

# Fast Food Nation:

**F**ast Food Nation began life as a book. It was written by the American journalist, Eric Schlosser, and it was published in 2001. In *Fast Food Nation*, Schlosser looks at the fast food industry in the US. He writes about the first ever burger bars; he visits meat packing factories and talks to the people who work there; he speaks to farmers, and to the teenagers who spend evenings and weekends working in fast food restaurants. Schlosser's book made people think about fast food, and where it comes from.



In 2006, *Fast Food Nation* came out as a film. Here, Eric Schlosser talks about his book and the film.



Eric Schlosser

## Why did you write *Fast Food Nation*?

The idea for *Fast Food Nation* came from *Rolling Stone* magazine. They wanted me to write a piece about the fast food industry. They wanted to show people the truth about the food they ate.

So, I started reading about it. I used to like burgers. I used to go to McDonalds. I didn't want to laugh at the 'all-American' meal. But I was very surprised by what I read. Our love of fast food has changed so many things in America – people's working conditions, the way animals are farmed, even the whole look of some places. I realised that the fast food industry was a hidden world.

# from book to film

My piece came out in two parts in *Rolling Stone*. I wanted to say a lot more and so I decided to write the book. I found a small publishers who wanted to publish it. And straight away, it sold very well ...

## How did *Fast Food Nation* the book become *Fast Food Nation* the film?

I spoke to lots of film-makers who wanted to make documentary films of the book, but I wasn't sure about it. I didn't want to agree to a film that I would feel uncomfortable with later. Then I met film-makers Jeremy Thomas and Richard Linklater. They suggested making a story inspired by the book, not a documentary. After almost two years of talking, we decided to go ahead.

## What do you think of the film?

I'm very proud of it. It's a brave film. People like me who eat meat should see where it comes from. It's a dark film, but in the United States these are dark times.

**"People who eat meat should see where it comes from." Do you agree or disagree with this? Discuss in pairs.**



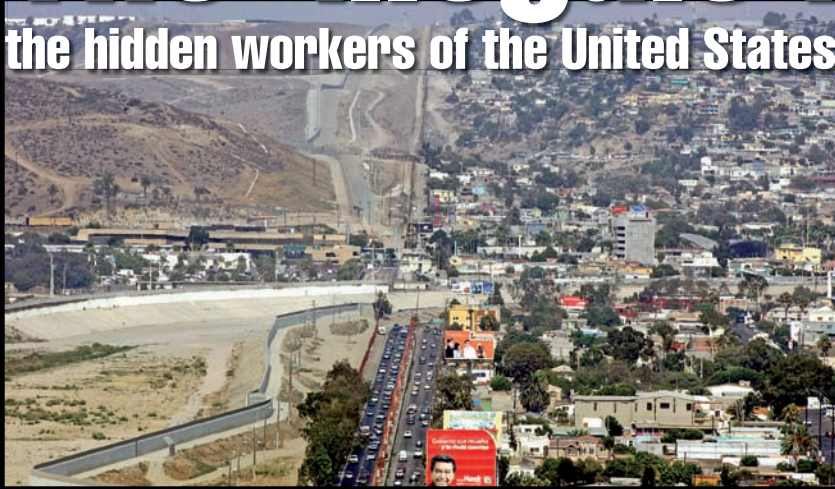
## How did you choose the actors in the film?

Every actor who worked on *Fast Food Nation* did it because the subject meant something to them. For example, Avril Lavigne doesn't eat meat, and she feels strongly about that. And Wilmer Valderrama (Esteban) first came to the US when he was fourteen. He didn't speak a word of English. He knows how it feels to be alone in a strange country.

**What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.**  
journalist publish industry conditions documentary inspire

# The 'illegals':

## the hidden workers of the United States



The US-Mexico border

Every year, thousands of people from countries such as Mexico risk everything to cross the border into the United States. When they arrive, life is hard. They may work long hours in badly-paid and dangerous jobs. They have no rights as they are not legal workers. Why do they do it, and what future is there for America's illegal workers?

**There are over eleven million illegal immigrants in the US. Most of these are Mexican.**

### A DANGEROUS JOURNEY

The US-Mexico border is over 3,000 km long. There are lots of high fences, and the US border police watch the area closely. Immigrants walk for hours in the desert heat to find places to cross where there are no police. Some try to swim or sail across the Rio Grande. Every year, Mexicans die during the journey. This is usually because they don't have enough water.



Border police with illegal immigrants

Often Mexicans will pay a guide, called a 'coyote' in Spanish, to take them across: on foot, or by boat or van. Sometimes coyotes pay money to a border police officer to let them through.

Many immigrants are caught by the border police. They are taken to a detention centre, and later they are driven back to Mexico.

### A NEW LIFE

Those immigrants who manage to cross the border are 'illegals'. You need an identity card and other legal papers to get work in America. With no 'papers', immigrants have no rights as workers. They often do the jobs that no one else wants to do. They do cleaning jobs; they work on farms; they look after children; they might work in factories ... The pay is low, but they can earn much more than in their own country. Many of them send money back to their families.

### THE FUTURE

Illegal immigration is seen as a big problem in the US. Some Americans feel angry at the number of immigrants in their country. They say that immigrants are taking their jobs, and using the schools and hospitals. However, some companies in the US want illegal immigration to continue. They depend on having cheap workers.

For people with difficult lives in poor countries, the US often appears to be a land of dreams. As we see in *Fast Food Nation*, real life for the immigrants who arrive is often very different.

**"We all share the same world. People should be able to work and live where they want."  
Discuss in class.**



Immigrant factory workers

What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.

**risk illegal legal immigrant detention centre identity card**



# A SHORT HISTORY

Most of us eat fast food at some time in our lives. Some people might even find it hard to live without fast food restaurants. So how and why did America become a 'fast food nation'?



## THE AGE OF THE CAR

In the 1940s, a new type of eating place appeared in America – the drive-in restaurant. It was designed for a changing way of life. People stayed in their cars and waitresses served them. Drive-ins were popular with teenagers.

## THE McDONALD BROTHERS

In 1940 Richard and Maurice McDonald opened the 'McDonald Brothers' Burger Bar Drive-In' in San Bernardino, California. It was near a high school, it

employed twenty waitresses, and it made them rich.

Eight years later, the brothers decided it was time to change. They changed their drive-in for a different kind of restaurant where people had to line up inside for food. There were no plates or glasses; everything was made of paper. There were no waitresses and there was no washing-up. The prices were cheaper and the food arrived more quickly than in a drive-in.

# OF FAST FOOD

The first ever McDonald's, now a museum



It was the first self-service restaurant and it was hugely popular. It made the McDonalds a lot of money.

Businessmen from all over America visited the San Bernardino restaurant and copied the McDonald's model in their own fast food businesses.

## THE 'GOLDEN ARCHES'

Richard McDonald designed a new building for the restaurant. He wanted drivers to see it easily from the road. On the roof, he put two yellow arches in the shape of an 'M'. The famous McDonald's logo had arrived!

**How many fast food restaurants are there in your town? Do they serve American food or local food? Which ones do you prefer and why? Discuss in pairs.**

## AMERICA AND THE WORLD ...

Between 1960 and 1973, the number of McDonald's restaurants in America grew from 250 to 3,000. Wall Street\* put money into the fast food businesses. A fast food nation was born.

Today, you can find big fast food chains like McDonald's in most countries in the world. Love it or hate it, it seems that fast food is here to stay.

\* Wall Street is the centre of finance in New York.



What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.

**self-service model arch(es) logo finance**