

Summer Reading Assignment for Introduction to Psychology

Students should choose 5 of the questions below & write a complete and thorough answer to each (approx. 2-3 paragraphs per). These questions will be due at the end of week 2 of class for both Semester 1 & 2.

1. Schlosser tells us that “no other industry in the United States has a workforce so dominated by adolescents” as does the fast food industry (p. 68). What are the advantages and disadvantages of this situation for the fast food companies and for the teenagers who work for them? In what ways are “the immediate needs of the chains and the long-term needs of teenagers . . . fundamentally at odds” (p. 78)?
2. What are some of the more important implications of the fact that “the fast food industry now employs some of the most disadvantaged members of American society”—that is, recent immigrants, the elderly, the handicapped, and others? What are the advantages to the industry of employing people from these groups? What part in the growth and success of the fast food chains and America’s food-production companies has been played by the hiring of illegal immigrants in particular? Does employing these people amount to a serious disservice to the nation?
3. Fast food chains, despite the myriad problems documented by the author, have an undeniable appeal -- they are convenient and offer inexpensive and tasty food. Even if you are disturbed by the practices of these corporations, could you realistically swear off their food, given its ubiquity and mainstream appeal?
4. Since few people would confuse fast food with health food, who bears the greater responsibility for the alarming rate of obesity in children in the United States: the fast food chains that market "supersize" meals to children, or parents who are not educating their children about the benefits of a balanced diet? Can well-intentioned parents maintain control over the eating habits of their children in an era when school districts are contracting to bring fast food into the school cafeteria?
5. One of Schlosser’s primary concerns is with the impact of fast food on children and adolescents. What details of that impact does he present? How does the fast food industry “both feed and feed off the young” (p. 9)? In what ways do the major fast food chains appeal to, and market to, children (p. 47)?
6. How significant is it that “a person’s food preferences, like his or her personality, are formed during the first few years of life” (p. 122)? How might this fact be related to the eating habits, food selections, and eating-related problems among America’s children, teenagers, and adults? What do the fast food chains do to promote the pleasures and reassurances associated with childhood favorites and

comforts?

7. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* was the first book to sound the clarion call about the appalling abuses inherent in mass-produced beef. In the decades since its publication, the state of meatpacking has received scant attention. Were you shocked that *Fast Food Nation* documents some of the same unsafe conditions and practices that Sinclair revealed nearly 100 years ago? Were you under the impression that the unsafe conditions in meatpacking had largely been eliminated and that the United States' beef and poultry industry set the standard for other countries?
8. Schlosser contends that “the industrialization of cattle-raising and meatpacking over the past two decades has completely altered how beef is produced -- and the towns that produce it” (p. 149). How has the “new meatpacking regime” changed beef production, the towns where beef is produced, and the lives of those who work and live in those towns? What economic, social, and political realities have resulted from the meatpacking industry’s efforts to increase productivity, efficiencies, and profits? What are the main pluses and minuses of introducing McDonald’s, Burger King, KFC, and other fast food restaurants—along with “the values, tastes, and industrial practices of the American fast food industry”—in countries around the world?
9. “No other nation in history has gotten so fat so fast,” Schlosser exclaims (p. 240). How successful is he in presenting the incidence and seriousness of obesity among American adults and, in particular, among American children (p. 240)? What links does he present between the dramatic rise of obesity in America and the dramatic increase in the consumption of fast foods, including carbonated soft drinks? What other contributory factors may be involved? What actions taken to combat the rising rate of obesity have you observed?
10. What actions by individuals, organizations, communities, and other groups -- including the United States Congress and government agencies -- does Schlosser call for (p. 262)? What effects would each likely have on individual consumers, our society, and the fast food industry?
11. “Whatever replaces the fast food industry,” the optimistic Schlosser concludes, “should be regional, diverse, authentic, unpredictable, sustainable, profitable -- and humble” (p. 288). What indications of this blend do you find in your community? What can we do to encourage the kinds of restaurants and the quality of food that Schlosser calls for?

Questions courtesy of Harper Collins