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## Dollar Menu Morality: Fast Food In Twentieth and Twenty First Century America

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## Dollar Menu Morality: Fast Food In Twentieth and Twenty First Century America

### Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgments: E.H. Butler Library, The Alexander Street Menu Collection, Dr. Bridget Chesterton, and Eric Schlosser for inspiring this paper.





# Dollar Menu Morality: Fast Food in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century America

Kassius James Broadus, HIS 300W Research and Writing Seminar • Dr. Bridget Chesterton, History

## Breakneck Speed

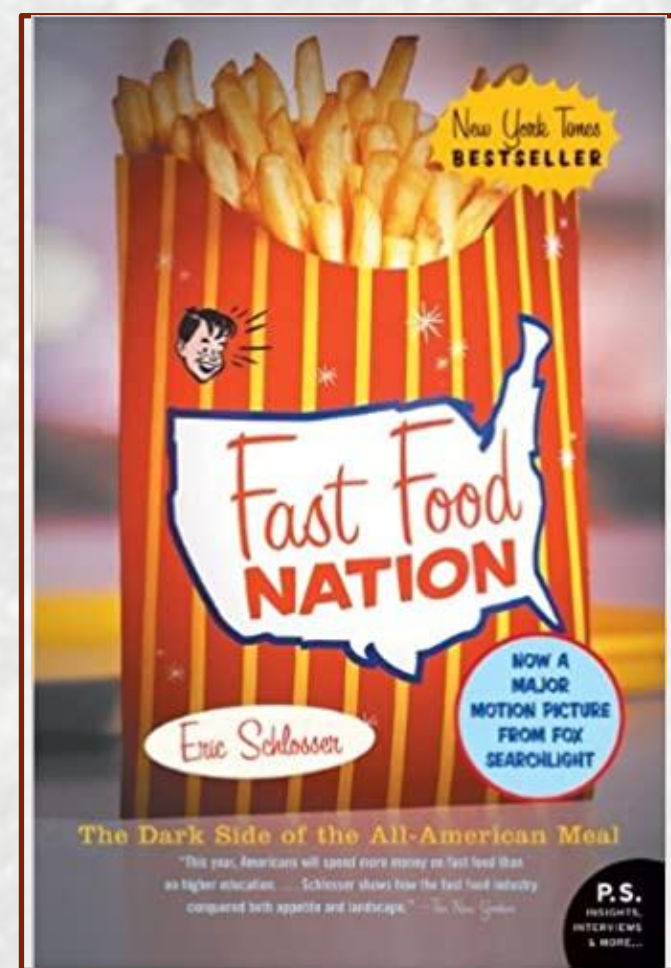
A significant part of this paper relied on an accurate timeline of McDonald's empire building. This meant researching and introducing the key players. These include the McDonald Brothers and their Speedee System and Ray A. Kroc and the mapping of the McDonald's empire.

In my research, I found a connection to Puritan culture and how it juxtaposed with European culture as a whole. Americans want their food fast, because dining in a leisurely manner is tied to sin.

What began as convenience quickly turned into cutting corners and overconsumption in the name of success. Restaurants encouraged customers to buy more, franchisees to put more of their own capital on the line, and workers to accept less for their hard work.

This paper studies what the uniquely American fast-food industry has done to the nation's economic and physical health.

## Inspiration in Pop Culture



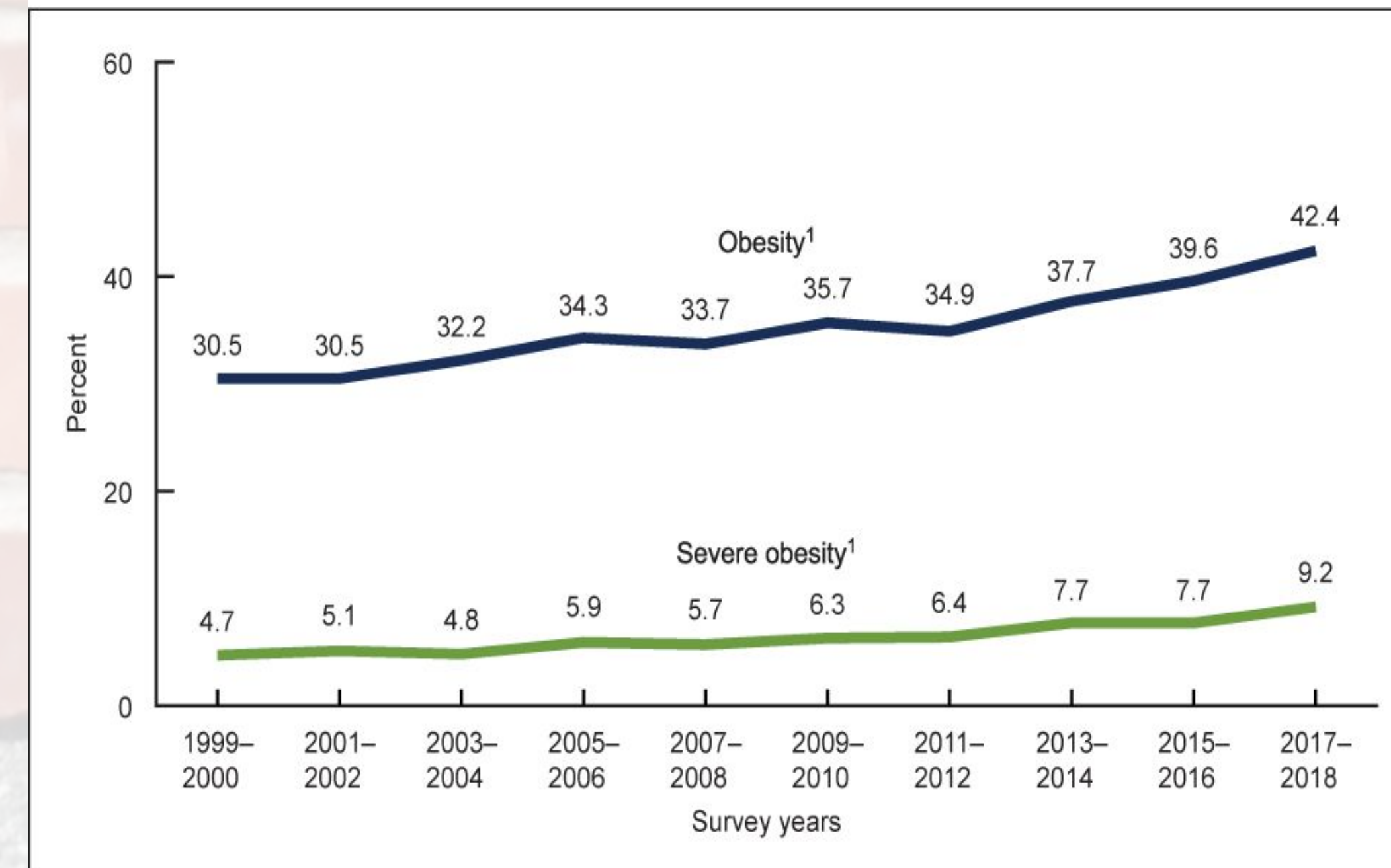
The original idea was drawn from the investigative journalist Eric Schlosser. He spent years embedded with fast-food workers, franchisees, and farmers to gain excellent first-hand information on how the fast-food industry not only operates, but affects consumers and laborers alike. *Fast Food Nation* represents his life's work.

Figure 1: Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. Boston & New York, 2001.

## Research Obstacles

This paper covered a modern historical subject and researching through a historical lens was difficult. Work written by journalists and sociologists provided much needed clarity. Since the topic covered economic and health issues, government sites provided hard numbers that supported the thesis.

Figure 4. Trends in age-adjusted obesity and severe obesity prevalence among adults aged 20 and over: United States, 1999–2000 through 2017–2018



<sup>1</sup>Significant linear trend.

NOTES: Estimates were age adjusted by the direct method to the 2000 U.S. Census population using the age groups 20–39, 40–59, and 60 and over. Access data table for Figure 4 at: [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db360\\_tables-508.pdf#4](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db360_tables-508.pdf#4). SOURCE: NCHS, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1999–2018.

It is imperative to research reputable sources when making any claims in an argument, but especially medical claims. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention site is an excellent resource for statistics on any major American health issue.

Figure 2: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Trends in age-adjusted obesity and severe obesity prevalence among adults aged 20 and over: United States, 1999–2000 through 2017–2018.” NCHS Data Brief no. 360. February 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db360.htm>

## Labor and Resource Exploitation

How does the industry survive? Is it classic American Bootstrap Theory or is classic exploitation? Primary and secondary source material points to the latter, seeing the most economically vulnerable affected: immigrants, people of color, the working poor, underprivileged youth and small farmers.

Figure 3: Our Maryland. “Maryland Fight For \$15.” Fight for \$15. Copyright 2021. <https://ourmaryland.org/fightfor15/>



## Caveat Emptor?

This paper stands as a reminder to consumers that they hold the power in the overall process. While it is true that Americans can vote with their conscience, they can also purchase and consume with it.

The United States is the most culturally and economically diverse nation in the world and fast-food is an industry that has spread far beyond American borders, easily repeating this blueprint of empire building in overseas markets.

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks to E.H. Butler Library at SUNY Buffalo State College, The Alexander Street Menu Collection, and Dr. Bridget Chesterton