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## Review of *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* by Eric Schlosser

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**Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal.** Eric Schlosser. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001. 356 pp. Bibliography, index. \$25.00 cloth, \$13.95 paper.

American fast food has come to symbolize runaway capitalism, pointless pop culture, and callous globalization. It is bad for the environment, bad for workers, and bad for consumers. This industry supports meatpacking firms—some of the largest are now located in the Great Plains—that are heavy polluters and rely on a labor force consisting largely of immigrant workers who receive few, if any, health or medical benefits, even though their work is some of the most dangerous in the US. Fast food restaurants are the signifiers of urban sprawl which threatens precious farm and ranch lands in the Great Plains and elsewhere. Employees of these restaurants are often teenagers who are abandoning homework to work nights and weekends. The food has killed children and made many adults sick. These are just a few negative aspects of the fast food industry Eric Schlosser elucidates in *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*.

Schlosser's treatment of the fast food industry, though, is not revolutionary. Instead, the author advocates reform. After all, he claims, most of the food tastes good and is convenient and inexpensive. Many of the founding fathers of the fast food industry are self-made and embody the American Dream. Fast food does not need to go away; its purveyors just need to be morally responsible for their actions if their industry is to be sustainable.

Changes must take into account both upstream and downstream actors. Restaurants must demand that slaughterhouses treat workers fairly, and only disease-free cattle raised in ways that protect the animal, the environment, and the consumer should be used in production. Farmers growing potatoes and other crops used by these restaurants must be sufficiently compensated to make a decent living without worrying about increasing debts and the encroachment of industrial agribusiness. Workers within the restaurants should receive higher wages, and younger workers must be encouraged to make education their first priority. Consumers need to be aware of the health consequences of eating fast food, and advertising should

not be aimed at children. Finally, when these restaurants open in other countries, efforts need to be made to include and emphasize regional cultures.

Many social scientists find these reforms hard to swallow, arguing that only a revolution would rectify the situation. We need a slow food movement featuring locally grown food and a healthy lifestyle. We need to eat at home with family and spend time discussing the things that are really important—school events, local politics. Or, better yet, we should all become slow moving, slow eating vegetarians. I would agree that there is some validity to these arguments, but there is no guarantee that such changes would benefit all consumers. The true revolution is one in which our food tastes good and does the least amount of harm to ourselves and others. *Fast Food Nation* may be viewed as a starting point for just such a revolution, though some will see it as a journalistic treatment of what is wrong with the fast food industry and a list of superficial changes that could be made to support the status quo. **Toby A. Ten Eyck**, *Department of Sociology and the National Food Safety and Toxicology Center, Michigan State University*.