

Preface

Why another edition of *The McDonaldization of Society*?

- For one thing, the paradigm for this process—McDonald’s—is undergoing dramatic changes and is declining in significance. This is important in itself, but it must also be addressed for what it *does* and *does not* tell us about the broader process of McDonaldization.
- Second, the fast-food industry is also changing with a variety of new trends (for example, the growing importance of non-American chains in the American market) worthy of discussion.
- Third, the tentacles of McDonaldization are continuing to spread more widely and more deeply into various social institutions, such as education, medicine, the criminal justice system, and so on.
- Fourth, broader processes that subsume McDonaldization, at least in part, are growing in importance. The most notable of these broader processes is globalization, and it needs to be discussed in greater detail, as does its relationship to McDonaldization.
- Fifth, the topic of McDonaldization has, by now, attracted the attention of a number of journalists (most notably Eric Schlosser and his international best-seller [inspired, in part, by an earlier edition of this book], *Fast Food Nation*), and their work, as well as recent scholarly work on this topic, needs to be integrated into this discussion.
- Sixth, current events have important implications for McDonaldization, and they need to be dealt with in the text. For example, with the end of the 2003 war with Iraq, and of the rule of Saddam Hussein, clones of McDonald’s—one called “MaDonal” complete with golden arches, red and yellow colors, and clowns, to say nothing of cheeseburgers and french fries—appeared three almost immediately. How

long before McDonald's itself will be opening in Iraq (and forcing the clones out of business)?

Thus, there is much that is new to be discussed here, and it will be integrated into the basic structure of this book, which remains largely unchanged.

While employing basically the same format, a few major structural changes have been made in this edition. For one thing, given the thrust of the preceding discussion, an entire chapter (8) is now devoted to globalization and its relationship to McDonaldization. In addition to a broad discussion of globalization, there is also a more specific treatment of my recent work on the "globalization of nothing." As we will see, McDonaldization is one of several key forces in the globalization of nothing.

To keep the length of this book manageable, the chapter (formerly, Chapter 8) on birth, death, and death-defying acts has been eliminated. However, at least some of that material has been retained, especially in Chapters 6 and 7 where it is used to offer illustrations of some of the basic dimensions of McDonaldization.

McDonaldization has roared into a new century. It is an infinitely more mature and more powerful force today than it was when I first began thinking about it two decades ago or even when I began writing the first edition of this book over a decade ago. In spite of its recent difficulties, McDonald's has many more outlets, has become a much more powerful enterprise internationally, and has wormed its way into the hearts and minds of many more consumers and entrepreneurs. More important, there are many more clones of McDonald's, not only in the fast-food industry but in many other settings as well. Many other nations have been invaded by McDonaldized American businesses, and many have created indigenous versions of those enterprises. Most important, McDonaldization has become even more deeply ingrained not only in the culture of the United States but also in many other cultures around the world. At the same time, the global opposition to McDonald's and McDonaldization has also expanded dramatically.

This book is essentially a work in social criticism. McDonald's clearly has many advantages that contributed to its expansion, and they will be mentioned throughout the book. However, McDonald's and its many clones have plenty of opportunity, and spend huge sums of money, to tell you about their good points. The book seeks to give the public discourse a little balance by focusing on the problems created, and the dangers posed, by McDonaldization.

As a theoretically based work in social criticism, this book is part of a historical tradition in the social sciences in which social theory is used to

critique society and thereby to provide the base for its betterment. This tradition animated the most important theoretical source of this book—the work of Max Weber—as well as that of other social theorists, such as Georg Simmel, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, C. Wright Mills, and Jürgen Habermas.

I should point out that I bear no particular animus toward McDonald's. It is no better or worse than most other fast-food restaurants and other manifestations of the rationalization process. I have labeled the process of concern here "McDonaldization" because McDonald's was, and is, the most important manifestation of this process. Besides, it has a better ring to it than some of the alternatives—"Burger Kingization," "Starbuckization," "Seven Elevenization," "Fuddruckerization," "H&R Blockization," "KinderCareization," "Jiffy Lubeization," or "NutriSystemization."

As the preceding list makes clear, a wide array of social phenomena are linked in this book under the heading of McDonaldization. Some have been directly affected by the principles of the fast-food restaurant, whereas in other cases, the effect is more indirect. Some have all the basic dimensions of McDonaldization, but others only one or two. In any case, in my view, they all are part of what Weber called the rationalization process, or to make Weber more timely, McDonaldization.

The major themes of this book, especially the critiques of the irrationalities of McDonaldization, are likely to be highly controversial. My experience in lecturing on this theme is that audiences generally support McDonaldization and feel protective toward it. Critiques of McDonaldization inevitably spawn heated debate in the lecture hall. I hope this book will spark a similar debate in a larger arena. The generation of such debate, as well as the insights to be derived from it, is the essence not only of good teaching but also of good sociology. Whether or not the reader agrees with my conclusions, I will have succeeded in achieving my goal if the reader has been provoked into rethinking this significant aspect of everyday life.

This book is written to be accessible to a wide readership. However, it is firmly based on one of the strongest social theories, Weber's theory of rationalization. It is also an "empirical" study, albeit a highly informal one. The "data" are drawn from a wide range of available sources and deal with the full range of social phenomena that fall under the heading of McDonaldization. However, although it is theory based and relies on data, this is not written as a dry theoretical and empirical study; it is not weighted down by many of the requirements of scholarly monographs. Rather, it is designed to be read by many people and inform them of a

wide-ranging social development occurring all around them. More important, it is written as a warning that the seductions and attractions of McDonaldization should not blind us to its many dangers.

I hope this book offers readers some new insight into the society they are constructing. If they are as alarmed as I am by the dangers posed by McDonaldization, perhaps they can do what Weber thought virtually impossible—act to reverse the trend toward McDonaldization. Although I do not think such a reversal is likely, or even necessarily desirable, I do think there are steps that people can take to ameliorate the problems, to humanize a McDonaldized society. I hope this book will not only inform but also serve as a warning and, perhaps most important, point the reader in directions that can help make the “iron cage of McDonaldization” a more human setting in which to work and live.

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In anticipation of the possibility of yet another revision of this book, and in an effort to de-McDonaldize the relationship between author and reader, I would appreciate receiving feedback on this book as well as additional examples of McDonaldization (with documentation, if possible), by e-mail (Ritzer@socy.umd.edu).