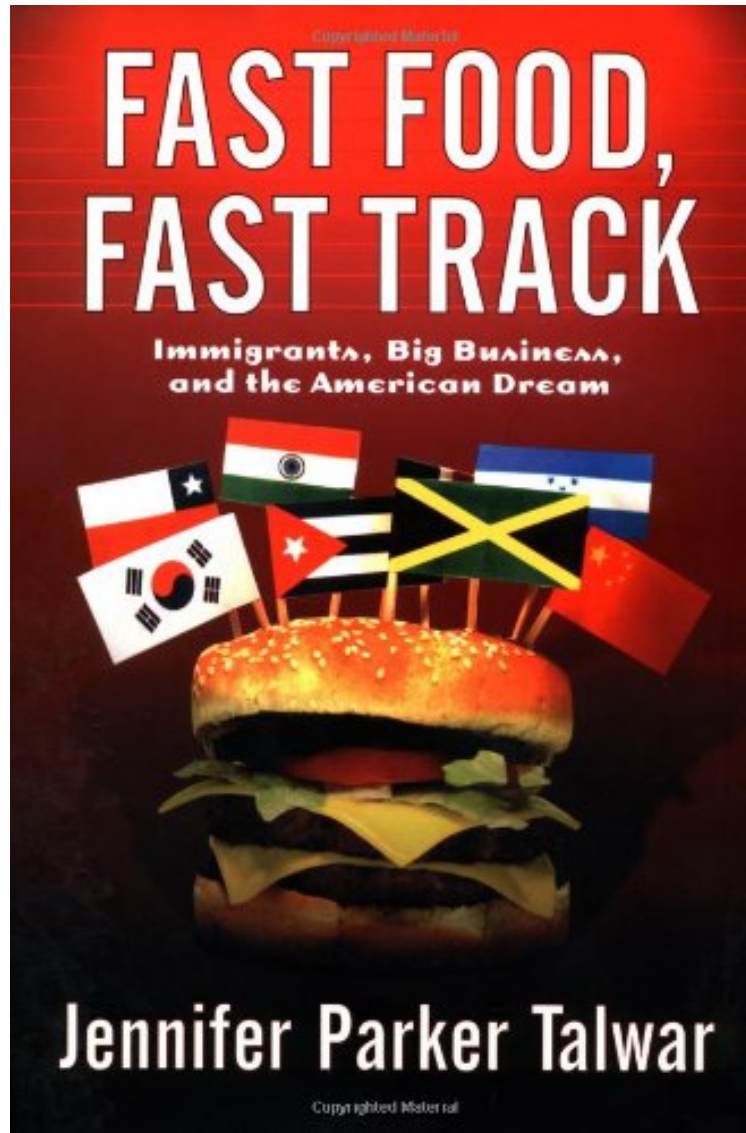


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Fast Food, Fast Track? Immigrants, Big Business, and the American Dream

Jennifer Talwar

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Jennifer Talwar : Fast Food, Fast Track? Immigrants, Big Business, and the American Dream before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fast Food, Fast Track? Immigrants, Big Business, and the American Dream:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An interesting study By RET Sociologist Jennifer Parker Talwar spent four years working in a Burger King as a part of her research on this book. She interviewed a wide range of

immigrant fast-food workers in New York City's ethnic communities. The result is an interesting study in immigration, ethnicity, labor and community in New York City. As a white American who has worked in fast food before, I was surprised to read about just how much is going on with fast food restaurants in a major metropolis, both in terms of the labor side and the business side. My experience was archtypal middle America - the kid working to make extra money. I think that this description still applies for the vast majority of the country, but the more I think about the faces behind the counter of many fast food restaurants in Washington, DC, Talwar is right - fast food is the entry for many immigrants into the mainstream American workforce. Accordingly, this book is a must-read for those who want to consider how immigrants are assimilated into modern America. The main limitation is that it is a study of immigrant labor and fast food in New York City. The broad range of ethnic diversity and community experiences that were drawn upon for this book simply do not exist anywhere else in the United States. I cannot think of any other city that could readily provide the "United Nations" workforce of the Chinatown McDonald's described in this book. Therefore, how applicable Talwar's work is to the country at large must be called into question. Also, do not be fooled by the cover into thinking that this book is anything like "Fast Food Nation." It is a specific (and appropriately narrow) sociological study, and lacks the range of that excellent book. 1 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Readable and Comprehensive By A Customer Clearly the result of exhaustive research, this book takes traditionally very dry material and presents a highly readable text that identifies fascinating perspectives on the American Dream. Recommended without reservation. 0 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Very informative By Harry S. Pariser This is a picture of America that you don't get elsewhere! She worked inside fast food restaurants to research this book, and I think she has done a stellar job here. Any American could learn a lot from reading this fine, fine book.

Hailing from China, the Caribbean, Latin America, and India, a colorful sea of faces has taken its place behind one of the most ubiquitous American business institutions the fast-food counter. They have become a vital link between the growing service sector in our cities' ethnic enclaves and the multi-billion dollar global fast-food industry. For four years, sociologist Jennifer Parker Talwar went behind the counter herself and listened to immigrant fast-food workers in New York City's ethnic communities. They talked about balancing their low-paying jobs and monotonous daily reality with keeping the faith that these very jobs could be the first step on the path to the American Dream. In this original and compelling work of ethnography, Talwar shows that contrary to those arguing that the fast-food industry only represents an increasing homogenization of the American workforce, fast-food chains in immigrant communities must and do adapt to their surroundings. Rather than focusing on how ethnic communities become relatively sealed off from the larger economy, Talwar explores the interplay between globalizing mainstream forces like fast-food chains and the immigrant communities of our largest and most diverse cities.

From Publishers Weekly Talwar, a sociology professor at Penn State-Berks Lehigh Valley, took a job in a Brooklyn, N.Y., Burger King to study the recent flood of immigrant employees in fast food restaurants. She also interviewed more than 100 employees (mostly Asian and Latino migrants) of New York-area McDonald's and Burger King franchises in ethnic neighborhoods. Here, she compares these fairly new sources of employment with the more traditional unskilled jobs in immigrant-run groceries, restaurants and other mom-and-pop enterprises, exploring why immigrants increasingly turn to fast food jobs and whether these jobs lead to English fluency and useful mainstream skills or are a dead end. Much of the text is Talwar's description of fast food life and her interpretations of the employees' survey responses and behavior. Missing are the first-person stories and real conversations that usually enliven the participant/observer genre even the extended survey answers seldom go more than one paragraph, and Talwar seems loath to let the workers speak for themselves without adding her own analysis. While she provides an unusual inside look at the pan-ethnic environment, hierarchies and racial conflicts of immigrant neighborhood fast food chains, her approach, as well as her sometimes facile observations ("It is interesting that [recent Chinese immigrants] Paul and Tina view McDonald's as foreign when the general public has long viewed Chinatown as foreign") deaden what might have been an engrossing and original study. (Mar.) Forecast: Readers of Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2001) will reach for this, undoubtedly hoping for more social analysis. Once word gets out that it doesn't measure up, though, sales will fall flat. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal With the publication in 1993 of sociologist George Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society*, the word "McDonaldization" became part of our vocabulary, usually used to describe prolific spread and mind-numbing sameness. Ritzer's ideas were further promulgated by subsequent titles such as *McDonaldization Revisited* by Mark Alfino, et al.; Barry Smart's *Resisting McDonaldization*; and, most trenchantly perhaps, Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*. Talwar (sociology, Penn State, Berks Lehigh Valley) offers us a less bleak perspective on fast food restaurants by examining the employment opportunities they represent for newly arrived immigrants in this country. The homogeneity decried in these other volumes here gives way to ethnic complexity, as restaurants (and their corporate owners) respond to local demographics. What appear to be dead-end jobs to those born in the United States are, in fact, just a rung in the ladder of upward mobility for ambitious new Americans. Intriguing and well researched,

Talwar's argument is recommended for all libraries. Ellen D. Gilbert, Princeton, NJ Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. "Fortunately, Jennifer Parker Talwar, takes a different approach [to the national debate over immigration]." -- The Wall Street Journal, February 28, 2002 "Intriguing and well researched..." -- Library Journal