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INTRODUCTION

McDonald's and Ray Kroc (1902–1984), the person most associated with it, were the subjects of motion picture *The Founder*. However, Kroc was *not* the founder of McDonald's. Nor was he the source of the early innovations that were the basis of that restaurant chain's phenomenal success. Rather, it was the McDonald brothers—Richard and Maurice—who were the true founders of McDonald's in 1937 and its real innovators. Kroc *was* the ruthless force behind the franchising of McDonald's restaurants and the eventual creation of what is now a globe-straddling chain of tens of thousands of restaurants. But even Kroc could not have anticipated that McDonald's would become the basis of one of the most influential developments in contemporary society. Its reverberations extend far beyond its point of origin both in the United States and in the fast-food business. It has influenced a wide range of businesses and many other types of organizations. Most generally, it is a global force affecting the way of life of a significant portion of the world.¹ That impact will continue during the COVID-19 pandemic that began in late 2019, although it will be altered in various ways as the pandemic evolves (see Epilogue).

This chapter begins with a discussion of McDonaldization, the concept and process that defines this book. After summarizing the basic principles that lie at the base of McDonaldization, its advantages and disadvantages (its “irrationalities”) are analyzed. We then turn to a discussion of the broader influence (the “long arm”) of McDonald's as well as the fact it has become an American and even a global cultural icon. The history of McDonald's is discussed in the context of the development of other brick-and-mortar chains. McDonald's is then compared to the largely digital Amazon. Because we live in the “digital age” and

* Notes may be found in the back of book.

Amazon is mainly digital (Amazon.com), it now is now a much more powerful force in consumption than the “brick and mortar” McDonald’s. Amazon’s digitality has also allowed it to become more McDonaldized than McDonald’s. As a result, the paradoxical question will be raised: Is McDonaldization still the best label for the process discussed in this book?

McDonald’s has center stage in this analysis, at least initially, *because it is the major example of and the paradigm for the wide-ranging process of McDonaldization.*² Most of this chapter as well as of this book is about that process, as well as the many phenomena affected by it.

McDonaldization is the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world.³

McDONALDIZATION: THE BASIC PRINCIPLES

Why has McDonald’s proven to be so successful and so powerful? Eating fast food, much of it at McDonald’s, has become increasingly common—over a third of American adults eat fast food on any given day.⁴ More subjectively, McDonald’s has become a “sign”⁵ for many that, among other things, they are in tune with the contemporary lifestyle. There is also a kind of magic or enchantment associated with such food and its settings. However, the focus here is not on McDonald’s per se but on the process of McDonaldization that is defined by four principles—*efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control*⁶—that lie at the heart of the success of McDonald’s and, more generally, of all McDonaldized systems. In short, McDonald’s and the other McDonaldized systems have succeeded because they offer consumers, workers, and managers the advantages of and association with these principles. Chapters 2 through 5 will be devoted to a discussion of these dimensions of McDonaldization from the perspectives of customers and workers, but the dimensions need to be introduced at this point.

Efficiency

One important element in the success of McDonaldized systems is their *efficiency*, or finding and using the optimum method for getting from one point to another.⁷ For consumers, McDonald’s (its drive-throughs are a particularly good example; the increasingly important online ordering and home delivery

systems—including McDonald’s own “McDelivery”—are others) offers the best available way to get from being hungry to being full. The fast-food model offers or at least appears to offer an efficient method for satisfying many other needs as well. Other businesses fashioned on the McDonald’s model offer similar efficiency to their consumers in, for example, exercising, losing weight, lubricating cars, getting new glasses or contacts, completing income tax forms, making online purchases, and using and paying for ride-hailing services through an app. It has even been applied to the widespread use of the highly addictive drug OxyContin for pain relief.⁸ Like their customers, workers in McDonaldized systems function efficiently by following the steps in a predesigned, often well-choreographed,⁹ process.

Calculability

Calculability emphasizes the quantitative aspects of products sold (number sold, portion size, price) and services offered (the time it takes to get the product). In McDonaldized systems, quantity has become equivalent to quality; large portions or their quick delivery is taken to mean that they must be good. “As a culture, we tend to believe deeply that in general ‘bigger is better.’”¹⁰ People can quantify things and feel that they are getting a lot of food for what appears to be a nominal sum of money. This is best exemplified by the McDonald’s \$1, \$2, and \$3 menu items. In a Denny’s ad, a man says, “I’m going to eat too much, but I’m never going to pay too much.”¹¹ This calculation does not take into account an important point, however: The profitability of fast-food chains indicates that the owners, not the consumers, get the better of the deal.

Consumers also calculate how much time it will take to drive to McDonald’s, be served the food, eat it, and return home; they then compare that interval to the time required to prepare food at home. They often conclude, rightly or wrongly, that a trip to the fast-food restaurant will take less time than eating at home. This sort of calculation is especially important to home delivery franchises, such as Domino’s and Papa John’s, as well as to other chains that emphasize saving time. A notable example of time savings in another sort of chain is LensCrafters, which has promised its customers “Glasses fast, glasses in one hour.” H&M (and similar clothing chains) is known for its “fast fashion.” The next day delivery by Amazon Prime is a major example of this. The emphasis on speed is central to McDonaldized systems.

Some McDonaldized institutions combine the emphases on time and money. Domino’s has promised pizza-delivery in half an hour, or the pizza is free. Pizza Hut has claimed that it will serve a personal pan pizza in five minutes, or it too will be free.

Workers in McDonaldized systems also emphasize the quantitative rather than the qualitative aspects of their work. Because the quality of the work is allowed to vary little, workers focus on how quickly tasks can be accomplished. In a situation analogous to that of customers, workers are expected to do a lot of work, very quickly, for low pay.

As will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, calculability has become infinitely more important in the era of the computerized collection of massive amounts of data (“big data”) and the automated mining and analysis of that data using applied mathematics, especially sophisticated algorithms, in order to uncover hidden patterns. These data are especially important with reference to digital sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). Many of these sites are highly McDonaldized, with Amazon being an even more McDonaldized consumption site than McDonald’s. Given the escalating importance of these sites and the big data associated with them, we can be said to live in an increasingly “computational culture.”¹²

Predictability

McDonald’s also offers *predictability*, the assurance that products and services will be much the same over time and in all locales. Egg McMuffins in New York will be virtually identical to those in Chicago and Los Angeles. Also, those eaten next week or next year will be about the same as those eaten today. Customers take great comfort in knowing that McDonald’s offers no surprises. They know that the next Egg McMuffin they eat will not be awful, but it will not be exceptionally delicious, either. The success of the McDonald’s model suggests that many people have come to prefer a world in which there are few surprises. “This is strange,” notes a British observer, “considering [McDonald’s is] the product of a culture which honours individualism above all.”¹³

The workers in McDonaldized systems also behave in predictable ways. They follow corporate rules, the dictates of their managers, and the demands of the systems with which—and in which—they work (e.g., tending to automated French fry machines). In many cases, what they do and even what they say (they are often scripted; see Chapter 5) is highly predictable.

Control

The fourth element in the success of McDonald’s, *control*,¹⁴ is exerted over the customers who enter McDonald’s. Lines, limited menus, few options, and uncomfortable seats all lead diners to do what management wishes them to do—eat quickly and leave. Furthermore, the drive-through window invites diners to

leave before they eat. Customers increasingly never enter in the first place, as they order online and await home delivery. Of course, this is even more true of Amazon.com and all online consumption sites.

Those who work in McDonaldized organizations are also controlled to a high degree—and usually more blatantly and directly than customers. They are trained to do a limited number of tasks in precisely the way they are told to do them. This control is reinforced by the technologies used and the way the organization is set up to bolster this control. Managers and inspectors make sure that workers toe the line. Amazon’s factories and delivery systems are similarly highly controlled.

This discussion leads to the need to offer an expanded definition of McDonaldization incorporating the four dimensions discussed above: **McDonaldization** is the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control—are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world.

THE ADVANTAGES OF McDONALDIZATION

McDonald’s and other McDonaldized systems have succeeded so phenomenally for good, solid reasons. Most generally, McDonaldized systems offer the advantages associated with their basic principles—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control.

Many knowledgeable people, such as the economic columnist Robert Samuelson, praise effusively this system as well as McDonald’s business model (copied by many). Samuelson confesses to “openly worship[ing] McDonald’s,” and he thinks of it as “the greatest restaurant chain in history.”¹⁵ In addition, McDonald’s offers many praiseworthy programs that benefit society. One example is its Ronald McDonald Houses, which permit parents to stay with children undergoing treatment for serious medical problems. The process of McDonaldization also moved ahead dramatically undoubtedly because it has led to positive changes.¹⁶ Here are a few specific examples of such changes:

- A wider range of goods and services is available to a much larger proportion of the population than ever before.
- Availability of goods and services depends far less than before on time or geographic location; people can now do things that were impossible previously, such as text message, e-mail, arrange dates online, make

online purchases, arrange online for the delivery of food, and participate in online social networks in the middle of the night with people halfway around the world.

- People are able to acquire what they want or need almost instantaneously and to get it far more conveniently.
- Goods and services are of far more uniform quality; many people even get better-quality goods and services than before McDonaldization.
- Far more economical alternatives to high-priced, customized goods and services are widely available; therefore, people can afford things (e.g., IKEA furniture rather than handmade furniture) they could not previously afford.
- Fast, efficient goods and services are available to a population that, at least before the COVID-19 pandemic, was working longer hours and had fewer hours to spare for consumption.
- In a rapidly changing, unfamiliar, and seemingly hostile world, the comparatively stable, familiar, and safe environments of a McDonaldized system (e.g., chains of urgent care centers) offer comfort (although that is now countered in the pandemic by the fear of being in any enclosed setting).
- Because of quantification, consumers can more easily compare competing products.
- Certain products (e.g., exercise and diet programs) are safer in a carefully regulated and controlled system.
- People are more likely to be treated similarly, no matter their race, sex, sexual orientation, or social class (although see Chapter 6 for examples of discrimination against Black customers and employees by McDonald's and other McDonaldized centers).
- Organizational and technological innovations are more quickly and easily diffused through networks of identical operators.
- One society's most popular products and services are more easily disseminated to others.

A CRITIQUE OF McDONALDIZATION: IRRATIONALITY

McDonaldization clearly offers powerful advantages, but rational systems inevitably spawn irrationalities. The downside of McDonaldization will be dealt with most systematically under the heading of irrationality. Some of major irrationalities to be discussed in Chapter 6 are

- inefficiency (rather than efficiency);
- high cost (even though McDonaldized goods and services often seem to be inexpensive);
- its falseness, especially in the way employees relate to consumers;
- disenchantment;
- homogenization; and
- dehumanization.

Criticism can, in fact, be levelled at all of the specific elements of the McDonaldizing world. As just one example, at the opening of Euro Disney, a French politician said that Disney will “bombard France with uprooted creations that are to culture what fast food is to gastronomy.”¹⁷ McDonald’s and other purveyors of the fast-food model spend billions of dollars each year detailing the benefits of their system. Critics of the system, however, have few outlets for their ideas. For example, no one sponsors commercials between children’s programs warning them of the dangers associated with fast-food restaurants.

Nonetheless, legitimate questions may be raised about this critique of McDonaldization: Is it animated by a romanticization of the past, an impossible desire to return to a world that no longer exists? Some critics do base their critiques on nostalgia for a time when life was slower and offered more surprises, when at least some people (those who were better off economically) were freer, and when one was more likely to deal with human beings than robots or computers.¹⁸ Although they have a point, these critics have undoubtedly exaggerated the positive aspects of a world without McDonald’s and McDonaldization, and they have certainly tended to forget the liabilities associated with earlier eras.

As an example of the latter, take the following anecdote about a visit to a pizzeria in Havana, Cuba, which in some respects is decades behind the United States:

The pizza's not much to rave about—they scrimp on tomato sauce, and the dough is mushy.

It was about 7:30 P.M., and as usual the place was standing-room-only, with people two deep jostling for a stool to come open and a waiting line spilling out onto the sidewalk.

The menu is similarly Spartan. . . . To drink, there is tap water. That's it—no toppings, no soda, no beer, no coffee, no salt, no pepper. And no special orders.

A very few people are eating. Most are waiting. . . . Fingers are drumming, flies are buzzing, the clock is ticking. The waiter wears a watch around his belt loop, but he hardly needs it; time is evidently not his chief concern. After a while, tempers begin to fray.

But right now, it's 8:45 P.M. at the pizzeria, I've been waiting an hour and a quarter for two small pies.¹⁹

Few would prefer such a restaurant to the fast, friendly, more diverse offerings of, say, Pizza Hut. More important, however, critics who revere the past ignore the fact that we are not returning to such a world. In fact, fast-food restaurants such as Kumba King have begun to appear even in Havana (and many more are likely).²⁰ The increase in the number of people crowding the planet, the acceleration of technological change, and the increasing pace of life make it impossible to go back to a world, if it ever existed, dominated by home-cooked meals, traditional restaurant dinners, high-quality foods, meals loaded with surprises, and restaurants run by chefs free to express their creativity.

It is more valid to critique McDonaldization from the perspective of a conceivable future.²¹ Unfettered by the constraints of McDonaldized systems but using the technological advances made possible by them, people could have the potential in the future to be far more thoughtful, skillful, creative, and well rounded. In short, if the world were less McDonaldized, people would be better able to live up to their human potential.

We must look at McDonaldization as both “enabling” and “constraining.”²² McDonaldized systems enable us to do many things we were not able to do in the past; however, these systems also keep us from doing things we otherwise could do. McDonaldization is a “double-edged” phenomenon.

McDONALD'S: CREATING THE "FAST-FOOD FACTORY"

As mentioned above, the basic McDonald's approach—and the basis of the McDonaldization process—was created by two brothers, Richard and Maurice McDonald, in their first restaurant in Pasadena, California, in 1937.²³ They based that restaurant on the principles of high speed, large volume, and low price. To avoid chaos, they offered customers a highly circumscribed menu. Instead of personalized service and traditional cooking techniques, the McDonald brothers used assembly-line procedures for cooking and serving food. In place of trained cooks, the brothers' "limited menu allowed them to break down food preparation into simple, repetitive tasks that could be learned quickly even by those stepping into a commercial kitchen for the first time."²⁴ They pioneered the use of specialized restaurant workers such as "grill men," "shake men," "fry men," and "dressers" (those who put the "extras" on burgers and who wrap them). They developed regulations dictating what workers should do and even what they should say. In these and other ways, the McDonald brothers took the lead in developing the rationalized "fast-food factory."²⁵

Ray Kroc not only did not invent McDonald's basic principles, he also did not invent the franchise:

Franchising is a system in which one large firm . . . grants or sells the right to distribute its products or use its trade name and processes to a number of smaller firms. . . . Franchise holders, although legally independent, must conform to detailed standards of operation designed and enforced by the parent company.²⁶

Singer Sewing Company pioneered franchising after the Civil War, and automobile manufacturers and soft drink companies were franchising by the turn of the 20th century. By the 1930s, it had found its way into retail businesses, such as Western Auto, Rexall pharmacies, and the IGA food markets.

There had been many efforts to franchise food service before Kroc arrived on the scene in the early 1950s. The first food service franchises, the A&W Root Beer stands, made their debut in 1924. Howard Johnson began franchising ice cream and other food in 1935. The first Dairy Queen opened in 1944; efforts to franchise it nationally led to a chain of about 2,500 outlets by 1948. Other well-known food franchises predated McDonald's. Big Boy started in the

late 1930s, and Burger King (then Insta-Burger) and Kentucky Fried Chicken began in 1954. Thus, Kroc's first McDonald's, which opened on April 15, 1955, was a relative latecomer to franchising in general and to food franchising in particular.

In 1954, when Ray Kroc first visited it, McDonald's was a single drive-in hamburger stand in San Bernardino, California (ironically, the same city where Taco Bell was founded by Glen Bell).²⁷ The basic menu, the approach, and even some of the techniques for which McDonald's is famous had already been created by the McDonald brothers. Although it was a local sensation, the McDonald brothers were content to keep it that way. They were doing very well and had few grand ambitions despite a few tentative steps toward franchising. With plenty of ambition for all of them, Kroc became their franchising agent and went on to build the McDonald's franchise empire. At first, Kroc worked in partnership with the McDonald brothers, but after he bought them out in 1961 for \$2.7 million, he was free to build the business as he wished.

Kroc took the specific products and techniques of the McDonald brothers and combined them with the principles of other franchises (food service and others), bureaucracies, scientific management, and the assembly-line. Kroc's genius was in bringing all these well-known ideas and techniques to bear on the fast-food business and adding his ambition to turn it, through franchising, into a national, then international, business phenomenon. McDonald's and McDonaldisation, then, do not represent something new but rather represent the culmination of a series of rationalization processes that had been occurring throughout the 20th century.

Kroc was impressed, above all else, by the efficiency of the McDonald brothers' operation, as well as the enormous profit potential of such a system applied at a large number of restaurant sites. Here is how Kroc described his initial reactions to the McDonald's system: "I was fascinated by the simplicity and effectiveness of the system. . . . Each step in producing the limited menu was stripped down to its essence and accomplished with a minimum of effort. They sold hamburgers and cheeseburgers only. The burgers were all fried the same way."²⁸ But Kroc's obsession with streamlined processes predated his discovery of McDonald's. When he was selling blenders to restaurants, he was disturbed by the restaurants' lack of efficiency: "There was inefficiency, waste, and temperamental cooks, sloppy service and food whose [*sic*] quality was never consistent. What was needed was a simple product that moved from start to

completion in a *streamlined* path” (italics added).²⁹ Kroc toyed with other alternatives for streamlining the restaurant meal before settling on the McDonald’s hamburger as a model of efficiency:

He had contemplated hot dogs, then rejected the idea. There were too many kinds of hot dogs . . . there were all sorts of different ways of cooking hot dogs . . . boiled, broiled, rotisserie, charcoaled. . . . Hamburgers . . . were simplicity itself. The condiments were added to the hamburger, not built in. And there was only one way to prepare the hamburger—to grill it.³⁰

Kroc and his associates experimented with each component of the hamburger to increase the efficiency of producing and serving it. For example, they started with partially sliced buns that arrived in cardboard boxes. But the griddle workers had to spend time opening the boxes, separating the buns, slicing them in half, and discarding the leftover paper and cardboard. Eventually, McDonald’s found that buns sliced completely in half, separated, and shipped in reusable boxes could be used more efficiently. The meat patty received similar attention. For example, the paper between the patties had to have just the right amount of wax so that the patties would readily slide off the paper and onto the grill. Kroc’s goal in these innovations was greater efficiency:

The purpose of all these refinements . . . was to make our griddle man’s job easier to do quickly and well. And the other considerations of cost cutting, inventory control, and so forth were important to be sure, but they were secondary to . . . what happened there at the smoking griddle. This was the vital passage of our *assembly-line*, and the product had to flow through it smoothly or the whole plant would falter.³¹ (italics added)

To this day, efficiency remains the focus at McDonald’s. For example, in at least one McDonald’s, “the workers labored with an assembly-line efficiency.”³²

However, Kroc’s major innovation lay in the way he franchised McDonald’s. He did not permit regional franchises in which a single franchisee received control over all the outlets to be opened in a given area. Other franchisers had floundered because regional franchisees had grown too powerful and subverted the basic principles of the company. Kroc maximized central control and thereby uniformity throughout the system by granting franchises one at a time and rarely granting more than one franchise to a specific individual. Kroc also gained

control over and profited from the franchisee's real estate.³³ Another of Kroc's innovations was to set the fee for a franchise at a rock-bottom \$950 (today, a potential franchisee needs at least \$500,000 in liquid assets even to be considered for a franchise, and the cost of obtaining a franchise will be between over \$1 and over \$2 million). Other franchisers had set very high initial fees and made most of their money from the initial setup. As a result, they tended to lose interest in the continued viability of their franchisees. At McDonald's, profits did not come from high initial fees but from the 1.9% of store sales that headquarters demanded of its franchisees. The success of Kroc and his organization thus depended on the prosperity of the franchisees. This mutual interest was Kroc's greatest contribution to the franchise business and a key factor in the success of McDonald's and its franchisees, many of whom became multimillionaires.

Although Kroc imposed and enforced a uniform system, he encouraged the franchisees to come up with innovations that could enhance not only their operations but also those of the system as a whole. Take the case of product innovations. Kroc himself was not a great product innovator. One of his most notorious flops was the Hula Burger, a slice of grilled pineapple between two pieces of cheese wrapped in a toasted bun. Successful creations, such as the fish sandwich (the Filet-O-Fish), the Egg McMuffin, McDonald's breakfast meals, and even the Big Mac, came from franchisees. Thus, McDonald's achieved a balance between centralized control and the independence of franchisees.

Kroc spearheaded a series of developments that further rationalized the fast-food business.³⁴ For one thing, he (unwittingly) served as preacher and cheerleader for the principles of rationalization as he lectured "about uniformity, about a standardized menu, one size portions, same prices, same quality in every store."³⁵ This uniformity allowed McDonald's to differentiate itself from its competitors, whose food was typically inconsistent. McDonald's also led the field by imposing a limited menu (at first, 10 items), by creating tough standards for the fat content of its hamburgers, by converting to frozen hamburgers and French fries, by using inspectors to check on uniformity and conformity, and by forming in 1961 the first full-time training center in the business (called Hamburger University and offering a "degree" in "hamburgerology").

In 1958, McDonald's published an operations manual that detailed many of the principles for operating a franchised fast-food restaurant.³⁶ It told operators *exactly* how to draw milk shakes, grill hamburgers, and fry potatoes. It specified *precise* cooking times for all products and temperature settings for all equipment. It fixed *standard* portions on every food item, down to the *quarter ounce* of onions placed on each hamburger patty and the *thirty-two slices per pound* of cheese.

It specified that French fries be cut at *nine thirty-seconds of an inch* thick. And it defined quality *controls* that were unique to food service, including the disposal of meat and potato products that were held more than *ten minutes* in a serving bin.

Grill men . . . *were instructed* to put hamburgers down on the grill moving from left to right, creating *six rows of six* patties each. And because the first two rows were farthest from the heating element, they were instructed (and still are) to flip the third row first, then the fourth, fifth, and sixth before flipping the first two.³⁷ (italics added)

It is hard to imagine a more rational system.

McDonald's success and importance is readily apparent. By 1994 it had already sold 99 billion burgers;³⁸ it has now sold hundreds of billions of them. Its revenues peaked in 2013 at \$28.1 billion (greater than the gross domestic product [GDP] of many countries, including Ecuador),³⁹ with a net income of \$5.6 billion.⁴⁰ In late 2019, revenues were *only* \$21 billion, and net income *had only risen to* \$5.8 billion. While McDonald's revenue has dropped slightly in recent years and its net income has been stagnant,⁴¹ it remains an economic superpower. It has almost 39,000 restaurants in 101 countries throughout the world, serving an average of nearly 70 million customers a day.⁴² A computer programmer compiled a visualization of all the McDonald's locations in the United States (just over 14,000 in 2019) and reported that it is impossible to get farther than 115 miles from a McDonald's.⁴³ The "McFarthest Spot," as the programmer labeled it, lies in Nevada.⁴⁴ A British commentator archly notes, "There are McDonald's everywhere. There's one near you, and there's one being built right now even nearer to you. Soon, if McDonald's goes on expanding at its present rate, there might even be one in your house. You could find Ronald McDonald's boots under your bed. And maybe his red wig, too."⁴⁵

MCDONALD'S AND OTHER BRICK-AND-MORTAR CONSUMPTION SITES

When the first edition of this book was published in 1993, its focus was on "brick-and-mortar" consumption sites, like your local McDonald's restaurant, and those of other chains of fast-food restaurants, as well as Wal-Mart, shopping malls, and so on. Before the advent of the consumption sites on the Internet, that's pretty much all there was (although the Sears mail order catalogue and that of others,

such as Montgomery Ward, were exceptions; see below on IKEA's catalogue). Some brick-and-mortar sites (including McDonald's) have expanded enormously in the last three decades, but many others have declined dramatically (department stores, big-box stores, some chain stores, shopping malls). Overall but *not* in the fast-food business (among others), brick-and-mortar locales devoted to consumption are increasingly being supplanted in importance by the largely digital sites. *However, as we will see, a clear and unequivocal distinction between the brick-and-mortar and the digital is increasingly untenable; they are increasingly merging into, augmenting, one another.* For example and as will be discussed further, Domino's largely brick-and-mortar structures are increasingly doing business online, and Amazon has opened brick-and-mortar bookstores, convenience stores,⁴⁶ and more importantly, bought the Whole Foods chain of about 500 supermarkets for over \$13 billion.⁴⁷

Largely brick-and-mortar franchises generated about \$2.1 trillion in business in the United States in 2014. They employed over 8.2 million people.⁴⁸ Franchises have continued to grow rapidly;⁴⁹ more than 80% of McDonald's restaurants are franchises (up from 57% in 2006). (Interestingly, another giant in the fast-food business—Starbucks—refuses to franchise its operations in the United States, but it does license them to independent owners. It has been franchising in Europe and elsewhere.) In the words of a McDonald's report, "We believe locally-owned and operated restaurants are at the core of our competitive advantage, making us not just a global brand but also a locally relevant one."⁵⁰

The McDonald's model has been adopted not only by other budget-minded hamburger franchises, such as Burger King and Wendy's, but also by a wide array of other budget-priced fast-food businesses. In 2019, Yum! Brands, Inc., operated more than 43,000 restaurants in more than 125 countries and territories.⁵¹ It encompasses Pizza Hut, Wing Street, KFC, and Taco Bell. Yum! Brands has more outlets than McDonald's, although its total sales (over \$49 billion in 2018) and net income (\$1.5 billion) are not nearly as high as McDonald's.⁵² Subway has almost 41,000 outlets in more than 100 countries; about 24,000 are in the United States.⁵³ The Cleveland, Ohio, market, to take one example, is so saturated with Subway restaurants that one opened *inside* the Jewish Community Center.⁵⁴ Among the innumerable other successful budget-oriented fast-food chains are Chipotle (still embattled because of a series of health scares), Chick-fil-A, Dunkin' Donuts, Firehouse Subs, Five Guys, Panera, and Jimmy John's.

In-N-Out Burger is a relatively small West Coast chain with nearly 350 restaurants. While Stacy Perman argues that In-N-Out Burger is "the antithesis of McDonald's,"⁵⁵ it is, in fact, in most ways highly McDonaldisated. Another

food chain is Pret A Manger, a British company (the name is French, meaning “ready to eat”). Founded in London in 1968, it remains based primarily in Great Britain. As of this writing, there are about 450 Pret A Manger restaurants in the world⁵⁶—less than 100 of them in the United States (New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Boston)—but more are promised.⁵⁷ Unlike In-N-Out and McDonald’s, Pret A Manger does *not* sell hamburgers but rather a variety of foods (salads, soups, wraps, desserts, etc.). Pret is best known for its high-quality sandwiches, such as Balsamic Chicken & Avocado. Like In-N-Out, Pret avoids the use of preservatives and chemicals. Pret does not make its sandwiches to order, but it does have them made in the shops several times a day.

One new and growing fast-food chain is Blaze Pizza. Founded in 2011, by early 2020 it had over 300 outlets. It involves an assembly-line-like operation where customers can select ingredients as they move along the service line. Once they have made all their topping selections and reach the end of the service line, their personalized pizza is fast-fired and is ready in about three minutes.⁵⁸

The McDonald’s model has been extended to more upscale, higher-priced, “fast casual,” brick-and-mortar chain restaurants. Among the burger chains in this category are Shake Shack and its “ShackBurger.”⁵⁹ Smashburger, once the hottest new burger chain, is noted for its burgers made crispy by smashing them with a steel mold. However, it fell on hard times and was acquired in 2018 by a Philippine-based chain, Jolibee. The dominant higher-priced restaurant chains offer fuller menus. Major examples include Outback Steakhouse, Chili’s, Olive Garden, Cheesecake Factory, and Red Lobster.

Morton’s is an even more upscale, high-priced chain of steakhouses (Ruth’s Chris is another) that has overtly modeled itself after McDonald’s: “Despite the fawning service and the huge wine list, a meal at Morton’s conforms to the same dictates of uniformity, cost control and portion regulation that have enabled American fast-food chains to rule the world.”⁶⁰ In fact, the chief executive of Morton’s was an owner of a number of Wendy’s outlets and admits, “My experience with Wendy’s has helped in Morton’s venues.”⁶¹ To achieve uniformity, employees go “by the book”: “an ingredient-by-ingredient illustrated binder describing the exact specifications of . . . Morton’s kitchen items, sauces and garnishes. A row of color pictures in every Morton’s kitchen displays the presentation for each dish.”⁶² Other types of brick-and-mortar business are increasingly adapting the principles of the fast-food industry to their operational needs. Said the vice chair of Toys“R”Us, “We want to be thought of as a sort of McDonald’s of toys.”⁶³ (Interestingly, Toys“R”Us collapsed in 2018 because of, among other things, the difficulty competing with the even more massively McDonaldized Wal-Mart and

its toy business.) The founder of Kidsports Fun and Fitness Club echoed this desire: “I want to be the McDonald’s of the kids’ fun and fitness business.”⁶⁴ Other chains with similar ambitions include Gap, Jiffy Lube, AAMCO Transmissions, Midas Muffler & Brake Shops, Great Clips, H&R Block, Pearle Vision, Bally’s, Kampgrounds of America (KOA) (called the “McDonald’s of camping”),⁶⁵ KinderCare (dubbed “Kentucky Fried Children”),⁶⁶ Home Depot, PetSmart, Jenny Craig, and Curves (which claims to be the world’s largest chain of women’s fitness centers).⁶⁷ The European budget airline Ryanair has copied the McDonald’s model in a process that has been called “Ryanization.”⁶⁸

McDonald’s has been a resounding success in the international arena. The majority of McDonald’s restaurants are now outside the United States (that was true of only about 25% of its restaurants in the mid-1980s).⁶⁹ About half of McDonald’s revenue comes from its overseas operations.⁷⁰ The leader is Japan with almost 3,000 restaurants,⁷¹ China is catching up quickly with its 2,700 McDonald’s restaurants.⁷² (However, Yum! Brands operates more than 5,000 KFCs in China—the Chinese greatly prefer chicken to beef.⁷³ Yum! Brands is expanding faster in China than McDonald’s.⁷⁴) France, the bastion of fine food, has become the second most profitable market in the world (the United States is first) for McDonald’s.⁷⁵ There were over 600 McDonald’s in Russia in 2018.⁷⁶ In fact, many other fast-food restaurants are succeeding in Russia; Russians seem to love American fast food.⁷⁷ Although there have been recent setbacks for McDonald’s in Great Britain, that nation remains the “fast-food capital of Europe.”⁷⁸ Israel is described as “McDonaldized,” with its shopping malls populated by “Ace Hardware, Toys’R’Us, Office Depot, and TCBY.”⁷⁹

Many highly McDonaldized, largely brick-and-mortar, firms outside the fast-food industry have also had success globally. Wal-Mart is the world’s largest brick-and-mortar retailer, with 2.3 million employees (over half of them in the United States) and almost \$500 billion in revenue in 2019. It opened its first international store (in Mexico) in 1991; over half of its approximately 11,500 stores are now outside the United States.⁸⁰ Although it is working hard to become a larger digital presence, Wal-Mart continues to be dominated by its brick-and-mortar sites.

Other nations have developed their own variants on the McDonald’s chain. Canada has a chain of coffee shops called Tim Hortons (merged with Wendy’s in 1995, purchased by Burger King in 2014, and now part of Restaurant Brands), with almost 5,000 brick-and-mortar outlets (about 700 in the United States) in 2016.⁸¹ It is Canada’s largest food service provider; much larger there than McDonald’s. The chain dominates Canada’s coffee business, but it has fallen on

hard times in United States.⁸² Paris, a city whose love for fine cuisine might lead one to think it would prove immune to fast food, has a large number of fast-food *croissanteries*. The revered French bread has also been McDonaldized;⁸³ it can even now be purchased in vending machines.⁸⁴ However, there is at least one effort to return to the production and sale of the classic French bread in traditional *boulangeries*.⁸⁵ An increasing number of French restaurants serve industrially produced food rather than food produced in their own kitchens. Overall, for the first time, in 2013 the French spent more money in fast-food restaurants than in traditional restaurants.⁸⁶ India has a chain of fast-food restaurants, Nirula's, that sells mutton burgers (about 80% of Indians are Hindus, who eat no beef) as well as local Indian cuisine.⁸⁷ Mos Burger is a Japanese chain with more than 1,700 restaurants, including six in Australia.⁸⁸ In addition to the usual fare, Mos Burger sells Teriyaki chicken burgers, rice burgers, and "Oshiruko with brown rice cake."⁸⁹

War-ravaged Beirut, Lebanon, once the most unlikely spot for an indigenuous fast-food restaurant, witnessed the opening of Juicy Burger in 1984. It had a rainbow instead of golden arches, and J. B. the Clown stood in for Ronald McDonald. Its owners hoped (in vain) that it would become the "McDonald's of the Arab world."⁹⁰ However, a newer competitor for the most unlikely spot for a McDonald's clone is Teheran, Iran, which now has a "Mash Donald's." It joins "K.F.C. (Kabooki Fried Chicken) and clones of Pizza Hut (Pizza Hat) and Burger King (Burger House)."⁹¹

And now McDonaldization is coming full circle. Other countries with indigenuous McDonaldized institutions have begun to export them to the United States. Great Britain's Pret A Manger has already been mentioned. Pollo Campero was founded in Guatemala in 1971 and by 2011 had over 350 restaurants in Latin America and several other countries, including the United States.⁹² Jollibee (see above), the Philippine chain, has about 1200 stores, with a number of U.S. outlets.⁹³ Pollo Campero is a smaller presence in the United States than the American-owned Pollo Tropical chain.⁹⁴ However, Pollo Campero is more significant because it involves the invasion of the United States, the home of fast food, by a foreign (Guatemalen) chain. As exemplified by Jollibee's purchase of Smashburger, even the hamburger business in the United States is not immune to an influx of foreign competition. BurgerFuel, a small, high-end, New Zealand burger chain with 88 outlets in six countries, expanded into the United States in 2017.⁹⁵

While it is highly McDonaldized, IKEA, a Swedish-based (but Dutch-owned) home furnishings company, is a powerful force on its own. In fact, there is discussion of "IKEAization" independent of the process of McDonaldization.

IKEA did about 35 billion euros of business in 2016, derived from the more than 684 million people visiting its over 400 brick-and-mortar superstores in 52 countries.⁹⁶ (Purchases were also made from the over 200 million copies of its catalog printed in 62 editions and 29 languages; an interactive version is now available online.⁹⁷ In fact, that catalog was reputed to print annually the second largest number of copies in the world, just after the Bible.⁹⁸) IKEA bridges the brick-and-mortar and digital worlds; its website reported 2.1 billion visitors in 2016.⁹⁹ IKEA is so popular in Europe that “it is said that one in ten Europeans is conceived on an IKEA bed.”¹⁰⁰ Another significant franchise is H&M, an international chain of clothing stores. Founded in 1947, it now has almost 5,000 shops in 74 countries.¹⁰¹ It currently employs 179,000 people and had over \$24 billion in sales in 2019.¹⁰² Another leader in the global clothing business is Zara, which opened its first shop in 1975 and now has more than 2,000 of them in 96 countries. Zara is part of a large group of fashion retailers that make up the Spanish firm Inditex. Taken together, there are more than 7,400 Inditex shops in 96 countries operating under nine different brand names.¹⁰³ Inditex had a total revenue of over 23,000 billion euros in 2016.¹⁰⁴

Much of the above emphasizes the geographic and spatial expansion of McDonald’s and other McDonaldized brick-and-mortar businesses, but in addition, they have all expanded temporally. McDonald’s has shifted some of its attention from adding locations to adding hours to existing locales, thereby squeezing greater profits from each of them. For example, at first McDonald’s did not offer breakfast, but now that meal has become the most important part of the business day; McDonald’s dominates the fast-food breakfast market. There is also a trend toward remaining open on a 24/7 basis. While less than 1% of McDonald’s restaurants in the United States operated nonstop in 2002, about 8% were operating that way until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Moreover, an even greater number of its U.S. locations opened by 5 a.m.¹⁰⁵ Time, like space, is no barrier to the spread of McDonald’s and McDonaldization.

THE LONG ARM OF McDONALD’S

Beyond the increasing influence of its business model (and of its impact on the larger culture; see below), McDonald’s has striven to continually extend its reach within American society and beyond. As the company’s chairperson said, “Our goal: to totally dominate the quick service restaurant industry worldwide. . . . I want McDonald’s to dominate.”¹⁰⁶

McDonald's began as a phenomenon of suburbs and medium-sized towns, but later it began to build brick-and-mortar restaurants in smaller towns, which supposedly could not support such restaurants, and in many big cities where consumers were supposedly too sophisticated to eat in them.¹⁰⁷ Today, you can find many fast-food outlets in New York's Times Square. In Paris, McDonald's is not only on the Champs-Élysées, but there is even a branch *in* the Louvre.¹⁰⁸ Soon after it opened in 1992, the McDonald's in Moscow's Pushkin Square sold almost 30,000 hamburgers a day and employed a staff of 1,200 young people working two to a cash register.¹⁰⁹ In early 1992, Beijing witnessed the opening of what was the world's largest McDonald's, with 700 seats, 29 cash registers, and nearly 1,000 employees.¹¹⁰ On its first day of business, it set a new one-day record for McDonald's by serving about 40,000 customers.¹¹¹ Today, the world's largest McDonald's ("Epic McD"), at least physically, is in Orlando, Florida, which is also the home of Disney World. It is three stories high, encompasses 19,000 square feet, and operated around the clock every day of the week. Among the more striking sites for a McDonald's restaurant are at the Grand Canyon; in what was once the world's tallest building, the Petronas Towers in Malaysia; as a ski-through on a slope in Sweden; and in a structure in Shrewsbury, England, that dates back to the 13th century.

McDonald's can even be found on the Guantanamo Bay U.S. Naval Base in Cuba and in the Pentagon. Small, satellite, express, or remote outlets, opened in areas that could not support full-scale fast-food restaurants, are also expanding rapidly. They are found in small storefronts in large cities and in nontraditional settings such as museums, department stores, service stations,¹¹² and even schools. These satellites typically offer only limited menus and may rely on larger outlets for food storage and preparation.¹¹³ A flap arose over the placement of a McDonald's in the then-new federal courthouse in Boston.¹¹⁴

Not content to dominate the strips that surround many college campuses, fast-food restaurants have long since moved right onto many of those campuses. The first campus fast-food restaurant opened at the University of Cincinnati in 1973. Today, college cafeterias often look like shopping mall food courts (and it's no surprise, given that campus food service is a multibillion-dollar-a-year business).¹¹⁵ In conjunction with a variety of "branded partners" (e.g., Pizza Hut and Subway), Marriott supplies food to many colleges and universities.¹¹⁶ The apparent approval of college administrations puts fast-food restaurants in a position to further influence the younger generation.

Fast food has long been available at many convenient rest stops along the road. After “refueling,” we can proceed with our trip, which is likely to end in another community with about the same density and mix of fast-food restaurants as the locale we left behind. Fast food is ubiquitous in airports and is also increasingly available in hotels.¹¹⁷

In other sectors of society, the influence of fast-food restaurants has been subtler but no less profound. Food produced by McDonald’s and other fast-food restaurants or that strongly resembles such food is now found in high schools and trade schools.¹¹⁸ Said the director of nutrition for the American School Food Service Association, “Kids today live in a world where fast food has become a way of life. For us to get kids to eat, period, we have to provide some familiar items.”¹¹⁹ Few lower-grade schools as yet have in-house fast-food restaurants; however, many have had to alter school cafeteria menus and procedures to make fast food readily available.¹²⁰ Apples, yogurt, and milk may go straight into the trash can, but hamburgers, fries, and shakes are devoured. Fast-food restaurants also tend to cluster close to schools.¹²¹ The attempt to hook school-age children on fast food reached something of a peak in Illinois, where McDonald’s operated a program called “A for Cheeseburger.” Students who received As on their report cards received a free cheeseburger, thereby linking success in school with McDonald’s.¹²² In Australia, toy versions of food featured by McDonald’s have been marketed to children as young as three. The toys include “fake McDonald’s fries, a self-assembling Big Mac, milkshake, Chicken McNuggets, baked apple pie and mini cookies.”¹²³ Many fear that playing with such toy food will increase still further children’s interest in eating the real thing.

The military has also been pressed to offer fast food on both bases and ships. Despite criticisms by physicians and nutritionists, fast-food outlets have turned up inside U.S. general hospitals and in children’s hospitals.¹²⁴ While no private homes yet have a McDonald’s of their own, meals at home often resemble those available in fast-food restaurants. Frozen, microwavable, and prepared foods, which bear a striking resemblance to meals available at fast-food restaurants, often find their way to the dinner table. There are even cookbooks—for example, *Secret Fast Food Recipes: The Fast Food Cookbook*—that allow one to prepare “genuine” fast food at home.¹²⁵ Home delivery of fast food, especially pizza, was revolutionized by Domino’s. In recent years, especially after the start of the pandemic, many other fast-food restaurants began delivering food to homes either on their own (e.g., Burger King) or by delivery services such as Grubhub, DoorDash, and Uber Eats.

Another example of the influence of McDonald's was to be found in movie theaters and reflected in the following newspaper headline: "To Woo Young Moviegoers, AMC Thinks Like McDonald's."¹²⁶ For example, building on McDonald's principle of calculability, especially large size (as best exemplified by the Big Mac), AMC theaters began offering "the Bavarian Beast," "a pound-and-a-half salted pretzel the size of a steering wheel."¹²⁷

Another type of expansion involves what could be termed "vertical McDonaldization";¹²⁸ that is, the demands of the fast-food industry, as is well documented in Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*, have forced industries that service it to McDonaldize in order to satisfy its insatiable demands. Potato growing and processing, cattle ranching, chicken raising, and meat slaughtering and processing have all had to McDonaldize their operations, leading to dramatic increases in production. That growth has not come without costs, however.

As demonstrated in the movie *Food, Inc.* (2008), meat and poultry are now more likely to be disease ridden; small (often non-McDonaldized) producers and ranchers have been driven out of business; and millions of people have been forced to work in low-paying, demeaning, demanding, and sometimes outright dangerous jobs. For example, in the meatpacking industry, reasonably safe, unionized, secure, manageable, and relatively high-paying jobs in firms with once-household names—such as Swift and Armour—have been replaced with unsafe, nonunionized, insecure, unmanageable, and relatively low-paying positions with largely anonymous corporations (many of which were plagued with COVID-19 illnesses in 2020). While some (largely owners, managers, and stockholders) have profited enormously from vertical McDonaldization, far more have been forced into a marginal economic existence.

McDonald's is such a powerful model that many businesses as well as entities in many other domains have acquired nicknames beginning with "Mc." Examples include "McDentists" and "McDoctors," meaning drive-in clinics designed to deal quickly and efficiently with minor dental and medical problems;¹²⁹ "McChild" care centers, meaning child care centers such as KinderCare; "McStables," designating the nationwide racehorse-training operation of D. Wayne Lukas; and "McPaper," describing the newspaper *USA TODAY*.¹³⁰ (Scholars have used the term "McSexy" to describe the McDonaldization of exotic dancing.)¹³¹ McDonald's is not enamored, to put it mildly, of the proliferation of businesses using "Mc" as a prefix. Take the case of We Be Sushi, a San Francisco chain with a half-dozen outlets. A note

appeared on the back of the menu explaining why the chain was not named “McSushi”:

The original name was McSushi. Our sign was up and we were ready to go. But before we could open our doors we received a very formal letter from the lawyers of, you guessed it, McDonald’s. It seems that McDonald’s has cornered the market on every McFood name possible from McBagle [*sic*] to McTaco. They explained that the use of the name McSushi would dilute the image of McDonald’s.¹³²

Like virtually every other sector of society, sex has copied the McDonald’s model.¹³³ In New York City, an official called a three-story pornographic center “the McDonald’s of sex” because of its “cookie-cutter cleanliness and compliance with the law.”¹³⁴ In the movie *Sleeper*, Woody Allen not only created a futuristic world in which McDonald’s was an important and highly visible element, but he also envisioned a society in which people could enter a machine called an “orgasmatron” to experience an orgasm without going through the muss and fuss of sexual intercourse. Use of such machines (e.g., vibrators) will increase as the plague continues.

The porn site RedTube mimics the standardized interface of YouTube to provide various categories of adult content that users can view on the site or embed in their own web pages. The web is filled with video chat sites where users can request the performance of various sex acts. The Casual Encounters section on Craigslist.org provides people from every major city in the world with a centralized interface to find sexual partners. Tinder is a phone application usually used by people for the purpose of “hooking up,” but more long-term relationships, even marriages, seem to be occurring as a result of initial contact via Tinder.¹³⁵ A variety of devices, termed “teledildonics” or cyberdildonics by the adult entertainment industry, enables users to stimulate one another through computer networks. 3Feel is a virtual 3D environment where users can interact in real time and engage in sexual activity (with or without teledildonics).¹³⁶ As Woody Allen anticipated with his orgasmatron, “Participants can experience an orgasm without ever meeting or touching one another.”¹³⁷

In a world where convenience is king, disembodied sex has its allure. You don’t have to stir from your comfortable home. You pick up the phone, or log onto the computer and, if you’re plugged in, a world of unheard of sexual splendor rolls out before your eyes.¹³⁸

These examples suggest that no aspect of people’s lives is immune to McDonaldization.

Various pharmaceuticals can be seen as McDonaldizing sex. Viagra (and similar drugs such as Cialis) do this by, for example, making more predictable the ability of males to have an erection. (There are not yet similar, effective drugs for females, but research continues.) Such drugs also claim to work fast and to last for a long time. MDMA (ecstasy), an illicit drug, lasts for as much as eight hours and tends to increase the intensity of sensory information and feelings of social (including sexual) connectedness.

The preceding represents merely the tip of the iceberg as far as the long arm of McDonald's is concerned. Other areas affected by it (many of which will be discussed throughout this book) include the following:¹³⁹ outdoor recreation,¹⁴⁰ especially mountain climbing (e.g., reliance on guidebooks to climbing routes),¹⁴¹ professional sports,¹⁴² tourism,¹⁴³ the police,¹⁴⁴ the criminal justice system (profiling, “three strikes and you're out”),¹⁴⁵ family (books, TV shows devoted to quick fixes to family problems),¹⁴⁶ “McSchools” and the policies that serve to McDonaldize them,¹⁴⁷ “McUniversities,”¹⁴⁸ e-learning,¹⁴⁹ especially Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs; see Chapter 6),¹⁵⁰ as well as entire academic fields such as kinesiology (“McKinesiology”),¹⁵¹ the practice of medicine,¹⁵² psychotherapy,¹⁵³ death and dying, including funeral practices in Islamic societies,¹⁵⁴ losing weight and the McDonaldization of the body,¹⁵⁵ farms and their supersizing,¹⁵⁶ religion and the McDonaldization of religious creeds¹⁵⁷ and spirituality,¹⁵⁸ banking,¹⁵⁹ “McJobs” (see Chapters 4 and 5),¹⁶⁰ politics (“cool” versus “hot” politics; “drive-through democracy”),¹⁶¹ and scientific research.

MCDONALD'S AS AN AMERICAN AND A GLOBAL ICON

McDonald's has come to occupy a central place not just in the world of brick-and-mortar businesses but also in American and global popular culture.¹⁶² When McDonald's first opened in Manhattan, the “city went nuts.”¹⁶³ To this day, the opening of a new McDonald's in a small town can be an important social event. Said one Maryland high school student at such an opening, “Nothing this exciting ever happens in Dale City.”¹⁶⁴

Fast-food restaurants also play symbolic roles on television programs and in the movies. They have been satirized on *Saturday Night Live* and played a prominent role in a number of movies including *Coming to America* (1988), *Falling Down* (1993), *Sleeper* (1973), *Tin Men* (1987), *Scotland, PA* (2001), *Fast Food*

Nation (2006), the 2008 remake of the sci-fi classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, as well as *The Founder* (2016).

When plans were made to raze Ray Kroc's first McDonald's restaurant, hundreds of letters poured into company headquarters, including the following: "Please don't tear it down! To destroy this major artifact of contemporary culture would, indeed, destroy part of the faith the people of the world have in your company."¹⁶⁵ In the end, the restaurant was rebuilt according to the original blueprints and turned into a museum.¹⁶⁶ A McDonald's executive explained the decision: "McDonald's . . . is really a part of Americana."

Americans aren't the only ones who feel this way. At the opening of the McDonald's in Moscow, one journalist described the franchise as the "ultimate icon of Americana."¹⁶⁷ When Pizza Hut opened in Moscow, a Russian student said, "It's a piece of America."¹⁶⁸ Reflecting on the growth of fast-food restaurants in Brazil, an executive associated with Pizza Hut of Brazil said that his nation "is experiencing a passion for things American."¹⁶⁹ On the popularity of KFC in Malaysia, the local owner said, "Anything Western, especially American, people here love. . . . They want to be associated with America."¹⁷⁰ One could go further and argue that at least culturally, McDonald's has become more important than the United States itself, at least in some people's eyes. Take the following news story about a former U.S. ambassador to Israel officiating at the opening of the first McDonald's in Jerusalem wearing a baseball cap with the McDonald's golden arches logo:

An Israeli teen-ager walked up to him, carrying his own McDonald's hat, which he handed to Ambassador Indyk with a pen and asked: "Are you the Ambassador? Can I have your autograph?" Somewhat sheepishly, Ambassador Indyk replied: "Sure. I've never been asked for my autograph before."

As the Ambassador prepared to sign his name, the Israeli teen-ager said to him, "Wow, what's it like to be the ambassador from McDonald's, going around the world opening McDonald's restaurants everywhere?"

Ambassador Indyk looked at the Israeli youth and said, "No, no. I'm the American ambassador—not the ambassador from McDonald's!" Ambassador Indyk described what happened next: "I said to him, 'Does this mean you don't want my autograph?' And the kid said, 'No, I don't want your autograph,' and he took his hat back and walked away."¹⁷¹

Two other indices of the significance of McDonald's (and, implicitly, McDonaldization) are worth mentioning. The first is the annual "Big Mac index" (part of "burgeronomics"), published, tongue-in-cheek, by a prestigious magazine, *The Economist*. It indicates the purchasing power of various currencies around the world based on the local price (in dollars) of the Big Mac. The Big Mac is used because it is a uniform commodity sold in many different nations. In the 2020 survey, a Big Mac in Switzerland cost \$6.71; in the United States, it cost an average of \$5.67; in China, it was \$3.12; and in Russia, it was \$2.20.¹⁷² This measure indicates, at least roughly, where the cost of living is high or low as well as which currencies are undervalued (China) and overvalued (Switzerland). Although *The Economist* is calculating the Big Mac index only half seriously, the index represents the ubiquity and importance of McDonald's around the world.¹⁷³

The second indicator of the global significance of McDonald's is the idea developed by Thomas Friedman that "no two countries that both have a McDonald's have ever fought a war since they each got McDonald's." Friedman calls this the "Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention."¹⁷⁴ Another tongue-in-cheek idea, it implies that the path to world peace lies through the continued international expansion of McDonald's. Unfortunately, it was proved wrong for the first time by the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, which at the time had McDonald's.

To many people throughout the world, McDonald's has become a sacred institution.¹⁷⁵ At that opening of the McDonald's in Moscow, a worker spoke of it "as if it were the Cathedral in Chartres . . . a place to experience 'celestial joy.'"¹⁷⁶ Kowinski argues that indoor shopping malls, which almost always encompass fast-food restaurants and other franchises and chains, are the modern "cathedrals of consumption" to which people go to practice their "consumer religion."¹⁷⁷ Similarly, a visit to another central element of McDonaldized society, Walt Disney World,¹⁷⁸ has been described as "the middle-class hajj, the compulsory visit to the sunbaked holy city."¹⁷⁹ McDonald's has achieved its exalted position because virtually all Americans and many others have passed through its golden arches (or by its drive-through windows) on innumerable occasions. Furthermore, most of us have been bombarded by commercials extolling the virtues of McDonald's, commercials tailored to a variety of audiences and that change as the chain introduces new foods, new contests, and new product tie-ins. These ever-present commercials, combined with the fact that people cannot drive or walk very far without having a McDonald's pop into view, have embedded McDonald's deep in popular consciousness. Some years ago, a poll of school-age children showed

that 96% of them could identify Ronald McDonald, second only to Santa Claus in name recognition.¹⁸⁰ Over the years, McDonald's has appealed to people in many ways. The restaurants themselves are depicted as spick-and-span; the food is said to be fresh and nutritious; the employees are shown to be young and eager; the managers appear gentle and caring; and the dining experience itself seems fun filled. Through their purchases, people contribute, at least indirectly, to charities such as the Ronald McDonald Houses for sick children.

DIGITAL McDONALDIZATION

The Internet in general and Amazon (founded in 1994) in particular was coming of age about the time the first edition of this book was published and long after I wrote my first essay on the topic.¹⁸¹ Without Internet sites such as Amazon.com to analyze from the perspective of rationalization (McDonaldization), the focus was on all there was to analyze—brick-and-mortar consumption sites such as McDonald's restaurants. While some brick-and-mortar sites (especially McDonald's) have expanded dramatically in the intervening years, that growth has been dwarfed by a wide and ever-increasing margin by the expansion and proliferation of Internet sites devoted to consumption.

For example, Amazon, which started operations when McDonald's was already a giant in the business world, has long since grown much larger than McDonald's, and its advantage will become ever larger in the coming years. As large and powerful as Amazon has become, Alibaba in China is an even bigger e-commerce site; also growing and of increasing importance is India-based Flipkart. However, as discussed previously, when we look solely at all retail business, the brick-and-mortar realm had a huge but diminishing lead over digital businesses. However, the pandemic greatly increased online consumption and further reduced the amount of business done by brick-and-mortar sites.¹⁸²

The center of the McDonaldization of consumption (and much, if not everything, else), as well as the most extreme examples of it, are to be found *not* in the brick-and-mortar world but rather in the digital world. Consumption on digital sites tends to be much more *efficient*, *predictable*, *calculable*, and *controlled* than consumption in brick-and-mortar sites. This is certainly true for consumers, but in many ways, it is even truer for the "work" that gets done on those sites. As direct relationships with human workers are reduced to a minimum on digital sites and in many cases are eliminated completely, that work is increasingly done by an array of nonhuman technologies without direct human involvement.

Because human beings are a, if not *the*, major source of inefficiency, unpredictability, incalculability, and loss of control, digital systems that minimize or eliminate their role are likely to approach a degree of McDonaldization unimaginable in the brick-and-mortar world (although, of course, in digital systems, humans operate behind the scenes in creating, refining, and maintaining them).

However, the clear distinctions between brick-and-mortar and digital worlds are eroding as those worlds increasingly interpenetrate, augmenting one another in a “bricks-and-clicks” world.¹⁸³ Data from online and from stores complement one another. The resulting world of consumption, with brick-and-mortar and digital sites augmenting one another, promises even more McDonaldization in the future. In terms of consumption, augmented reality creates an increasingly seamless way to blend “the digital and the physical allowing a shopper to shift seamlessly between the two realms. . . . Customers . . . tend to jump constantly between the two worlds without noticing.”¹⁸⁴

Amazon was once almost totally digital, except for such aspects of its business as the warehousing and delivery of material products. It has recently moved strongly into the brick-and-mortar world by opening physical bookstores (it already has about half of the consumer book market in the United States), convenience stores (Amazon Go), and, most significant, the purchase of the Whole Foods chain of supermarkets. This is a major example of the fact that the never hard-and-fast distinction between the material and the digital is fast disappearing. (Although, it seems clear that the material world of consumption will be greatly diminished in the future.)

For example, as a result of its “grab-and-go” system, Amazon Go consumers can physically go to the brick-and-mortar shop, select, pick up, and take home groceries, ready-to-eat meals, and meal kits with all of the ingredients to create a meal at home in 30 minutes. Because of the integration of the digital in Amazon Go shops, it is not necessary for them to wait in line to physically pay for their purchases on checkout; Amazon Go offers checkout-free shopping. All shoppers need do is use the Amazon Go app on entering the store, take whatever automatically detected products they want to purchase, and leave the store.¹⁸⁵ Amazon Go’s “Just Walk Out Technology” is connected to the Internet and employs computer vision, sensors, and deep learning.¹⁸⁶ All of this serves to make shopping at Amazon Go far more McDonaldized (especially more efficient) than in any other brick-and-mortar convenience store or supermarket. (Uber has done much the same thing. Because rides are prepaid through an app, passengers can exit an Uber without the need to pay or tip.)

In fact, Amazon is expanding in so many directions and augmenting its online business in so many different ways that it has created fear of an emerging modern monopoly similar to the 19th-century railroads that led, in their day, to the development of anti-monopoly laws.¹⁸⁷

Because of what it sells—food—McDonald's is doomed to remain, at least for the foreseeable future, an almost totally brick-and-mortar phenomenon (McDonald's does now have digital kiosks for ordering food), at least until a way is found to transport food digitally, directly to consumers.

It is in the digital world, as well as the augmented world of bricks-and-clicks, that McDonaldization has reached new and unprecedented heights. More generally, the worlds of online and off-line consumption have grown far more McDonaldized. We are still in the early stages of this development, which is likely to accelerate at an ever-increasing pace.

Is “McDonaldization” Still the Best Label?

This leads to the issue of whether it makes sense to continue to use the term *McDonaldization* to describe the process of concern in this book. In discussing that issue, the question then becomes whether *Amazonization* would be a better term than *McDonaldization* for that process. For example, it is much easier to transform consumers into *prosumers* (those who *both* produce and consume, sometimes simultaneously) online. Indeed, if Internet businesses and other digital sites are to operate successfully, *consumers must become prosumers* (see Chapter 2). Brick-and-mortar sites have long done this, most notably McDonald's with its efforts to get consumers to perform tasks traditionally performed by paid workers. However, this is accomplished much more easily and extensively on Internet sites. It is hard, if not impossible, for consumers to find workers to help them online. In the main, if prosumers online want something done, they have little choice but to do it themselves.

Then there are all the material realities and impediments associated with a brick-and-mortar site like McDonald's. Consumers (and workers) must physically go to them in order to consume; goods must be delivered there; the goods must often be processed before they can be sold to consumers; and so on. All of these steps are reduced in the online consumption of products, and they are almost entirely eliminated as far as digital products, such as e-books and e-music are concerned.

Given the limitations of such brick-and-mortar sites as McDonald's restaurants, would we be justified in renaming the process of concern in this book

“Amazonization”? A strong argument can be made in support of such a relabeling. However, the basic principles of McDonaldization apply as well or even better to largely digital sites and bricks-and-clicks entities like Amazon than they do to brick-and-mortar sites like McDonald’s. In fact, successful digital (and bricks-and-clicks) consumption sites are arguably *more* McDonaldized than brick-and-mortar sites; they are more *McDonaldized than McDonald’s*. The present and even more the future of consumption belongs to the digital world in general and Amazon in particular. This became even more the case with the pandemic where many people grew increasingly reluctant to go to a brick-and-mortar site.

However, McDonald’s is still the pioneer in the creation of the process of McDonaldization. As a result, we will continue to use that term for this process.

A LOOK AHEAD

Because this book is a work in the social sciences, I cannot merely assert that McDonaldization is spreading throughout society; evidence must be presented for that assertion. Numerous and diverse examples in each chapter demonstrate the degree to which McDonaldization has come to dominate, even define, society and at an accelerating rate.

The focus throughout is on the impact of McDonaldized systems (e.g., fast-food restaurants, universities) on people, especially the people—consumers and workers—who are found in them. Chapters 2 and 3 concentrate on the consumers in McDonaldized settings. The focus is on the four basic principles of McDonaldization outlined in this chapter—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control—and the ways in which they affect consumers. Chapters 4 and 5 shift the focus to the workers, the producers, in those settings and their McDonaldized occupations, especially their “McJobs.” As was the case with consumers, workers are discussed from the perspective of the four dimensions of McDonaldization. In Chapter 6, the irrationality associated with these seemingly rational systems is explored. While there is much that is rational about McDonald’s and McDonaldization, including its basic principles, much of the book is a critique of McDonaldization. Chapter 6 presents that critique most clearly and directly, discussing a variety of irrationalities, the most important of which is dehumanization. Also discussed in this chapter are several perspectives on the issue of whether or not McDonaldization’s irrationalities need to be dealt with and, if so, how. The new Epilogue deals with profound effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on McDonaldization.