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Fast Food: A Convenience Not Worth the Price

Charlotte Rose Fox

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Abstract

The invention of the fast food restaurant in 1921 started a trend that had a great impact on making America what it is today. Fast food allowed the American public to either stop and eat or take food to-go in record times. In a fast paced world, this idea expanded rapidly. Finally, there was a way for busy American’s to get a meal that was both quick and cheap. Although the invention of the fast food restaurant gave the American public a convenient and affordable meal, the negative impact it has had on our culture, business, and most importantly our health far outweigh its advantages.

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Fast Food: A Convenience Not Worth the Price

The invention of the fast food restaurant in 1921 started a trend that had a great impact on making America what it is today. Fast food allowed the American public to either stop and eat or take food to-go in record times. In a fast paced world, this idea expanded rapidly. Finally, there was a way for busy American’s to get a meal that was both quick and cheap. Although the invention of the fast food restaurant gave the American public a convenient and affordable meal, the negative impact it has had on our culture, business, and most importantly our health far outweigh its advantages.

Up until the mid 1900’s, meals were traditionally prepared in peoples‘ homes; most people were unable to afford to eat out at restaurants. The preparation and consumption of meals was therefore a social event. This routine gave people the opportunity to have time together as a family and eat a good home cooked meal. According to TIME Magazine, “the more often families eat together, the less likely kids are to smoke, drink, do drugs, get depressed,… and the more likely they are to do well in school,…[and] eat their vegetables” (Gibbs, 2006, para. 4). This explains that having family meals is an important part to a child’s development of values and life practices. These traditions of eating together as a family were greatly impacted by the growth of the fast food restaurant.

American families started to steer away from the home cooked meals because in today’s society, many people simply do not have the time to spend cooking in the kitchen. Fast food restaurants make it easy for a working mother to feed her children quickly without spending a fortune. People choose to eat fast food because it has become very

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convenient in today’s society. When speaking in an interview about the popularity of fast

food, Eric Schlosser (2009) said “McDonald's revolutionized fast food. They introduced a way to eat food without knives, forks or plates. Most fast foods can be eaten while steering the wheel of a car and the restaurants are usually drive through” (para. 2). This makes it very easy for people to multitask their life. They were now able to eat breakfast while they drove to work in the mornings. Nowadays there are fast food restaurants on almost every corner. With the popularity of fast food, the food industries had to adapt so that they could produce enough food to supply all of the demand.

In the early days of the food industry, products were made from wholesome ingredients that were naturally grown or raised. The supply traditionally met the demand for food when multiple variables allowed for it. This all changed with the increase of population and the rise of the fast food restaurant. Now the food industries have found ways to genetically engineered both plants and animals to grow faster and ultimately bigger. According to the documentary *Food Inc.*, “[chickens] are now raised and slaughtered in half the time than they were fifty years ago, but now they are twice as big. People like to eat white meat, so they redesigned the chicken to have large breasts” (Kenner, 2008). This engineering has proven great for business but, it has altered the genetic makeup of the food so much that some products can no longer be genetically identified as the same product it started out as.

The genetic alterations made to the food are not the only results of an inflated industry. The treatment of the animals is seen as inhumane and the environmental output of the factories is detrimental to public health. The genetic changes force the animals to

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go against mother nature. For instance, a chicken that has grown more muscle than its

legs are designed to carry, is unable to support its own weight and collapses after just a few steps (Kenner, 2008). Though the life span of an industry animal is short, it should still be humane.

The animals are born and raised for their meat and the most productive way to do this involves them being contained in close quarters that allow very little room to move. The ubiquitous amount of manure from the livestock ultimately ends up within the product itself or contaminates the water systems that water crops. The major concern with this is the spread of food born illnesses which are closely associated with animals. The food born illness “*E. coli* in manure can newly infect or re-infect animals in pastures and feedlots. What’s more, *E. coli* on hides can contaminate carcasses at the packinghouse” (Durham, 2011, p. 9). While there are many procedures done to help prevent the spread of these illnesses, the most definite way to prevent the spread would be to change the system of production in the factories. They could do this by cleaning the outside of the animal before they butcher it.

Food born illnesses from production are not the only way that the health of society has been hindered by the boom of the food industry. Before the introduction of the fast food restaurant, the food the everyday American consumed was made from mostly pure ingredients. The ripple effect from the fast food restaurants to the food industries has created new foods due to mass production and cost. Today’s food is engineered to look, smell, and taste perfect. Chemists have created these incredible potions that are now found in most foods that are mass produced. They are more well known as food additives

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which are not very supportive of good health.

These food additives “comprise approximately 10% (about 150 lbs) of the food consumed by the average American adult. As nutritional awareness grows, many health experts and consumers have become more vocal in their criticism of the excessive and potentially dangerous use of food additives” (Food Additives, 2011). This may seem like a small number, but it adds up quickly. The producers of corn have recently come out with commercials stating that corn syrup is the same as sugar and is safe in moderation. While this may be true, they forget to inform the public that corn syrup is in almost everything nowadays. The best way for the American public to stay informed about what is in food is to check the ingredient list for additives and only eat them in moderation. The consumption of foods with many additives in them like corn syrup have a strong correlation with health problems such as obesity (Chen, Crott, Zhenhua,& Smith, 2010). It only makes sense that large amounts of corn will increase weight gain because corn is what is fed to livestock to fatten them up.

The convenience of fast food restaurants and the unhealthy food served there have played major roles in the increase of obesity in this country. A newspaper article stated that

California's nearly 3 million 9th graders are at least 5.2 percent more likely to be obese if there is a fast food restaurant within a tenth of a mile of their school, according to a new study by University of California, Berkeley, economists who calculated that these students eat 30 to 100 more calories per school day than their non-obese counterparts. (Maclay, 2009)

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This shows that having access to a fast food restaurant alone can increase the risk for

obesity due to the high amount of calories that are in the food. The food industry has been able to make it cheaper to eat at a fast food restaurant than to make the same meal at home. This has created a problem because the nature of fast food restaurants have become a negative environmental factor that help promote poor eating habits. It does not help that there is now a fast food restaurant on practically every street corner.

Obesity is a condition that includes many risks to a persons health. It is a widely known fact that people who are obese are more likely to get type two diabetes, cardio vascular disease, many types of cancer, stroke, and hypertension. In the documentary *Super Size Me*, Morgan Spurlock begins to have problems with his liver after eating too much McDonald’s. His doctors asked him repeatedly to stop his experiment because his fat intake was causing his liver to shut down, much like an alcoholics liver would (2004). This documents the reality that the food being sold at fast food franchises is truly unhealthy. With the great amount of health problems that obesity can cause, its increase in this country has also had a negative economic impact on the health care system. People are seeking more and more financial help to pay for tests and medicine needed to treat the multiple problems caused they have acquired by becoming obese.

Not only are people eating so much that the make themselves sick, but they are actually eating themselves to death. According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 112,000 deaths are associated with obesity each year (CDC, 2011). With this high of a death rate, the way American people eat needs to be improved.

In recent years, people have finally starting to realize how unhealthy this country

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has become. This realization has created a push for organic food which is forcing the food

industry to change their ways to produce a healthy product. This push for health is perhaps the only thing that can change the way Americans eat. Like any great transformation, the effort will take a great deal of time and support. Maybe one day America will be able to reverse all of the negative effects that the fast food industry had a created to make a healthy tomorrow.

It is clear that the invention of the fast food restaurant has had an enormous role in making America what it is today. It created a domino effect which transformed both the food industry and the American people. The lure of both convenience and cost of these restaurants will hopefully be overlooked in the future due to knowledge of the consequences. Thanks to the fast food restaurant, people now live fast paced lives while they consume genetically engineered food, that makes them obese with a variety of health problems. Welcome to America, Ronald McDonald.

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