

FAST FOOD WORLD  
THE HAMBURGER COMES OF AGE  
by William P. Ancker

There is debate over the history of the hamburger and who deserves credit for its invention, but there is no disagreement about the global stature it has achieved over the past few decades as a result of the proliferation of the fast food industry. Every day around the world, millions of them are sold in thousands of restaurants. It is ironic, given this magnitude of sales, that most hamburgers are remarkably similar: ground beef on a bun with condiments such as ketchup, mustard, and pickles. Though modest, even monotonous, this sandwich has become an icon among foods and a symbol of the globalization of fast food.

## HISTORY

A number of cooks and restaurants claim to have invented the modern hamburger. One of the earliest events at which a burger in a bun was sold was the 1904 World's Fair at St. Louis, Missouri. It wasn't until the 1920s, however, that hamburgers became the centerpiece of a new marketing concept for American restaurants. Although the hamburger wasn't called "fast food" then, the first business that can accurately be called a fast food restaurant was White Castle, which began in Wichita, Kansas in 1921. It sold hamburgers for five cents each. Their burgers were different from today's version: they were cooked with onions and they were smaller, so most customers ate more than one at a meal. In fact, the first fast food slogan, created by White Castle, was "Buy 'em by the sack." The idea caught on, and with their new business booming, the owners of White Castle opened more restaurants in other parts of the country.

Other companies copied White Castle, and they too offered the simple but seemingly irre-

sistible combination of hamburgers, french fries, and cola. Their names— White Palace, White Tower, Royal Castle—indicate just how blatant their imitation was. Some of these competitors introduced variations on the hamburger theme. A slice of cheese melted on top of the meat made the sandwich a cheeseburger. In the late 1930s, a California restaurant called Bob's introduced a hamburger with two patties of meat and named it the Big Boy.

Perhaps the most unusual innovation in those early years of fast food was how the food was served at



some of the new restaurants. A server, or “carhop,” brought the food outside to the customers so they could eat without leaving their cars. This type of “drive-in” service began in the 1920s with the A&W root beer company, but the idea was soon picked up by hamburger restaurants, and the fast food industry in America became closely associated with the automobile.

After World War II, the number of restaurants specializing in fast food grew tremendously, and each needed a special feature to survive in the competitive marketplace. At the Sonic Drive-Ins, established in Oklahoma in 1953, the carhops wore roller skates. They still do today at some of the restaurants the company operates in 28 states. Dairy Queen began in the 1940s serving only a unique soft ice cream. As the number of Dairy Queen restaurants grew nationally, the company added more elaborate desserts and expanded its menu to include hot dishes. In the 1950s, the Taco Bell restaurant was established in California, specializing in American versions of Mexican food. Church’s Chicken was also established in the 1950s in Texas, specializing in fried chicken and jalapeños. Hot dogs, pizza, fish and seafood, submarine sandwiches, roast beef sandwiches, donuts, salads... by the 1960s the fast food industry in the United States had grown to include these other kinds of specialty dishes and, more importantly, a very large and loyal clientele.

Although White Castle was rapidly overtaken by new competitors in the fast food business, it is notable on two

accounts. First, it still exists, which makes it the oldest in the industry. Second, its founders were astute business pioneers who established decades ago many of the standard practices prevalent in today’s ubiquitous global fast food restaurant chains.

by Paulette C. Jordan

**T**he roots of the modern hamburger go back to the German city of Hamburg. According to historians, German immigrants to the United States brought the recipe for a dish of raw chopped beef mixed with egg. The Germans learned about the dish, now called Steak Tartare, from Russian sailors who visited Hamburg and brought along an appetite for food from their homeland. The Russians apparently learned of the dish from the nomadic Tartars.

By the time it reached the New World, a hamburger steak was shredded or chopped beef shaped into a patty that was broiled with onions and spices. The first documented mention of hamburger steak in the United States was in the 1830s. It was served at Delmonico's, an expensive restaurant in New York City, for the price of 10 cents. In 1896, hamburger steak was included for the first time in the famous cookbook of Boston chef Fannie Farmer.

More than one person has claimed to be the creator of the modern hamburger sandwich. At various times in the late 1800s and early 1900s, cooks (or their descendants) from Wisconsin, Connecticut, Ohio, and Texas boasted of inventing the hamburger.

A theme repeated in some of the stories is that customers wanted a quick meal that was easy to carry. Charlie Nagreen's family claims he invented the hamburger in Wisconsin in 1885, when he was only fifteen years old. He fried ground beef in butter and served it between two slices of bread at the Outgamie County Fair. Charlie continued to sell his hamburgers at the fair for the next 64 years. In New Haven, Connecticut, in 1900, the owner of Louis' Lunch supposedly invented the hamburger when his customers asked for something tasty and quick to serve. That is what the grandson of Louis, and current owner of the small restaurant, claimed 90 years later when the restaurant was still in business.

Another theme is that hamburgers were invented when a creative cook ran out of the usual ingredients and had to improvise. One day in 1892 at the Summit County Fair, Frank Menches and his brother Charles, of Akron, Ohio, ran out of sausage for sandwiches and substituted ground beef instead. Their switch was so popular with customers that they began to specialize in beef sandwiches. When Frank died in 1951, his obituary in the newspaper reported he earned a small fortune from his hamburgers.

The most widely reported story about the origin of the hamburger comes from the 1904 World's Fair. Fletcher Davis and his wife Ciddy, from Athens, Texas, set up a food counter and sold hamburgers with hot mustard and a slice of onion. An article about the fair in St. Louis was published in a New York newspaper, and it mentioned the sale of hamburgers but failed to include the name of the cook. Since then, the whole world has come to know the hamburger, but no one will ever know with absolute certainty who really created it!

## STANDARDIZATION

**N**o matter where fast food restaurants are located or what type of food they sell, their most fundamental operating principle is standardization. A hamburger from a Burger King in New York must taste the same as a hamburger from a Burger King in Florida, or in Japan, Argentina, or Turkey. To succeed with this formula of selling the exact same food everywhere, fast food restaurants must offer a standardized menu that limits the number of food choices.

A small selection of items on a menu makes preparing fast food convenient for the hundreds (or thousands) of restaurants that are part of a particular company, because they need only a limited variety of ingredients, albeit in huge quantities. The limited variety makes it possible to secure adequate shipments of those ingredients from suppliers and thereby ensure quality control of the meals served to customers.

Anyone who has eaten at a fast food restaurant can appreciate the convenience of standardization. If the only options are what type of pizza to order, whether or not to have pickles on a hamburger, or how many pieces of fried chicken to eat, then a decision is relatively easy. For some people, it is comforting when there aren't very many choices and they know in advance what they will be eating and how it will taste. Although some people dislike fast food for its predictability, it can be reassuring to a hungry person in a hurry or far from home.

This predictability is essential for a successful fast food company. If customers have an enjoyable meal at one restaurant, they will probably be willing to go to any other restaurant of the same company. This type of repeat sales, which is crucial for a business over the long term, requires that the same quality food and service be offered in all the restaurants that are part of a chain.

There is an obvious disadvantage to this standardization, however, that has nothing to do with the taste or convenience of the food or the reputation of the company. Among the many competing restaurant chains selling the same types of fast food, how does one stand out from the rest? The innovators at White Castle developed an answer to that problem: aggressive advertising. ⇨ page 52





## WEB SITES OF INTEREST

Here are a few Web sites that have useful information about fast food. In addition, many fast food restaurants have their own Web sites with detailed explanations of the company history, menu, and even investment opportunities. A search of the company's name will usually turn up the official Web site, which is usually the name plus ".com" (e.g., mcdonalds.com, burgerking.com, tacobell.com, etc.)

### **The American Forum for Global Education**

<http://www.globaled.org/curriculum/ffood.html>

In the teaching materials section of this Web site, teachers can find on-line materials related to global studies, including a set of seven activities called A Global Perspective on Fast-Food History.

### **Nutrition Action Health Newsletter**

[http://www.findarticles.com/cf\\_dls/m0813/9\\_26/57827152/p1/article.jhtml](http://www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m0813/9_26/57827152/p1/article.jhtml)

This newsletter, published by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, presents research and practical advice on nutrition, diet, and related health issues, including an article about fast food breakfasts.

### **Education World: The Educator's Complete Resource Guide to the Internet**

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_sites/sites010.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_sites/sites010.shtml)

This Web site serves as a search engine for other educational sites. Teachers can find links to eight other sites that contain materials and lesson plans for teaching about nutrition.

### **Bobby's Fast Food Toys**

<http://www.heathtoy.com/bobbys/>

Believe it or not, this commercial site sells new and old "collectible" toys given away at fast food restaurants. In the spirit of business cooperation rather than competition, it has links to over 50 other sites that also specialize in selling fast food toys.

### **Slow Food**

<http://www.slowfood.com/>

This is the Web site of the international organization based in Italy that supports slowing down the pace of modern, industrialized society by savoring our food and resisting fast food, among other lifestyle changes. There are also Italian and French versions of this site.

**W**hen French farmer Jose Bove and his cohorts demolished a McDonald's restaurant under construction in Millau, France in August 1999, they claimed they were protesting American sanctions against French cheese, which, by the way, were levied in response to a French ban on American beef. Their case drew international media attention and made Bove a hero to many Europeans. Bove has since gone on to achieve international notoriety as a protester against globalization, specifically, against what he sees as the industrialization and standardization of food production.

Clearly, fast food is representative of the globalization process. However, fast food companies have shown some willingness to adapt to local customs. Here are some examples of how international fast food chains have attempted to accommodate local tastes and how we have become a fast food world.

#### **McDonald's**

- In Japan, the Teriyaki McBurger is a sausage patty on a bun with teriyaki sauce.
- In Italy, the Marinara salad has shrimp and salmon, the Mediterranean salad has cheese and olives, and the Fiordiriso salad has rice, tuna, ham, and mushrooms.
- There are two McDonald's restaurants in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.
- In Hong Kong, a curry potato pie and a red bean ice cream sundae are sold.

#### **Burger King**

- In Chile, the menu offers a broiled salmon sandwich.
- In Costa Rica, the breakfasts include Gallo Pinto (beans and rice).
- In Mexico, the Breakfast Burrito is served.

#### **Pizza Hut**

- At the opening of the 10,000th outlet, in São Paulo, Brazil in 1994, Pele kicked a soccer ball through the door.
- The highest volume outlets are in Paris, Moscow, and Hong Kong.
- In 2001, Pizza Hut "delivered" to the International Space Station. The outer space version was developed after a year of collaboration between company and Russian scientists.

#### **Kentucky Fried Chicken**

- In Japan, the menu offers a salmon sandwich.
- Tricon Global Restaurants, the parent company of KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell, is the largest restaurant system in the world, with almost 30,000 outlets in over 100 countries.

## MARKETING

**W**e treat you right.” “Have it your way.” “We love to see you smile.” “Your way, right away.” “What you want is what you get.” “Taste the difference fresh makes.” “A fresh take on fresh taste.” These are just a few of the slogans various fast food companies have used over the years to attract customers. With commercials featuring cheerful music and catchy jingles broadcast on radio and television, fast food companies rely on sophisticated marketing to convince consumers that their food offers the best taste and value, or is the most fun to eat.

Much of the marketing of fast food is specifically targeted to children. Of course, the goal is for children to see a restaurant’s advertisements, then persuade their parents to take them there. With children in mind, McDonald’s features Ronald McDonald, a clown, and Taco Bell introduced a talking Chihuahua dog. Fast food restaurants frequently offer a free toy with every purchase. A similar but more alluring type of promotion is to offer a set of toys, which requires more than one purchase to acquire the complete set. Some companies now have attractive playgrounds with swings, slides, and balloons as integral parts of their restaurants, so children can eat and play at the same place.

To attract adults, fast food marketing campaigns emphasize the method of food preparation or value rather than fun. Typical promotions are “Two for the price of one” or “Buy one at the regular price and get a second one free!” Restaurants sometimes offer a large serving for the same price as a small one. One company boasts that their hamburgers are tastier because they are charcoal-broiled, not fried. Another competitor claims that one of their sandwiches can be ordered in 1,024 possible ways; a figure based on the number and combination of condiments available.

There have been innumerable contests at fast food restaurants, with the expectation that customers will feel hungry as well as lucky. Prizes can range from a free hamburger or drink to an all-expenses-paid vacation. Whether by gimmicks or giveaways, marketing in the fast food industry is crucial because it helps companies distinguish themselves from competitors that offer almost exactly the same type of meals.

There have been innumerable contests at fast food restaurants, with the expectation that customers will feel hungry as well as lucky. Prizes can range from a free hamburger or drink to an all-expenses-paid vacation. Whether by gimmicks or giveaways, marketing in the fast food industry is crucial because it helps companies distinguish themselves from competitors that offer almost exactly the same type of meals.

### Burger King and Taco Bell in Guatemala

Globalization by the fast food industry is illustrated here on a busy street in Guatemala City. The corporations compete vigorously in the international market.

### Yo Quiero Taco Bell!

#### Dinky, the Taco Bell Chihuahua

In 1997, Taco Bell introduced a new advertising campaign that featured a talking dog, which gave America the slogan, “Yo Quiero Taco Bell” [I want Taco Bell].

### Clara Peller holding a press conference for Wendy’s

At the age of 88, Ms. Peller appeared in a TV commercial that showed her disappointed with a large bun but a small hamburger patty. “Where’s the beef?” she demanded irritably, and a new slogan entered American slang. This catchy phrase appeared later in a presidential campaign when one candidate used it to belittle his rival as lacking substance.

## FRANCHISE

**F**ranchising is a feature of fast food restaurants that has contributed to their proliferation and created opportunities for individuals to own their own business. According to *The Random House College Dictionary*, a franchise is “a contract granted by a national or regional chain allowing one the exclusive right to operate one of their outlets within a specified area... usually with the parent company furnishing equipment, supplies, merchandising, and advertising.” Individuals, or groups, who own franchises benefit from the reputation of the parent company and at the same time are required to uphold the standards of the company.

To take one brand name as an example, McDonald’s is an international chain with its headquarters in Oak Brook, Illinois. Each McDonald’s restaurant—there are 28,000 in 120 countries—is an outlet. The people who own a franchise (called franchisees) of McDonald’s, or any other parent fast food company, receive extensive training in food preparation, business management, and of course the daily operations of outlets. In the 1950s, when the first McDonald’s franchise was sold, the initial fee paid to the parent company was \$950. Today the fee is \$45,000. To open a new McDonald’s outlet costs between \$450,000 and \$740,000, depending on the size and location.

## CONCLUSION

In the 80 years since the first fast food restaurant, White Castle, opened, the hamburger has become ubiquitous. Its status as the world's favorite sandwich is obvious from the tens of thousands of fast food restaurants across the globe that feature it. Whether you prefer hamburgers over cheeseburgers, or another kind of fast food, whether you avoid fast food altogether, there is no denying that the hamburger and the advocates of fast food industry have changed the way a lot of people eat.

### References

- Hogan, D. G. 1997. *Selling 'em by the sack: White Castle and the creation of American food*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jakle, J. A. and K. A. Sculle. 1999. *Fast food: Roadside restaurants in the automobile age*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kroc, R. 1997. *Grinding it out: The making of McDonald's*. Chicago: Contemporary Books.
- Schlosser, E. 2001. *Fast food nation: The dark side of the All-American meal*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Tennyson, J. 1993. *Hamburger heaven: The illustrated history of the hamburger*. New York: Hyperion.

## GROWTH

Fast food has grown remarkably, not only in the United States, but also around the world. Restaurant chains represent a multi-billion dollar industry that shows no sign of slowing down. Innovations in operations and products have kept the industry growing and, some critics would argue, led to speeding up the pace of contemporary life.

From its inception, fast food has lived up to its name. In the early days of fast food, as Americans came to depend more on their cars, outlets offered drive-in service, enabling customers to park and eat in their cars. This service reduced the cost of operating a restaurant and established relatively low prices. Now we see "drive up" (or "drive thru") service. Customers can order, pay, and leave without turning off the motors of their cars. Many eat as they drive!

Given the popularity of fast food for lunch and dinner, it was only a matter of time before marketers and franchisees realized they could expand their line of products by offering breakfast, too. All the major fast food chains now sell breakfast to hungry people in a hurry. Chains have also sought new markets other than the traditional roadside ones. Now we see fast food counters inside amusement parks, shopping centers, movie theaters, airports, schools, and even a few hospitals.

For many people, however, fast food has become symbolic of a fast-paced lifestyle that is neither natural nor healthy. An organization called Slow Food was established in Italy in 1986 to oppose fast food and its assembly-line approach to cooking and eating. The Slow Food manifesto, endorsed in Paris in 1989 by delegates from 15 countries, states, "We are enslaved by speed and have all succumbed to the same insidious virus: Fast Life, which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat Fast Foods." To fight the negative connotations of fast food, many companies now emphasize the word "fresh" in their advertising and use the term "quick service" to describe their operations.

I would like you to try a little thought experiment with me. Let's put our heads together to see if we can design the Worst Diet in the World, one that would be most likely to undermine health and shorten life.

To begin, let's stuff it with calories, more than most people will be able to burn off, so that it will promote obesity. We should overload it with carbohydrate calories from high-glycemic-index foods. That means lots of refined flour in fluffy breads and pastries, a lot of potatoes, sweets, and sweet drinks....

For fat we will need a glut of saturated fat in the form of cheese, butter, cream, and other whole-milk products, along with a lot of beef and unskinned chicken. That will ensure that most people will develop unhealthy levels of cholesterol and increased risks of cardiovascular disease. We should also include plenty of hydrogenated fat in the form of margarine, vegetable shortening, and snack foods made with partially hydrogenated oils.... We should also throw in some well-used cooking fat, consisting of cheaper vegetable oils....

As for protein, we should probably go for as much as we can eat and make it mostly commercially raised meat and poultry rather than fish or vegetable protein. That will maximize intake of drugs and hormones used to raise animals for meat as well as environmental toxins concentrated in their fat and other tissues. A lot of the meat in the diet should be processed (into hot dogs, lunch meats, and the like) to add more sodium, saturated fat, and unhealthful chemical additives. We should encourage everyone to drink cow's milk throughout life to make sure we affect the lactose-intolerant fraction of the population....

The Worst Diet in the World should also be distinguished by what it does not provide. We will want very inadequate amounts of the micronutrients, especially those that protect the body from effects we are trying to achieve by the above selection of macronutrients. The easiest way to make sure of that is to restrict fruits and vegetables. Of course, we will allow unrestricted amounts of floury potatoes (preferably French fried or otherwise prepared with quantities of margarine, butter, and sour cream)...but we don't want people eating too many greens and brightly colored fruits and vegetables.... Perhaps pickles, high in sodium, and ketchup, high in sugar and sodium, will count as vegetables in our diet. These rules will keep fiber intake low, prevent people from eating too many protective phytochemicals, and maybe even get levels of vitamins and minerals down low enough to cause suboptimal functioning of many systems of the body without producing overt deficiency symptoms that might lead people to take corrective action.

From what I know about the scientific basis of human nutrition, I am quite sure that a diet of this sort, though it will sustain life and growth, will also have tremendous consequences as people age. It will increase the frequency of degenerative diseases, lowering the age at which they appear, accelerating their progression, and worsening their severity. It will certainly promote obesity, hypertension, coronary heart disease, and cancer and probably will adversely affect liver, kidney, and brain function.... It might even make people less energetic and worsen their moods....

Thank you for indulging this exercise in fantasy. Now I have a real-world assignment for you. I would like you to visit three different fast-food restaurants of your choice, study the menus in them, and observe what the customers are eating. Then I want you to think about how closely those menus approximate the Worst Diet in the World we have just designed....

From Chapter 3 "The Worst Diet in the World" of EATING WELL FOR OPTIMUM HEALTH by Andrew Weil, M.D., Copy © 2000 by Andrew Weil, M.D. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.

**stuff it with calories...overload it with carbohydrate calories...**

**a glut of saturated fat... include some hydrogenated fat...**

**protein... as much as we can eat...**

**unrestricted amounts of floury potatoes (preferably French fried...)**

**add more sodium, saturated fat and unhealthful chemical additives...**