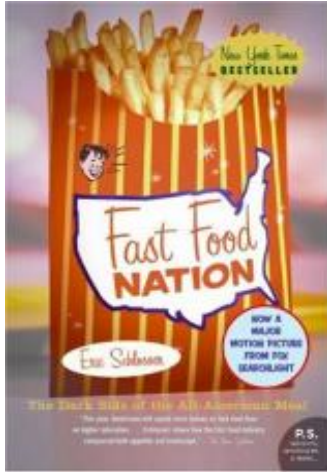


Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal

by Eric Schlosser



About the Book

Fast food has hastened the malling of our landscape, widened the chasm between rich and poor, fueled an epidemic of obesity, and propelled American cultural imperialism abroad. That's a lengthy list of charges, but here Eric Schlosser makes them stick with an artful mix of first-rate reportage, wry wit, and careful reasoning.

Schlosser's myth-shattering survey stretches from California's subdivisions where the business was born to the industrial corridor along the New Jersey Turnpike where many fast food's flavors are concocted. Along the way, he unearths a trove of fascinating, unsettling truths -- from the unholy alliance between fast food and Hollywood to the seismic changes the industry has wrought in food production, popular culture, and even real estate. He also uncovers the fast food chains' disturbing efforts to reel in the youngest, most susceptible consumers even while they hone their institutionalized exploitation of teenagers and minorities.

Discussion Guide

1. Schlosser discusses the eagerness of fast food companies to avoid hiring skilled workers and to rely instead upon highly unskilled workers. In fact, some chains openly embrace "zero training" as their ultimate goal. Since these companies are providing a steady paycheck, is it really the obligation of fast food chains to take an interest in their workers and to teach them job skills? Also, since many of the workers are recently arrived immigrants, doesn't employment at fast food restaurants offer them a toehold in the American economy and an opportunity to move onto a better job?

2. Over the last several decades, fast food companies have aggressively targeted children in their marketing efforts. Should advertisers be permitted to target children who lack the sophistication to make informed decisions and are

essentially being lured into eating high fat, high calorie food through toys and cute corporate mascots? Is it possible that fast food companies - like tobacco companies - are recruiting increasingly younger consumers in order to insure a steady customer base as their older constituents die from heart disease, diabetes, and other obesity-related disorders?

3. Upton Sinclair's **The Jungle** was the first book to sound the clarion call about the appalling abuses inherent in mass-produced beef. In the decades since its publication, the state of meatpacking has received scant attention. Were you shocked that **Fast Food Nation** documents some of the same unsafe conditions and practices that Sinclair revealed nearly 100 years ago? Were you under the impression that the unsafe conditions in meatpacking had largely been eliminated and that the United States' beef and poultry industry set the standard for other countries? Does the author's contention that not enough has changed in the meat industry challenge the progressive belief in American capitalism-that it will lift all boats and make constant improvements in working and living conditions?

4. Fast food chains, despite the myriad problems documented by the author, have an undeniable appeal-they are convenient and offer inexpensive and tasty food. Even if you are disturbed by the practices of these corporations, could you realistically swear off your food, given its ubiquity and mainstream appeal? If you are driving home from work, tired and hungry, and your two choices are a familiar fast food restaurant or an unknown Mom-and-pop, which would you choose? What kinds of implications does this choice have?

5. If one accepts the author's assertions that the beef processors and fast food corporations are engaging in patterns of unethical conduct, what can the consumer do to modify their behavior? Can the conduct of an individual have an impact on a company's practices? Why is a company most likely to change its conduct? To generate public goodwill? To respond to its employees' concerns? To address diminishing profits?

6. Since few people would confuse fast food with health food, who bears the greater responsibility for the alarming rate of obesity in children in the United States: the fast food chains that market "supersize" meals to children, or parents who are not educating their children about the benefits of a balanced diet? Can well-intentioned parents maintain control over the eating habits of their children in an era when school districts are contracting to bring fast food into the school cafeteria?

Author Bio

Eric Schlosser is a correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly*. He has received a number of journalistic honors, including a National Magazine Award for an Atlantic article he wrote about marijuana and the war on drugs. This is his first book.

Critical Praise

"All children who can read should be issued a copy of Eric Schloser's Fast Food Nation. Also all adults, so that makes just about everybody. Here is an in-depth, hard-hitting work of investigative journalism that carries the seeds of social change. If the idea of a three-storey, illuminated Ronald McDonald strikes you as a blight on the landscape, this book is for you...now put down this paper and go by the book"

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