

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

New York: HarperCollins, 2001. 383 pp.

Reviewed by David W. Gill [www.ethixbiz.com](http://www.ethixbiz.com)

Eric Schlosser is a correspondent with *The Atlantic Monthly* with many fine articles to his credit in various magazines. *Fast Food Nation*, his first book, has been on the best seller lists for many months. There is a certain irony to the simultaneous popularity of fast food and a book debunking fast food.

From time to time, Schlosser can't resist firing a punch at a beckoning target but for the most part his style is simply to describe the people, the statistics, the landscape, the factories, the reality of the fast food industry. This is not just about food and personal taste; it is a major business, technology, and ethics story.

The first part of Schlosser's book tells the stories of the rise of fast food operations such as Carl's Jr., McDonald's, and Pizza Hut. These people, ideas, and experiences make for an unexpected page-turner. Fast food is both a result of changes in technology and culture (e.g., the automobile, the pace of life), and a cause of further changes (e.g., in labor, eating, and land use patterns).

In part two, Schlosser explores major changes in food processing and preparation and in agribusiness driven by the giants of fast food. The role of chemicals in creating precise flavor experiences is an intriguing story. The dangers to workers in the cattle slaughterhouses and the risk of disease to consumers of their products occupy a couple chilling chapters. The aggressive expansion of fast food corporations around the globe and the statistical evidence of an epidemic of obesity following fast food is another thread in Schlosser's account.

Schlosser argues that the triumph of unhealthy fast food is not inevitable. He shows how "In-N-Out Burger" restaurants successfully go against the flow on food quality and worker wages while remaining competitive and profitable. Schlosser suggests reforms that could safeguard animals from cruel treatment, workers from exploitation, and consumers from unhealthy food. In the paperback edition he responds to some negative reviews of the clothbound edition.

McDonald's was hailed as an exemplary corporation back in Tom Peters and Robert Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* and in many respects it, along with other fast food corporations, is a true business success story. Schlosser describes well the creativity and single-mindedness that has gone into this success. However, especially after thirty years of experiencing fast food power and influence, there are serious issues to confront. Schlosser has done us all a great favor by putting the cards on the table.