterhouses. Chapter 8: The Most Dangerous Job

“ I’m now struck by how many workers there are, hundreds of them, pressed close together, constantly moving, slicing, You see hardhats, white coats, flashes of steel. Nobody is smiling or chatting, they’re too busy, anxiously trying not to fall behind.” In this chapter, Schlosser takes readers into the slaughterhouse. He finds someone with access to the plant who is upset by the working conditions to give him a tour. Schlosser sees the entire gruesome process of cattle slaughter from the stunning of cattle to the cutting. Importantly, he observes the workers’ conditions inside. Schlosser says meatpacking is most dangerous job in America. One of the most dangerous aspects of the job are the knives people use to make cuts every two to three seconds. Many often accidentally stab themselves or someone around them. Schlosser criticizes the “ IBP revolution” for hazardous conditions meatpacking workers confront on a daily basis. Injury rates are directly linked with the speed of the disassembly line.

The faster the line runs the more likely that workers sustain injuries. In order to cope with pressure, many workers use methamphetamine to help them feel more self-confident and ready for the job. The worst job in the slaughterhouse belongs to the late-night cleaning crews. They are in charge of cleaning the mess left behind from the slaughtering of 3, 000-4, 000 cattle everyday. Their primary cleaning tool is a high-pressure hose that sprays a mixture of chlorine and water, heated to about 180 degrees. During the cleaning process, a thick fog engulfs the plant and visibility is reduced to less

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than five feet. The smell is overwhelming and many vomit on the job. Even worse is cleaning the vents of the slaughterhouse. During the winter, when the vents are clogged with grease and dried blood, the area becomes icy and the winds are brutal. Many workers fear being blown off the roof into the darkness. The death rate among sanitation workers is very high. Schlosser grimly adds, "The nation's worst job can end up in just about the worst way.

Sometimes these workers are literally ground up and reduced to nothing."

During the course of his research, Schlosser observed that as the disassembly lines became faster and more illegal immigrants replaced skilled workers. The federal government also reduced its enforcement by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). In the 1980s, the number of meatpacking injuries rose, yet the number of OSHA inspections fell. In 1919, Colorado was one of the first states to offer workers' compensation to enable urgent care and income for injured workers.

However, in 1991, Colorado began to impose harsh restrictions on workers' comp payments. Benefits were reduced for injured employees. At present, it can take a long time for an injured person to receive their workers' comp benefits. When an injury is easily visible the company agrees to pay immediately, but if the injury is listed as cumulative trauma, the compensation process is often prolonged with litigation. Chapter 9: What's In the Meat

"A series of tests conducted by Charles Gerba, a microbiologist at the University of Arizona, discovered far more fecal bacteria in the average American kitchen sink than on the average American toilet seat. According to Gerba, 'You'd be better off eating a carrot stick that fell in your toilet than <https://assignbuster.com/fast-food-nation-chapter-summaries-essay-sample/>

one that fell in your sink.” This chapter opens with a story about a man named Lee Harding. In August of 1997, he became the victim of food poisoning from frozen hamburger patties, which contained E. coli 0157: H7. The meat came from a fairly new, state-of-the-art Hudson Foods plant in Columbus. Public officials announced a recall on beef as soon as it was traced to the plant, but it was too late. 25 million pounds of the ground beef had already been eaten. Schlosser attributes the recent increase in foodborne illness to the way American food is produced.

Because American meat production is so “centralized,” more people are affected whenever contamination occurs. The uniform system required by corporations like McDonald’s has nurtured an “extremely efficient system for spreading the disease,” says Schlosser. Just in the last two decades, more foodborne pathogens have been discovered. The new pathogens are suspected to be coming from healthy animals. Food tainted with these pathogens have most likely come in contact with the infected animal’s stomach contents or manure during slaughter and processing. Schlosser cites an appalling USDA study to make his case, “78.6 percent of the ground beef contained microbes that are spread primarily by fecal matter.” The next section deals with the refusal of the meat packing industry to implement a science-based inspection system. This involves testing the meat frequently for potentially harmful microbes. After Jack in the Box’s infamous outbreak in 1993, the company made great strides to improve the safety of its food at all levels of its production.

David Theno, the master behind the safety system at Jack in the Box, is loved by consumer groups and heralded as the “Antichrist,” by those in the <https://assignbuster.com/fast-food-nation-chapter-summaries-essay-sample/>

meatpacking industry. Theno is an advocate of seeing a “ performance-based grading” for slaughterhouses. The ones that produces consistently clean meat would receive a ‘ A’ and plants that performed moderately receive a ‘ B’ and so on. The grades would be based on microbial testing. He believes that the E. coli problem can be solved easily and quickly saying it “ is a matter of will not technology.” Schlosser notes that the Jack in the Box food safety program raises the cost of the chain’s ground beef by about only one penny per pound. Another meatpacking industry issue of concern is the slow pace of recall or lack of recall when an outbreak occurs. Schlosser states that under current law, the USDA has no authority to demand a recall. When something happens, the USDA and the meatpacking company go into negotiations about the timing and scale of the recall.

Schlosser emphasizes that every day that passes in this negotiation period is another day people are eating contaminated meat. He supports his point by examining the Hudson Foods outbreak in 1997 and the amount of time it took to inform the public. He also notes that companies are not obligated to inform the public or even state health officials about contamination. The Clinton Administration backed legislation to give the USDA authority to impose civil fines on meatpackers and demand meat recalls. But Congress failed to enact this bill and similar legislation presented later. Schlosser does not blame contamination solely on the meat industry. Often the people preparing the food at restaurants are responsible too. He notes the several interviews with fast food employees who told him horror stories about the food served. Many of the workers said they would not eat the food unless they prepared it themselves. Chapter 10: Global Realization

“[Activist Dave Morris] spoke intensely about McDonald’s, but stressed that its arrogant behavior was just one manifestation of a much larger problem now confronting the world: the rise of powerful multinationals that shift capital across borders with few qualms, that feel no allegiance to any nation, no loyalty to any group of farmers, workers, or consumers.” In this chapter, Schlosser discusses the expansion of fast food chains around the world. The McDonald’s Corporation called this growth, “ global realization.” Today McDonald’s gains the majority of its profits from outside the United States. Their brand is more widely known than Coca-Cola. As more fast food chains moved overseas, their suppliers also set up shop in foreign countries at the same time. To avoid suspicions of imperialism, chains try to purchase as many of their supplies from the countries they operate in.

The idea is to set up similar agricultural systems in the country, instead of importing all the food from the United States. For example, in 1993, J. R. Simplot started growing potatoes and opened the first french fries factory in China to supply Chinese McDonald’s. Another issue of importance is the increased rate of obesity in the last few decades due to fast food consumption. Schlosser remarks, “ By eating like Americans, people all over the world are beginning to look like Americans.” Schlosser supports his claim with quotes, facts and figures from nutritionists, medical literature, and scientific research studies. Fast food chains have tried to create and promote healthier menu items but, most attempts fail. Campaigns in the last few decades to double, triple, or mega size food orders haven’t helped consumers control portion size and caloric intake.

Fast food may give consumers a lot of bang for their buck, in reality, the annual health care costs arising from obesity are close to \$240 billion, according to a 1999 Reuters article cited by Schlosser. He also finds, “Americans today spend more than \$33 billion on various weight-loss schemes and diet products.” The obesity epidemic is spreading to the rest of the world. Great Britain is the largest consumer of fast food after the United States. They also have the highest obesity rate in Western Europe. Schlosser says China and Japan have also seen increased rates of obesity due to fast food chains changing the Asian diet. While many embrace fast food culture, many around the world continue to oppose it. During the 1990s, American fast food chains were often targets of overseas demonstrations. These restaurants became a symbol of “American Imperialism.” For example, in 1996, Indian farmers in Bangalore attacked a Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) because they felt the chain threatened their traditional agricultural practices. Schlosser goes on to list a number of angry occurrences around the world against chains like McDonald’s.

In the next section, Schlosser talks about the infamous “McLibel” trial in Great Britain and how it became the “longest trial in British history and a public relations disaster for McDonald’s.” Two London Greenpeace activists had handed out a leaflet entitled, “What Wrong with McDonald’s?”. It accused the fast food chain of promoting poverty, selling unhealthy food, exploiting workers, torturing animals and more. Helen Steel and Dave Morris did not write the leaflet; they just handed it out. McDonald’s had plenty of resources and decided to sue the two for libel. Morris and Steel had their work cut out for them. They had to find witnesses and locate numerous

official documents to support the claims in the leaflet. McDonald's was confident it would win the case and made the error of assuming that everything in the leaflet was libelous.

Even though Steel and Morris were able to defend only some of the leaflet's content, the trial led to a public examination of the chain's labor policies. The trial made front-page news in British media. In an attempt to save their case, McDonald's had spies attend Greenpeace meetings from 1989-1991. "The spying had begun in 1989 and did not end until 1991, nearly a year after the libel suit had been filed. McDonald's had used subterfuge not only to find out who'd distributed the leaflets, but also to learn how Morris and Steel planned to defend themselves in court." Epilogue: Have It Your Way

"The executives that run the fast food industry are not bad men. They are businessmen. They will sell free-range, organic, grass-fed hamburgers if you demand it. They will sell whatever sells at a profit." The author circles back to Colorado to tie up loose ends. Schlosser attempts to show readers examples of successful places that haven't been corrupted by corporate greed and still serve quality food. Instead of taking readers back into the world of fast food, Schlosser visits Dale Lasater, a Rockies rancher, located in the small town of Matheson. Lasater's philosophy on raising cattle is to let nature do most of the work. The cattle are fed grass instead of grain. Lasater recently started a company to sell organic, free-range grass beef. As a result, his meat is lower in fat content, and has a "stronger, more distinctive flavor." About sixty miles away from the Lasater Ranch is a place called Red Top Restaurant owned by Rich Conway. Conway's small Red Top

chain managed to survive in Colorado Springs despite the influx of fast food chains in the 1970s.

The family business is known for hamburger patties that are made by hand with fresh beef and fries made by peeled potatoes everyday. The restaurant is a fraction more expensive than the Wendy's across the street. The challenge Red Top faces is how to "expand the business without compromising the values responsible for its success," says Schlosser. In-N-Out Burger is another family-owned successful chain. Owners Harry and Esther Snyder opened the first restaurant in 1948 and declined many offers to sell the chain. Schlosser believes the chain has "always followed their own path", paying the highest wages in the fast food industry. Full-time workers receive benefits that include medical, dental, vision, and life insurance. Schlosser says, "The managers have, on average, been with the chain for more than thirteen years." Even with high wages, In-N-Out doesn't have higher food prices or lower quality food. In fact, the opposite is true; the chain has ranked the highest in food quality, value, service, atmosphere, and cleanliness.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Schlosser cites a poll from Restaurants and Institutions in 2000, for rating McDonald's with the lowest-quality food served at a major hamburger chain. Schlosser urges readers about "what to do" and "how to do it." Schlosser thinks Congress should ban all advertisements directed at children to promote unhealthy foods. In effect, children would be discouraged from bad eating habits at an early age, and fast food chains would be encouraged to create healthier recipes for their menus. A similar campaign against cigarette advertising proved highly

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successful and sales of cigarettes have “ declined ever since.” He outlines and elaborates on the various issues fast food industry needs to amend. In summary Schlosser writes: “ Congress should ban advertising that preys upon children, it should stop subsidizing dead-end jobs, it should pass tougher food safety laws, it should protect American workers from serious harm, it should fight against dangerous concentrations of economic power, but it isn’t likely to do any of the soon.

The political influence of the fast food industry and its agribusiness suppliers makes a discussion what congress should do largely academic.” Schlosser urges Congress to resist fast food lobbies and apply pressure directly to the fast food industry. He compares today’s US agricultural practices to the centralized system of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. At one point, the American decentralized system of agriculture depended on millions of independent producers and was depicted as the “ most productive system in the world.” Faster than any legislation Congress can pass, the power to change the fast food industry is in the hands of consumers and the chains themselves. If McDonald’s were to demand higher wages and safer conditions for its meatpacking workers, the suppliers would have to provide them. Schlosser says, “ Nobody in the United States is forced to buy fast food.”

If consumers demand better quality food, fast food chains would have to provide or risk losing their consumers to other places that are providing better food. “ Pull open the glass door, feel the rush of cool air, walk inside, get in line, and look around you, look at the kids working in the kitchen, at the customers in their seats, at the ads for the latest toys, study the backlit

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color photographs above the counter, think about where the food came from, about how and where it was made, about what is set in motion by every single fast food purchase, the ripple effect near and far, think about it. Then place your order. Or turn and walk out the door. It's not too late. Even in this fast food nation, you can still have it your way." Afterword

This section was recently added to the 2012 editions of *Fast Food Nation*. Schlosser reminisces over the past decade since the initial publication of the book. He wishes that the book was out-of-date, but unfortunately that isn't the case. The issues discussed in this book are just as relevant today as they were decade ago. Upton Sinclair would be amazed at just how little has changed in the last century. Despite the problems that still exist, he acknowledges that a healthy food movement has taken place and a number of authors, filmmakers, chefs and activists are responsible. There is a new culture, which rejects highly processed foods, genetically modified foods, and industrial food production. People are embracing the back to basics attitude towards food, with many restaurants using only locally sourced and sustainable ingredients on their menus.

Parents have also taken up the cause, urging school systems around the country to ban fast food, junk food like sodas and candy on school campuses. Schlosser also discusses the various positive and negative responses he received to the publication of this book. He is thankful that none of the industry attacks on the book have been based on factual errors in the text. "Everything that I've learned since *Fast Food Nation* was published has made me more, not less, optimistic about the possibilities for change. I believe, more than ever before, that nothing about our current food system was

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inevitable. And when things aren't inevitable, that means things don't have to be the way they are. I hope that 10 years from now this book really is irrelevant—and that the world it describes, so full of greed and lacking in compassion, is just a bad memory.”