

# Fast food nation essay

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Fast Food Nation Eric Schlosser explores the severe consequences of the rise of the fast food empire in America in his book *Fast Food Nation*. His thesis is blatantly displayed on the front cover of his book "the Dark Side of the All-American Meal". After reading his work I have to agree that the fast food industry does indeed have a dark side. It is a well-known fact that fast food is unhealthy to consume.

What is not commonly known is just how unhealthy it actually is and how the fast food industry has affected our social construct in a most adverse way. " Hundreds of millions of people buy fast food everyday without giving it much thought... they rarely consider where this food came from, how it was made, what it is doing to the community around them" (Schlosser 10). In today's society fast food consumption has become synonymous with pop culture and pop culture is the result of mass media consumerism. " Fast food has joined Hollywood movies, blue jeans, and pop music as one of America's most prominent cultural exports. Unlike other commodities however, fast food isn't viewed, read, played, or worn. It enters the body and becomes part of the consumer. No other industry offers, both literally and figuratively, so much insight into the nature of mass consumption.

" (Schlosser 10) This quote eloquently conveys just why the take over of America by the Fast Food Empire is an issue that deserves immediate action. We are what we eat. And the consumer has a right to know just what they are eating. The fast food industry ominously threatens America's health as well as its environment.

A Fast Food Nation is Born The history behind the vast and ever growing span of fast food chains throughout this nation goes deeper than any average consumer could guess. In the era of the rise of the automobile in America fast food pioneers jumped at the chance to make a quick and easy buck catering to the newly mobile working class. Since its onset the industry has won the favor of Congress and the Whitehouse in order to protect its interests. Lobbying for laws that will oppose food safety and worker safety, one can't help but wonder how a nation that boasts the "safest food in the world" can sleep at night. According to a study conducted by agricultural economist from the Organic Center in Greenfield, Massachusetts "In four (other) areas, the U.

S. food supply would not rank in the top ten percent of countries, and maybe not even in the top one-third." (Organic Consumers Association) What is motivating our government and Food Safety administrations to turn a blind eye to the atrocities happening nationwide in the preparation and provision of fast food? The answer is simple: pure unadulterated economics. Since square one fast food giant McDonald's has been working effectively at buying the favor of White House. Ray Kroc, Chairman of the McDonald's Corporation, donated \$250, 000 to President Nixon's presidential campaign in 1972, that same year the McDonald's bill passed in Congress allowing the minimum wages of employees under the age of 18 to be decreased by 20 percent. (Schlosser 37) Marketing To America's Youth Indeed McDonald's began its infiltration into mass advertisement at the perfect moment.

With an ad campaign directed mainly at children the baby boom era provided a significant raise in the nation's number of children. (Schlosser 41)

“ A child who loves our TV commercials and brings her grandparents to McDonald's gives us two more consumers” says Kroc. (Schlosser 41) An industry that spends approximately \$3 billion on television advertising annually must be doing something right as “ every month about 90% of American children between ages of three and nine visit a McDonald's” (Schlosser 47) This fact comes as no surprise when one considers that about one quarter of the nation's children between the ages of two and five have a TV in their bedroom. (Schlosser 46) How to attract children? Toys of course! Ray Kroc, being an insatiably competitive man borrowed Walt Disney's method of attracting the attentions of children and had play lands installed in each McDonald's location. “ With its hamburger patch, apple pie trees, and Fillet-O-Fish fountain... McDonald's soon loomed large in the imagination of toddlers, the intended audience for the ads.” (Schlosser 42) Fast food has infiltrated our nation's schools through posted advertisements and lunchroom franchises rendering our children a captive audience to its indoctrination. In the early 90's a school district in Colorado Springs was first in a nationwide trend by allowing Burger King to advertise in its hallways and on its school buses.

“ For \$12, 000 a company got five school bus ads, hallway ads in all 52 of the district's schools, ads in their school newspapers, a stadium banner... and free tickets to high school sporting events” (Schlosser 51)One cannot conceive of fast food without also conceiving of soda to wash it down. The average American consumes roughly six hundred twelve ounce cans of soda

a year. The adult market however, isn't yielding favorable enough results for soda giants so their ad campaigns have been augmented to target elementary school children.

(Schlosser 53) What's so bad about a good old-fashioned soda pop? It's tasty, its readily available at virtually every restaurant, grocery store, gas station and convenience store in the free world; it's American. A brief look at results that the Center for Science in the Public Interest yielded in their press release Liquid Candy and it is plain to see that health-wise everything is bad about a soda pop. " Soft drinks provide large amounts of sugars (mostly high-fructose corn syrup) to many individuals' diets. Soda pop provides the average 12- to 19-year-old boy with about 15 teaspoons of refined sugars a day and the average girl with about 10 teaspoons a day. Those amounts roughly equal the government's recommended limits for teens' sugar consumption from all foods." (cspinet. org) Joining the fast food giants in mass marketing frenzy the soft drink companies have made our nation one giant billboard for the promotion of ill health.

" Soft drinks are heavily consumed in part because companies promote them vigorously and market them everywhere—in stores, restaurants, gas stations, museums, vending machines, and even schools. Companies spend roughly \$700 million on media advertising each year, and hundreds of millions more on other promotional activities, which may involve musicians, actors, contracts with schools, and price discounting." (cspinet. org)The Food Is CrapWhen one thinks of a McDonald's value meal images of a flame-broiled grade A burger on a grille, a chef wielding a spatula in a crisp white

apron, and fresh potatoes being sliced in the kitchen and dipped into delicious oils in the fryer generally spring to mind. A conception artfully fed to us through television commercials no doubt, but a conception that is in fact a fallacious fancy of a marketing agency.

An image so far from the actual production of the value meal it could and should be called false advertising. That flame-broiled char-grilled flavor is cooked up in a lab by chemists in New Jersey. If one were to check the ingredients that comprise McDonald's fries they would come across the vague term "natural flavor" at the end of the list. This "natural" ingredient in actuality is a mixture of synthetic additives. "The New Jersey Turnpike runs through the heart of the flavor industry, an industrial corridor dotted with refineries, and chemical plants... the area produces about two-thirds of the flavor additives sold in the U. S.

" (Schlosser 121) These companies not only provide the flavor of fast food but of every processed and virtually every frozen food sold in America as well as perfumes and toiletry products. "The basic science behind the scent of your shaving cream is the same as that governing the flavor of your TV dinner." (Schlosser 122) How did we get to a point where the majority of our nation's tastes are shaped by synthesized chemicals? In the 1950's processed food sales began to boom giving rise to the flavor industry. Today about 10,000 new processed-food products infiltrate the American market, all of which require chemical flavor additives.

(Schlosser 124) The reason that ad campaigns directed at children is an ingenious marketing strategy is because "aroma and memory are somehow

inextricably linked... the flavors of childhood foods seem to leave an indelible mark and adults often return to them without always knowing why.”

(Schlosser 123) Even our beloved household name Kool-Aid comes from just such a chemical factory. Methyl anthranilate was one of the first artificial flavors and was concocted accidentally by a German scientist mixing chemicals in his lab It is the main flavor ingredient in grape Kool-Aid.

(Schlosser 124) It is a frightening fact that the FDA does not regulate flavor companies usage of chemicals or require them to disclose their ingredients.

The only discriminatory measure employed is to determine whether the chemicals are GRAS, or generally regarded as safe. (Schlosser 125)

Generally regarded as safe sounds like an extremely ambiguous standard. A Burger King strawberry milkshake contains no less than 45 synthetic chemicals. (Schlosser 126) “ Today’s highly processed foods offer a blank palette: whatever chemicals you add to them will give them specific tastes.”

(Schlosser 126) “ Adding methyl-2-peridylketone makes something taste like popcorn... without affecting the appearance or nutritional value, processed foods could even be made with aroma chemicals such as hexanol (the smell of freshly cut grass)...” (Schlosser 126)The quality of the meat in fast food industry is not merely questionable, it is researched and established fact that the hamburger meat is not quality or healthy. First of all, American ranchers inject their cattle with bovine growth hormones. “ In addition to hormones used to increase milk production, there are six hormones approved for use in beef cattle. Two of these hormones, estradiol and zeranol, are likely to have negative human health effects, including cancer and impacts on child development, when their residues are present in meat.

" (CFFS) The European Union recognizes the ill effects of hormone usage and consequently banned its usage in meat production. (CFFS) Secondly, "there's shit in the meat." (Fast Food Nation- film) The conditions within slaughter houses are so sub-par that manure actually ends up in the beef. At the de-gutting table the line is moving too fast so that when intestines are pulled out feces spill out into the meat on a regular basis (Fast Food Nation- film) " Much like French fry factories, beef slaughter houses often operate at profit margins as low as a few pennies a pound. The three meat-packing giants- ConAgra, IBP, and Excel- try to increase their earnings by maximizing the volume of production at each plant. The profits it will earn are directly related to the speed of the line. A faster pace means higher profits."

(Schlosser 174) The future of America's food safety looks bleak as " the U. S. is likely to slip farther behind food safety leaders internationally as long as our leaders and public institutions remain in denial that the way we raise, manufacture, distribute and cook food has opened the door to some significant new risks." (Organic Consumers Assoc.)Hamburgers in a BottleA fast food hamburger's taste is engineered by flavor companies. (Schlosser 128) Schlosser visited one of the leading flavor companies IFF to interview its " flavorists" and to become familiarized with what they do in such a place. While there he partook in a " taste test" where he smelled several glass vials filled with aroma chemicals that the lab had synthesized.

He closed his eyes and smelled everything from fresh cherries to shrimp. One scent in particular floored Schlosser however, as he took in the unmistakable aroma of a grilled hamburger. He literally imagined a chef



grilling burgers right in the room but when he opened his eyes there was only a tiny white smelling strip in front of him. (Schlosser 129) This is the very same aroma that fills the nostrils when one is within close proximity to any fast food burger joint. In Conclusion Personal tastes are the result of conditioning and can therefore be changed at will through habituation (a Platonic concept). After reading Fast Food Nation I have come to the realization that most of America never questions what the media feeds them as acceptable nutrition.

As a result by repetitive consumption they are conditioned to crave the poisonous food and keep returning to ingest it. " Hamburgers and French fries could be as addictive as heroin, scientists have claimed." (BBC) By becoming aware of the causes behind our tastes for certain foods we can begin to modify which foods we gravitate toward and eventually we can come to crave what is beneficial to our bodies.

Personally I stopped consuming fast food when I realized the horrors behind the meatpacking industry as well as the synthetic and toxic chemicals that fast food contains. I have also resolved to steer clear of processed foods that contain many of the same chemicals. I don't see how a rational human being can deny the merit of the age-old adage " you are what you eat", a philosophy I now subscribe to even more whole-heartedly. Works Cited1. Schlosser, EricFast Food NationHoughton Mifflin CompanyBoston, New York 20012. Krebs, A.

V. “ Debunking the Myth that the U. S. has the Safest Food in the World”

Organic Consumers Association <http://www.organicconsumers.org/foodsafety/foodmyth040504.cfm>3.

“ Liquid Candy” Center For Science in the Public Interest <http://www.cspinet.org/liquidcandy/index.html>4. “ r/BGH/ Hormones” CFFS [http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/rbgh\\_hormo.cfm](http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/rbgh_hormo.cfm)5.

Fast Food Nation (Film) Richard Linklater Fox Searchlight Pictures 20066. “ Fast Food as ‘ Addictive as Heroin’” BBC News Jan. 2003 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/2707143>.

stmFast Food Nation Outline. Intro: why the take over of America by the Fast Food Empire is an issue that deserves immediate action. A. In today’s society fast food consumption has become synonymous with pop culture and pop culture is the result of mass media consumerism. B. Schlosser’s thesis is displayed on the front cover of his book “ the Dark Side of the All-American Meal”.

C. We are what we eat- what are we eating exactly? D. The fast food industry ominously threatens America’s health as well as its environment.

II. A Fast Food Nation is Born A. Fast food pioneers in the age of the automobile B. Friends with Congress and the Whitehouse C. FDA turns a blind eye to the slack safety standards in fast food.

III. Marketing to America’s Youth A. “ Every month about 90% of American children between ages of three and nine visit a McDonald’s” 1. How to attract children? Toys of course! 2. “ With its hamburger patch,

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apple pie trees, and Fillet-O-Fish fountain... McDonald's soon loomed large in the imagination of toddlers, the intended audience for the ads.

" B. Fast food ads infiltrate our public schoolsC. Soft drink industry joins in bombarding schools with commercial propaganda. 1. What's so bad about a good old-fashioned soda pop? 2.

" Soft drinks are heavily consumed in part because companies promote them vigorously and market them everywhere—in stores, restaurants, gas stations, museums, vending machines, and even schools..." IV. The Food Is CrapA. That flame-broiled char-grilled flavor is cooked up in a lab by chemists in New Jersey. B. " Natural flavor" not natural at all. C. How did we get to a point where the majority of our nation's tastes are shaped by synthesized chemicals? 1.

Today about 10, 000 new processed-food products infiltrate the American market, all of which require chemical flavor additives2. " aroma and memory are somehow inextricably linked... the flavors of childhood foods seem to leave an indelible mark and adults often return to them without always knowing why." D. FDA does not regulate flavor companies usage of chemicals.

E. The quality of the meat in fast food industry is not merely questionable, it is researched and established fact that the hamburger meat is not quality1. American ranchers inject their cattle with bovine growth hormones2. " There's shit in the meat." 3. Future of America's food safety looks bleak as " the U. S.

is likely to slip farther behind food safety leaders internationally as long as our leaders and public institutions remain in denial that the way we raise, manufacture, distribute and cook food has opened the door to some significant new risks." V. Hamburgers in a Bottle A Fast food hamburger's taste is engineered by flavor companies.

1. Schlosser partakes in a "taste test" with smelling vials. 2.

He took in the unmistakable aroma of a grilled hamburger. B. This is the same aroma in the air when one is within close proximity to any fast food burger joint. VI. Conclusion Personal tastes are the result of conditioning and can therefore be changed at will through habituation.

Most Americans never question what the media feeds them as acceptable nutrition. 1. They are conditioned to crave the poisonous food. 2. "Hamburgers and French fries could be as addictive as heroin, scientists have claimed." By becoming aware of the causes behind our tastes for certain foods we can begin to modify which foods we gravitate toward. I stopped consuming fast food when I learned the horrors behind the meatpacking industry and the synthetic and toxic chemicals that fast food contains. "You are what you eat", a philosophy I now subscribe to even more so.