

# A gigantic influence of fast food on today's world

Food & Diet



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Fast Food Nation seeks to expose the vast unknown about the fast food industry. Eric Schlosser not only exposes major fast food chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, and Jack in the Box, but also their suppliers (ConAgra, Excel), the political involvement in this industry and how greatly the world's population has been effected by all of this.

As with any other business, the fast food industry is primarily concerned with making a profit. This tunnel vision has led to major fast food companies along with their suppliers to go to extreme lengths to ensure this goal. As seen in the case with McDonald's, top executives went to lengths as far as performing lie detector tests to stop the formation of unions between its workers so that the workers wouldn't have any bargaining power against them for better wages and treatment. Suppliers also take extreme measures in order to ensure that their profit margin stays high, even at the expense of the physical well being of their employees. At processing plants like IBP, they would keep two different injury logs for their workers, one with the actual number of injuries, and another with a falsified number of injuries that they would provide to various government inspectors in order to avoid hefty fines and to make themselves look better not only to the government, but to the American people.

One may not realize how heavy an influence the fast food industry has on politics. Countless amounts of legislation has been passed in order to benefit fast food companies such as the McDonald's Bill, the Targeted Jobs Tax Credit, and companies have even abused the Small Business Administration for their own good. However, not all legislation that was focused on the fast food industry was necessarily in their favor. Coble's Bill sought to make

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franchisors obey the same business principles that other companies had to follow which would create an end to the unfair treatment that many of their franchisees suffered through. Unsurprisingly, fast food chains strongly oppose the bill. Other pieces of legislation have been fiercely opposed as well such as when the Clinton administration wanted to implement a tough, science-based food inspection system as to help avoid the spread of pathogens from unsanitary meat after an outbreak of E. coli at a Jack in the Box chain restaurant. The main opposition comes from the Republican Party because the meatpacking and fast food industries have been major financial backers to them.

The fast food industry has influenced and affected many people because of how prominent it is. A plethora of people work for these companies and the feeling towards them is mixed. The majority of people working in the companies' supplier plants are often unhappy because of the poor and back-breaking working conditions. Most of these people are immigrants who are afraid to say anything against the company that they're working for in fear of retribution. The people who work in the physical restaurants often report that their experience there is based on how their manager treats them.

Nevertheless, fast food companies continue to always have an endless supply of workers mainly in part to the lack of skill needed for many of their job positions. The workers of the companies aren't the only ones who have been affected by the fast food industry. The main effect can be seen in the weight of the American people. The obesity/overweight rate has greatly increased in America greatly in part to more people consuming fast food on a more regular basis. Although there have been attempts at adding healthier

dishes to the menus of many fast food chains, a lot of them have failed as people just don't see it as more appealing than what they've already grown accustomed to eating at that restaurant.

These chains have also been able to reach people all over the world because of globalization. Now, one can go essentially anywhere and run into a McDonald's, Pizza Hut or T. G. I. Friday's. The general acceptance of these restaurants comes from not only the fascination and admiration of American culture (especially seen in Japan), but also because a lot of the companies take active roles in trying to diminish fears of American imperialism by buying as much food as possible from the country that they're operating in.

Fast Food Nation delves into how the consequences of choices lie in the future when speaking about the fundamental changes to American society caused by the incredibly fast growth of the fast food industry. Stark changes include how a generation ago, three fourths of the money used for food was spent on home cooked meals but today, one half of the money used for food is spent at restaurants with the majority of them being fast food restaurants (p. 4). The growth of the fast food industry has also served as a catalyst to the spread of obesity, rise of franchising, and the malling/sprawling of the west (p. 9).

Voluntary trade created wealth for the McDonald brothers Richard and Maurice when they decided to completely overhaul their drive-in business. Originally, they were in constant need of new carhops, short-order cooks, dishes, glassware and silverware, all of which they realized was more of a hassle than it was worth (p. 19). After closing and then reopening three

months later, there were radical changes. They fired their carhops, eliminated any food that required an eating utensil, only sold sandwiches that were hamburgers or cheeseburgers, used different workers for different tasks during the food making process and got rid of their dishes and glassware (p. 20). By cutting out their surplus of services/goods that weren't necessarily helping their business, they were able to focus on what they could do best (fast service and hamburgers) and propel their business to success. Another way fast food companies create wealth through voluntary trade is through school systems. Many chains promote their food by selling school lunches. Although they usually must accept lower profit margins, loyalty to their brand is subsequently created in the minds of their ideal customers (p. 56).

In the case of almost all fast food restaurants, incentives are used to increase their customer and cash flow. Many tailor their incentives to be child friendly, such as playlands and toys, seen in restaurants like McDonald's and Burger King. These things have proven to be an effective lure as children see these places as fun and magical. As the playlands and toys bring in children, it brings in parents along with their money (p. 47). Furthering fast food chains' conquest to reach their ideal child aged customer, many have started advertising contracts with struggling school districts such as District 11 in Colorado Springs. The fast food chains would respond to the incentive of being able to advertise on essentially every part of the school by paying the school 12, 000 dollars (p. 51). An incentive offered to these chains by the government through the Targeted Jobs Tax Credit and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit is a tax credit. The government

uses the tax credit as an incentive for these chains to continue job training to the poor (p. 72).

In the fast food industry, economization is paramount. When the industry was first taking off, many entrepreneurs saw it as a great opportunity to start a fast food restaurant as opposed to another business because the start-up costs for it were low and the profit margins promised to be high (p. 22). This industry also economizes when it comes to their workforce. By primarily having a workforce composed of the young, the poor, and the handicapped, these companies are able to fill positions cheaply and lose the need to retain any one worker because of how easily they can be replaced (p. 70).

I found *Fast Food Nation* to be an eye opening experience. I was elucidated to not only many of the horrors of the fast food industry, but also the tactics they use to get what they want. I believe more action needs to be taken against many of the fast food chains mentioned in the book, not necessarily to punish them, but to foster a better environment for many of their employees, create a better awareness of these companies to their customers, and to show how the industry should properly be run.