

The Correlation Between Health & The Food Within a Nation Built on Greed

Sa'Rhene Reneaja A'nell Jefferson

Marion Technical College

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Mrs. Hannah Westenbarger

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Undoubtedly, most humans dream of living a long healthy life, where stress is minuscule and time is used to work towards goals that give one meaning while having the freedom to spend time with the ones that matter the most. But what if a nation still trying to figure out its identity has been going completely against that? Well, areas called blue zones, the occurrence of historical events, & their impact on the development of the American food culture. A concept

calculated based on economic success, has shown the undeniable spark if not fire of health issues within United States borders. This causes many people to go on a quest to find out what went wrong and how they can change their understanding of what healthy eating looks like (the diet culture)—making the saying that the easiest way to hide a solution is to put it right in one's face. Regardless, evidence will continue to prove that the greed that built the United States has contributed to the sharp health decline since its founding.

The “traditional” way of eating consisted of people hunting and eating food that was not only available but also around them, however, that has changed. The quick evolution concerning food accessibility has changed human health forever, as many people now have year-round access to food even if it's not natural. To begin with, blue zones explained by Free Press, “Blue Zones have cultures that encourage healthy eating and other healthy habits that lead to many residents living to be older than 100, often with few serious health problems such as heart disease, cancer or diabetes” (Free Press, Mankato, MN, 6 Nov. 2018). Going more in-depth, blue zones are most commonly found in areas such as South America, China, and the non-capitalized areas in Africa that still hold onto their traditional practices of eating. However, the United States is not considered a blue zone, why? Well because of the rising cases of different diseases like cancer, obesity, Alzheimer's, and the multitude of different mental disorders. More interesting though is that compared to the United States many of these blue zones pre-colonial or not to this day are more plant-based, or have little to no meat consumption. Before slavery, many Africans & Indians(Red and Seminole) thought of meat as a food eaten in scarcity, & such things as beans, rice, fruit, and veggies were primarily eaten, and were seen in their advanced agriculture skills. Supported by, “How Enslaved Africans Helped Invent American Cuisine”,

Fruits and vegetables brought from Africa flourished in America in large part because enslaved Africans planted their gardens to supplement the meager rations provided by their captors. These plants eventually made their way from the gardens of the enslaved to those of some of the wealthiest and most prominent people in the country, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, whose gardens were planted with heirloom seeds from Africa. (Mekouar, 2019)

The mass geographical relocation of African people from their homeland and Indians; both red and Seminole already on Turtle Island (now the U.S.) for the use of slavery within the United States caused traditions that once kept the mass of those populations healthy to be lost and oppressed. To build a nation where people didn't want to do the dirty work or that didn't have the knowledge many turned towards involuntary servitude. (slavery) It was rationalized o in the eyes of the colonizers filled with greed they used the bible as a way to justify that blacks were inferior, and the term black; an “absence” or more so an observation of light was associated with negativity while the color white; a reflection of all wavelengths, a color many people truly aren't was associated with good and positivity. So in return, many black values and traditions were lost and that's where the health decline starts to be shown. With this, the food provided and available to not just blacks but poor people, in general, would leave people eating the scraps. With racial prejudice and hierarchy at play even when slavery was over and independence was “given”, many families became stuck in the food they once ate. Many going for the most affordable food option to put food on the table became a downfall of health as opportunities for black people to build wealth were suppressed, and the need to keep the poor, poor, and the rich, rich. Over time these dishes made within the black community during slavery were exclusively called soul food

or comfort foods, usually leftover animal parts. Furthermore in the text, “Soul Food: Scraps Became Cuisine Celebrating African-American Spirit”,

Slaves were forced to eat the animal parts their masters threw away. They cleaned and cooked pig intestines and called them "chitterlings." They took the butts of oxen and christened them "oxtails." Same thing for pigs' tails, pigs' feet, chicken necks, smoked neck bones, hog jowls, and gizzards. (Ha, 2023)

The significance of this information is that the forced diet placed upon the African to African American population set the standard for what food would become in American culture regardless of race or income, though the distinction between race and food has allowed the impact it has on health to be seen. “The inadequate diet forcefully imposed upon enslaved Africans was the precursor for the poor eating habits that have been traditionally found in the African American community, putting them at higher risk for chronic illnesses” (Michelle B. Pass, Sharon K. Bullock, 2021). So really the worst part of it all is that people are still unknowingly stuck in a cycle of eating meals eaten in times of struggle and survival now proven to be a center of causing the very health issues the nation faces. Only to still deny that their lifestyle is not at fault, blame it on genetics are unaware of the fault the government has in creating such an issue. Such foods that the government has made a staple are man-made, ultra-process, fatty foods that only kill a person inside out. So really the question is... is one willing to pay attention and tend to their body when it gives them a sign before the fire? This all amplifies how big food has an impact on health, before slavery populations had little to no diseases while just consuming mostly fruits, veggies, and good quality starches with meat here and there. The continuation of the U.S.’s way of eating, which is a disease-ridden lifestyle

accepted by the population, will only continue to show the negative effects it has on health and how the American way is not as healthy as believed before.

This leads to the next point of how the presence of poverty has and is contributing to the health decline in the U.S. This nation was built on the need for a hierarchy for economic prosperity, meaning the need of the rich and the need for the poor people which race partaking in that issue. Unfortunately, impoverished communities tend to struggle with food accessibility and quality food. Let's backtrack on the issue of slavery and life after slavery because this is the start of how the issue of poverty developed and how it's related to health. In “Homelessness and Black History: Poverty and Income”,

black people's inability to build meaningful wealth has its roots in the very inception of this nation. While on its face the end of slavery should have meant the opportunity for Black people to build wealth, in reality, each generation of Black Americans since the end of slavery has faced a new, even more insidious set of obstacles to obtaining and keeping wealth, status, and stability. (Naeh, 2021)

This limiting environment and the continuous need for hierarchy in the U.S. society laid the foundation for poverty to further feaster even with race out of the equation. However it is not to exclude the struggles blacks had to endure as “among all racial groups, Black Americans are second most likely to experience poverty, with 21% living below the poverty threshold, following Native Americans at 25%. Black Americans in particular have only ten cents for every dollar in wealth that white families have” (Naeh, 2021). The accessibility to healthy foods has been a problem for a long time and the knowledge that people can acquire has been restricted so some people have a strong disconnect between food and its effect on their health. Amplify the problem that the government is failing to keep; the order and health of their people, because the

health industry adapts not only with time but also with the thought of bettering the life of its people. Supported by Poverty and Obesity in America,

Poverty is also a large component of obesity in the United States. There are many reasons Why obesity and poverty are linked; the high price of healthy food, limited government subsidies to farms, and the lack of government programs to provide quality food to those in need make staying at a healthy weight difficult. (Olivares, Regina, 2014, p.1)

With this being revealed the issue of health has understandably started to rise within these impoverished communities as people are in survival mode, without the thought or care of what's being consumed. So statistically the trends of health attached with a negative connotation have been easier to spot. It's important to realize how everything has a cause and an effect and that everything ties together. Tying into the creation of soul food, food made from scraps then created into art and the most common dishes within the u.s though it tends to be still in higher concentration within the black community. The rise of health issues within these communities caused big organizations like The National Institutes of Health to investigate why these were and so it was then claimed that the knowledge of the very food adopted historically over through oppression, the very foods most of the population was eating especially in poverty-stricken areas that were typically comprised of black people (a planned genocide) that tended to be at greater risk of health issues. Even more shocking is that these foods that are heavily advertised and made heavily accessible within impoverished communities were then stated as not meant for human consumption though the whole population eats them. These foods were also understood to have “high amounts of heterocyclic aromatic amines and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons which are carcinogens (chemicals that cause cancer) that were seen to be further amplified when cooked increasing the risk for cancer” (*Do Grilled Foods Cause Cancer?* 2023), an illness high within

this community. Even worse, these foods were in high concentrations of sodium which can cause plasmolysis (the loss of water within the cells of the body) which can weaken the functionality and resilience of diseases the body might encounter like seizures, stroke, and even death. Furthermore, these foods are high in bad fats (trans fats and even saturated fat) leading to the body going through a multitude of health complications. These foods are now the very foods that have become staples in many people's homes, whether they're melanemic (a lack of melanin also known as albinism), melanaticus(differing shades of melanin), or melanotic (heavy amounts of melanin). This right here, the lack of empathy, the lack of understanding of how everything is intertwined and affecting each other has caused fixing the issue of health particularly within the United States stagnant, even when it has been continuously proven to be destructive. It hasn't changed then, hasn't changed now, and will only leave future generations with more of a yarn ball to sort and fix.

Moreover, the health of the United States has made time needless to say more valuable, and such periods in time now known as history impacted not only the foundation of this nation but how society functions. Focusing first on the Great Depression which changed the game for the food industry as the need for quick and accessible food was the focus rather than health. As explained by The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl,

because there were no large-scale programs that could distribute the unused food, many crops simply rotted in piles or spoiled in the fields, untouched. Many people turned to newly developed, mass-produced processed foods like canned meats, corn chips, and fruit-filled cakes (*The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl: 1929-1941 · Food Waste · USU Digital Exhibits*, n.d.-b)

With this being said, healthy foods that were once accessible and affordable by the “mass majority” of the population had soon turned over to more highly processed and canned foods in times of urgency and distress. Since the demand was high, major companies started to chemically alter their food to keep up, within the mist of consumer addiction started, and with the cheapness, conveyance, and lack of formula change to keep consumers coming back for more, the thought of whether or not the food being eaten was healthy took a back seat and guided the slippery slope of the food industry to boom. Needless to say, because businesses could endlessly supply people's desires for these types of foods, the issue and presence of obesity and diseases started to skyrocket. Even worse though in the text, “Canned: The Rise and Fall of Consumer Confidence in the American Food Industry”, Ziede a previous store worker explains how foods sold to consumers transitioned into unregulated foods, meaning that even if foods were to passed by the FDA, it didn't always mean it meet general health guidelines. So untimely the FDA adapted to the time of the great depression and things highly unnatural, ie powdered cheese, surgery drinks, and canned goods (which aren't all bad) were accepted and even claimed as good for society;

Zeide argues that over time, canners changed their strategies for gaining consumer trust.

Whereas in the early years, canners depended on impartial scientific research and government regulation to improve their products. Zeide claims this strategy began to shift in the 1930s. Canners then moved toward sponsoring their research, developed a more adversarial relationship with the government, and utilized new techniques of marketing and advertising to attract consumers. (Miller, Laura J.)

Following the Great Depression food undeniably changed forever, going from soul food meals now proven detrimental, to foods made for convenience to handle hard times. As a result, of

these foods being driven by capitalism at the expense of its people the cheapness, convenience, and physically addicting properties caused them to be even worse for health. They were showing further how the United States government failed its people, putting capitalism over its duty to keep the health and wellness of its people at the forefront as they made unhealthy foods readily available.

The traction these foods brought changed the way food was approached, and appealed to what many people think of when it comes to American cuisine and its ingredients and large portion sizes. With business needing traction the issue with food advertising became evident with the decline in people's health and well-being. Starting with how the business runs, humans advertise a wide range of companies every day whether it is clothing, technology, jewelry, or food, meaning if there are no advertisers and no demand there will simply be no businesses. The strong value in the food industry is a reflection of food's important role in keeping the world alive besides the breatharians. The promising return has made many businessmen invest in food advertising no matter the expense to consumers, being further proven as “the food industry spends almost a whopping 14 billion a year on food advertising” (Ha, 2023b), towards unhealthy, sugary, and fatty foods. So the billions of dollars that come out of hardworking citizens' paychecks will continue to be poured into businesses that do more harm than helpful organizations like the “U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention which has only a 1 billion dollar budget” (Ha, 2023b), which is comparatively less when looking at the budget for the food industry. Even worse in the text “Fighting the Fast Food Habit: Can America Downsize?” It states that “if a company feels it can make more money producing unhealthy products, it will continue to do so even with the health industry proving its potential because companies will always be profit-driven. Proving that companies cannot be trusted to make

decisions in the best interest of their consumers when it comes to their health” (Garcia, Victor F. 2005, pg. 3).

Nonetheless, the very foods that people see through advertising made to be visually and physiologically addictive and appealing, typically loaded with sugar and saturated fat which are known to lead to health issues, is the exact cause of America’s obesity epidemic. As a result of the unhealthy foods being pushed amongst the public the health of the U.S. population has been completely obliterated and so has the health and life expectancy of children “The World Health Organization (WHO) has labeled the epidemic of childhood obesity as “globesity” (The True Weight of Childhood Obesity in America, Hopkins et al. 2011). Emphasizing more how the government has discarded the responsibility of keeping the nation's health in order, all the while supporting influential companies to contribute to an issue that they are admittedly not contributing to. While companies very rarely admit to including the very chemicals that make their food tasty and addictive as a direct link to the array of health issues that are faced today “Fighting the Fast Food Habit: Can America Downsize? Fast Food Habit” says otherwise, “Kraft, one of America’s largest food manufacturers, recently promised to start cutting portion sizes of single-serving snacks. McDonald’s and Kraft are also studying the issue of trans fats in their foods and may make moves to reduce the heart-clogging agents” (Garcia, Victor F. 2005. pg 3). Not to mention those milk advertisements that many saw when they were young on how much milk is crucial for health was all a money scheme and here's proof, “milk, cheese, yogurt, and any related products are not, properly speaking, healthy foods as they are high in saturated fats that clog the arteries that lead to a multitude of heart and brain diseases” (Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, n.d.). In the end, the United States’ goal is not healthy with the government yet to take action even with the enumerated power under the commerce

clause to stop such advertising. Subsequently, they have only caused a more massive storm of ill health that leaves people with a diminished quality of life that will continuously fund a billion-dollar industry stacked against them, unless things are changed.

With all the health issues that the government has refused to take action on for the sake of its citizens who have fallen victim to the food system, the next issue is the healthcare system in the United States which many people rely on when things go wrong. More so the problems with the healthcare system being simply outdated and profit-focused. First, the healthcare system is out of date, there's no doubt that most of the education many medical professionals obtain out of medical school is not relevant today and is not reliable as that information was based on beliefs and not scientific evidence of healthy foods. Unfortunately, this understanding of what healthy food is is now practiced nationwide, known as the American diet. Suppose research is done on how the body functions and the impact food has on health and the lifestyle that has widely been adopted in the U.S. In that case, a nation built on greed will show the wrongdoings of the U.S. not advocating such information and will shed light that the nation is ruled by money just as any nation. So the American diet many have gotten trapped into was not only the government's way of testing how the diet affects health but also an opportunity to create an issue and provide a facade of profit solution. Nonetheless, the techniques that were once used to treat certain conditions that are no longer relevant or helpful. The rise in varying conditions at the hands of the United States promoting disease-causing food and the lack of adopting new information to genuinely care for their patients are keeping people learning how to tend to their bodies. Medical billing is also an issue, medical professionals are being paid based on the highest code or the reported extremity of an injury which does not hold the affordability aspect of receiving health care. To receive health care has been increasingly difficult because of its cost

and has left many families scrambling to be able to save themselves or even a loved one. Supported by one of the top schools in the country Harvard Medical School, “High costs combined with high numbers of underinsured or uninsured means many people risk bankruptcy if they develop a serious illness. Prices vary widely, and it's nearly impossible to compare the quality or cost of your healthcare options — or even to know how big a bill to expect”(Shmerling, 2021). “Despite spending far more on healthcare than other high-income nations, the US scores poorly on many key health measures, including life expectancy, preventable hospital admissions, suicide, and maternal mortality” (Shmerling, 2021). It just doesn't make sense that the United States which earns trillions of dollars in taxes, etc still charges its people unrealistically to receive health care for an issue that they are responsible for causing. So it begs the question that even if one could afford treatment, will the treatment that one receives be intentionally less effective? Curing a disease or teaching preventative habits would risk leaving the healthcare industry high and dry because if there is no health problem there is no healthcare business.

However, with all the information that has been provided about the evident health decline in the United States, there's another side that will argue otherwise. Firstly, for someone to state that diseases are only a problem in the United States is uneducated, there is no denying that diseases have risen notably in the United States but diseases have been around for centuries and will continue to develop. Diseases are not always bad but are simply the process of human evolution. Secondly, claiming that processed foods that the majority American population eats as bad is not accurate, as processed foods have allowed better nutrient absorption aiding in increased health. Regarding the issue of fats, diets like the keto diet have challenged the idea of fats being bad. “Evidence suggesting that eating a high-fat diet improves lipid profiles by

lowering low-density lipoprotein, increasing high-density lipoprotein, and lowering triglycerides” (Dowis K, Banga S. The Potential Health Benefits of the Ketogenic Diet: A Narrative Review. Nutrients. 2021).

Though it's correct that fat contributes to the body's proper functioning it must be noted that there are different types of fat, the first being bad fats i.e. trans fat, and saturated fats. Which are heavily present in the American diet and have been proven to aid in rapid cell death and therefore the start of different developing diseases. Here's an example, how many times has one seen a pot of old chicken and saw the solidified fat in the pot? The same thing is happening inside the body which is lethal as these fats are not easily absorbed and digested and usually over a while clog up the arteries which restrict blood flow. In return, the first sign is high blood pressure which then can result in things like strokes, heart attacks, or any other health complication one might experience. Comparatively, there are also healthy fats, rarely seen on grocery store packing like polyunsaturated or monounsaturated fats that work to health the body and rejuvenate cells.

Next, the opposing argument might represent that there is no issue with food advertising, as many food advertisements are changing in more recent times as they see the issues with the food they have been advertising and that carbs are bad for the body. Though there are issues with carbs and sugar in the American diet, the issue is not carbs but the quality of carbs. Carbohydrates have the molecule glucose in it which is used by the body for energy. Nonetheless, many people in America eat a lot of low-quality carbs and a lot of candy high in sugar. When large amounts of these carbohydrates are consumed the body tries to rush and prioritize where to put it which causes distress in the body, known as a glucose spike. “Refined

carbohydrates may not just lead to being overweight and diabetic but also contribute to dementia & mental illness” (Fuhrman, 2018).

This leads to how the American diet has impacted health from the inside out through the gut; the second most important organ next to the brain. “Impacting mood, the human defense mechanism (the immune system) and therefore health” (*Watch Hack Your Health: The Secrets of Your Gut | Netflix Official Site*, n.d.). The gut is crucial to health because the gut is the area where nutrients are absorbed when food is digested. With the American diet typically high in unhealthy fats and processed sugar, the link between food and its impact on gut health can be seen. Changing the quality, quantity, and types of bacteria meant to fend off certain diseases; making people who have adapted the American diet have a higher chance of getting autoimmune diseases. “Enzymes in the gut also known as microbes feed off the food that’s consumed, meaning the gut is adaptable and can start to crave the unhealthy food being eaten daily” (*Watch Hack Your Health: The Secrets of Your Gut | Netflix Official Site*, n.d.). Since the American diet lacks essential nutrients, when food is passed the lining of the gut microbes cannot absorb nutrients needed for proper function. As a result of microbes attacking the mucus wall in the gut as a last resource for nutrients (*Watch Hack Your Health: The Secrets of Your Gut | Netflix Official Site*, n.d.) the body starts to essentially attack itself. Onward if the gut is not being provided what it needs it will start to impact the quality of connections between the gut and the brain; impacting feelings and thus emotions. To conclude the American diet in its entirety with its high concentrations of unhealthy fats and refined carbs/sugar that have been proven “to cause pro-inflammatory pathways and obesity, exacerbating inflammation, which is known as a risk factor for cancer and other diseases”(Bojková et al., 2020). Supporting how American cuisine that's been promoted is the cause for the many health issues people face today.

Regarding the issue of the healthcare system being rigged, the healthcare system was created to help people not to take advantage of people. The efforts people have made to develop a multitude of different treatment options both funded and unfunded have proven that the healthcare system is given in trying to help improve patients' health and quality of life. The treatments that have been around and that have been newly developed have proven the worthiness of original medicine and have been used and effective worldwide. Though availability has allowed treatment to be available, it doesn't mean everyone has the means to afford these treatment options regardless of whether they're new or effective. Further, the very foods that cause people to be in the hospital in the first place are typically provided in the hospitals themselves. The very environments are meant to help and cure patients which only further proves the lack of understanding or care that health professionals have to keep the sick and vulnerable population at their lowest. The point of emphasizing all this is not to argue whether the health of the United States population is declining but to bring awareness to what has built the food industry so lifestyle changes can occur and replace a lifestyle now evident after generations to be unhealthy. In other words, foods that have been known to be beneficial for the population along with a newfound understanding of what health means should allow healthy food options to be available and allow people who have become victims of the food industry to be educated on the healing properties and culture that have been lost through food. One is not living to eat but should be eating to live not to survive.

In conclusion, despite all the evidence presented on both sides of the argument, the verdict still stands that the health and wellness of the people in the United States have undeniably been on a decline since the beginning of time being, there's more proof to support it than disprove it. Blue zones that tend to be non-colonized areas have proven that diseases are not as normal as the

United States makes it seem with their low to non-existent disease rates. The lack of greed within their community has allowed capitalism to not strip them of their culture of traditional (natural) eating habits while understanding the essentiality of community and the need for physical movement for overall health but also with the understanding that if the body is weak there is no life to be experienced as America's sedentary lifestyle has been the cause for many unneeded deaths amongst the elderly. When it comes to oppressive historical events ie slavery and the great depression were undeniably the building blocks of unhealthy food habits that became a lifestyle now known as American culture and have left many living a diminished quality of life. The issues of race, poverty, and capitalism amongst the different social groups like healthy food options not being available, and affordable, or the restriction of information between food and its connection to health to keep people blind have been major contributors to the health decline. The need for major food companies and the health care system to have an addicted and ill population has only further pushed away the reality of a genuinely healthy population within the U.S. This amplifies the tragic reality America is in and how important change is to get somewhere better, but how to get there with oppression is all the nation has known to get what it wants.

Undoubtedly the United States foundation has been woven with greed, power, and the need for hierarchy for economic prosperity. As a relatively new nation still trying to figure out its identity, stagnancy is the state of mind that has become unknowingly the norm. Though some might not see the problem, evidence has proven repeatedly otherwise, currently, people are questioning and challenging what needs to be changed. Only further emphasizing the need for people to face the past so the state of the world today can be understood. Remember change takes time but changing what has laid the foundation of the United States has been shown detrimental to saving the overall health and the future of humanity.

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