

# Unwary consumers essay



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Millions of Americans eat at various fast food restaurants every day. Many have no idea where the food came from or what was done to get it there. Eric Schlosser wrote *Fast Food Nation* expressing his feelings on the wrong doings of the fast food industry. As American consumers, we have the responsibility to rise up against fast food businesses.

We must stop buying their products, and show that we will not stand for their ethics. We must think of the bigger picture when we buy food from restaurants such as McDonald's, because we are supporting their work ethics as well. Schlosser begins to show us what its really like to work in a fast food restaurant. He vividly shows us the frequent injuries the workers have, the tenacity of management to save money, lack of training, and the overall exploitation of the workers. He strongly feels that the business takes advantage of unskilled workers, mostly illegal immigrants, to make profit.

Upon visiting the slaughterhouses and meat packing buildings, he reports his dismal findings and describes the deplorable working conditions. With the inadequate training that the workers receive, it is no surprise that there are high incidences of injury. The fast food industry thrives on the high staff turnover rate and inexperienced workers. These workers often do not have many other career options and will put up with the low pay and poor hours without complaining. This is morally wrong.

Managers do not even care about the welfare of their own workers because new ones are easy to acquire. Their actions and thoughts on how to profit from workers and consumers are unjustifiable. Yes, it is easy to take advantage of unskilled workers, but we are talking about the health and lives

of actual people. How can these managers look in the mirror each day? The working conditions that are present throughout these factories are truly unthinkable.

Furthermore, Schlosser accuses many of these managers of engaging in collusion with each other and fixing prices to their advantage. They are becoming greedier and wealthier. They do not even care for the well-being of their workers. Gertner puts it best: when he says, “wealth challenges our values” from *What Is Wealth* (103). The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the organization that maintains various beef companies (among other jobs), actually put a price on a man’s life. The fine was \$480 for each man’s death” (Schlosser 178).

\$480? This is the worth of one man? How can OSHA, or anybody for that matter, even conceive a value of man? This is sad and absurd. This fact alone, makes me pity the souls that came up with this. The value of man is immeasurable. What about his feelings, his mind, his intuitions, or his contributions to society? As consumers we must think about what we are really supporting here- a successful business that serves America’s belly, or a organization that places a monetary value on a man’s life. With all these poor working conditions, it isn’t surprising to find out that bacteria is often found in meat, particularly in beef. Schlosser feels that the fast food industry isn’t doing enough ensuring that the food being served is completely safe to eat.

He presents several incidents where people have become very sick, and have even died from consuming meat that was infected with *Escherichia coli*

0157: H7, (better known as the E. coli virus), and other bacterium. In Schlosser's novel, he presents several startling facts about the contents of the beef that we consume. He provides " a simple explanation for why eating a hamburger can now make you seriously ill: There is shit in the meat". How can they do this to its own consumers?! They knowingly expose the public to this virus among other bacteria.

They are endangering many lives here, and all for what? To make more money (197). In July of 1993, a six-year-old boy named Alex was infected with the E. Coli virus. He started to have abdominal cramps that were similar to labor pains, which eventually lead to bloody stools. The doctors tried to save his life, but the Shiga toxins were destroying his internal organs.

He died a day after his mother's birthday (Schlosser 200). A little over a year ago, I ate at a McDonald's and ordered a number one: Big Mac, French Fries, and a Coke. I sat down and after finishing my beef filled fries (" McDonald's did acknowledge that its fries derive some of their characteristic flavor from ' animal products'"), couple sips of my coke, started on my Big Mac. Half way into it, I looked at what I was eating.

I noticed that my burger had something in it, which resembled a human toe nail. This shocked me and I did not know what to do, so I threw away my food and just left. I should have complained to the managers, but I was too grossed out (Schlosser 128). Could I have mistaken what I saw? Maybe it was an animal toe nail. After reading " Fast Food Nation", I am outraged by the way fast food restaurants get their food and how they operate. Feeding us

inferior meat for our hard earned money?! No one would suspect that successful fast food chains would sell such inferior meat to their consumers.

As buyers who support food companies, we have the right to know what is really in our food. I could see the toenail, but what if my meat contained something that I could not see? I could have become seriously ill. No one thinks about these things because it is not supposed to happen. But it does happen. Everyday, we risk our health and lives by eating meat provided by fast food restaurants.

One might argue that we (consumers) choose to eat at fast food restaurants. But, how many people would continue to eat there if they found out where the food came from and how it was acquired? Not too many. They endanger our lives, the workers lives, and all to make a profit. Then I wondered why I always ate at McDonald's, among the other places to eat. According to Schlosser, it all starts at a young age. He blames the sneaky tactics that are used by fast food restaurants to get children to eat their food.

Think about it, have you ever heard of a child comment on how tasty the burger was? No, because it was the Happy Meals with the toys that drew the children in. McDonald's uses this as a marketing tool directed at children to hook them into being customers for life. I remembered when my parents brought me to McDonald's when I was young. I would always look forward to the new toy. As unsuspecting consumers, we have all signed this invisible contract with McDonald's for the rest of our lives. We were tricked and brain washed.

Parents are oblivious to what fast food industries are doing. All they know is that McDonald's provides "an ideal food for small children," cheap and easy (Schlosser 198). To keep the loyal customers coming, the managers and business men have lowered "costs at any cost" and raised "profits at any cost" (Berry 131). Something must be done. Schlosser says working conditions must be improved and workers should be protected from the money hungry corporations. His solution to this, and many other problems, is the need for a greater control by the government.

The government should intervene by protecting the rights of the employees, encouraging the formation of labor unions, and demanding more training and greater emphasis on safety. Many think that rising up against these big industries would be difficult, but it isn't. Whose money is supporting them? Who is buying their products? We are! If we continue to purchase their items, then more likely than not, they are going to operate as they have in the past. If we stop buying their products, they will be forced to change their erroneous ways. Congress has passed safety laws that prevent businesses from preying on children and protect workers from harm. Unfortunately, these laws are not enforced, due to the power that these companies hold.

Managers of big fast food companies such as McDonald's continue to benefit from profits made by luring children to eat their food. If the consumers just stop buying the food, they can pressure the fast food industry to changing the way food is acquired and produced. America's economy must change the way they think and act. First, we must rebel against fast food companies by not eating their food and spread the message throughout our country. We

must exploit the food companies for what they are, whether it may be by television, campaigns, or protests.

As time goes by, sooner or later, these companies will yield to the consumers. After all we are the one's who are supporting them. The citizens of America should not stand for greedy fast food companies preying on them for more money. We must realize that what they are doing is wrong, and stop them at once. This particular industry has gone too far, and has consequently threatened the well-being of the country, it must stop.