

McDonald's corporation

[Business](#), [Company](#)



When two families decided to hold McDonald's Corporation accountable for their overweight daughters, film school dropout Morgan Spurlock was intrigued by the cultural implications of such a development that he decided to embark on a month-long self-experimentation with a McDonald's diet. Spurlock documented the experience in *Super Size Me*, but more interestingly he also argues the dining choices at the Golden Arches and fast food culture as a whole are inherently unhealthy by examining the history of fast food culture through colorful anecdotes, and diverse interviews with nutritionists, food company representatives and educators.

In the interest of fairness, he emphasizes that some weight must be given to personal responsibility in healthy eating, but the eating culture produced by fast food is a massive obstacle to this. Ultimately, Spurlock concludes that society must begin to hold fast food companies accountable for their menus. Spurlock (5-6) observes that the massive success of McDonald's has a trickle-down effect on American consumer culture. Spurlock is not off the mark here. In *Fast Food Nation*, Eric Schlosser notes much of American life has been franchised, with many of these franchisers being inspired by the billion dollar profits of McDonald's.

Franchising extends so far that between a Columbia/HCA maternity ward franchise and the Service Corporation International funeral home and cemetery franchise, it is possible now for one person to "go from the cradle to the grave without spending a nickel at an independently owned business." Schlosser argues that fast food culture is the logical result of a series of political and economic choices, which Spurlock indicates to have profound implications on our cultural understanding of food.

As indicated above, personal responsibility is one of the most important factors behind a society's ability to make healthy eating choices. However, the ubiquity of fast food culture defeats this. In effect, fast food companies have successfully used the line of personal responsibility as a means to evade their corporate social responsibility. Spurlock takes issue with the way fast food targets the youth demographic, which influences consumption decisions and popular understanding of nutrition.

With massive advertising budgets and celebrity endorsements food companies send problematic messages about nutrition, argues Spurlock. Schlosser (51-57) supports Spurlock's view by complaining that fast food companies have also penetrated the public school system by mixing advertising with education and putting junk food into lunch period. Through strategic partnerships with public schools, fast food is able to gain casual acceptance among children as a way of dining, as well as affiliate itself with notions of health, education and leisure.

Not helping things is the fact that "schools turn a blind eye" to these matters, and in a visit to one public school, Spurlock points out that educators and cafeteria workers are quick to rationalize poor food choices at the lunch counter. Furthermore, food companies have penetrated the cafeteria with sugary drinks, junky snacks and candy bars, despite educators' ostensible concern for physical health and nutrition. Strutt (9) notes that there is an inherent hypocrisy in this. By allowing companies representing fast food, soft drinks and candy to sponsor education and sporting events, they send mixed messages about personal health.

Promoting a message of a healthy lifestyle alongside junk food sponsorship ultimately weakens that message. In effect, society is collectively at fault in being complicit with the promotion of fast food. Furthermore, the increasingly sedentary habits in modern living means that children lack benefits from healthy exercise which can stymie calorie-rich food intake which characterizes fast food. (Harper 20-22) Additionally, the fast food culture has begun to supplant traditionally prepared foods with highly processed ones in the diets of millions of Americans.

In one cafeteria, Spurlock discovers that food preparation has been reduced to reheating and reconstituting highly processed foods making the “ school cook” a quaint concept of the past. Manning argues that food companies reduce food into commodities. In one striking passage, he notes that the Department of Agriculture no longer aims to feed people so much as it does get them to eat whatever commodity happens to be in surplus. Over the decades, this was usually corn, which is now processed in various ways to add value to food commodities.

(Manning 188-190) Spurlock complains that today much of what we eat involves components and preparation methods that are hardly used in the kitchen. Fast food, which includes off-the-shelf food products in the supermarket and cafeteria inventory, is no longer cooked so much as they are engineered. Of course, matters of poor nutrition, questionable production methods could be avoided with proper information and diverse options, but Spurlock observes that not only do fast food menus provide little in the way of healthy alternatives, but nutritional information about the contents of their food is either poorly distributed or nonexistent.

It is practically impossible for anybody dining at a fast food place to make responsible choices if information cannot be acquired about the fat content of their burgers, or the sugar content of their shakes and if even the alternatives like salads and granolas are laden with calorie-rich dressing and sugar-laced yogurt. As a whole, Spurlock makes a compelling argument for why fast food companies should be held accountable for the myriad problems in nutrition.

On the surface, Spurlock can easily be criticized for overlooking the fact that the success of fast food companies stems from a free market system. However, Spurlock's argument relies less on the fact that fast food is unhealthy and more on the fact that fast food companies have unparalleled cultural hegemony in the media, schools and in the commercial landscape of America. Simply put, Spurlock argues that fast food has become firmly ensconced within American culture. Its ubiquity is what makes its adverse effects so powerful.

Make no mistake: Spurlock does prove that fast food is unhealthy. Over the course of his self-experimentation, which he admits to be an extreme example rather than a realistic scenario, he inflicts various health ailments upon himself through what his nutritionists later call a "Mac Attack." However, millions of Americans consume fast food on a regular basis with little to no exercise, so it is reasonable to suspect that even a "normal" fast food consumption level would have similar effects.

While Spurlock binged himself into bodily shock, ordinary Americans will probably experience similar effects as a long-term result of the 'average' unhealthy lifestyle. In any case, while society should recognize that

fast food does bear great fault for poor health across the United States and other similarly developed nations, fast food companies cannot be expected to develop social responsibility with any level of trustworthiness if it compromises their bottom line.

To paraphrase one former spokesperson interviewed in the movie: they could be part of the solution, but they will still be part of the problem. Ultimately, Spurlock's case against fast food is not left-wing vegan propagandizing – much to his vegan chef girlfriend's chagrin, he insists that he can never deny himself of meat – but rather a case to incite people to hold fast food companies accountable for the influence they wield in the media, the presence they maintain in schools and the dining options they make available.

Fast food culture is ultimately about convenience, but convenience does not mean absolving companies of their responsibilities. Overall, *Super Size Me* makes the most valid case for letting personal responsibility become the underlying principle behind challenging nutritional negligence on the part of fast food companies. Spurlock does this by recognizing that economic decisions such as where and what to eat are also political ones. Works Cited
Super Size Me.

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