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Fast Food and Slow Change: A Preliminary Look into the Evolution of Dining and Consumer Culture in Johannesburg

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History Department

Research Report

Fast Food and Slow Change: A Preliminary Look into the Evolution of Dining and Consumer Culture in Johannesburg

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Plagiarism Declaration

I, JL Bousfield (Student number: 713962), am a student registered for the degree of Master of Arts History in the academic year 2025.

Research Title: Fast Food and Slow Change: A Preliminary Look into the Evolution of Dining and Consumer Culture in Johannesburg

I hereby declare the following:

I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.

I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above degree is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.

I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.

I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.

Signed: *JL Bousfield*

Date: 20 May 2025

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To Allan Ambor, whose book got me thinking and whose willingness to give of his time helped answer some of those questions.

To Dr Andrew McDonald for his patience and guidance throughout this process.

Abstract

This research project examines the evolution of fast food in South Africa, focusing on Johannesburg's early dining scene, and the subsequent shift toward a fast food culture similar to that of the United States. It explores the introduction of American dining influences, particularly through the emergence of local fast food chains like Steers, and Spur, and how they reshaped previous dining habits. This research contributes to understanding the impact of globalisation—especially American consumer culture—on South African food trends from the mid-20th century onward. It suggests that food serves as a societal marker, reflecting broader socio-political and economic shifts in both South Africa and globally, and that our food choices reveal underlying social attitudes.

The main objective of this research is to analyse the transformation of South African dining spaces by looking at the factors behind the adoption of fast food and the broader cultural implications thereof. It explores three key phases: Early dining spaces in Johannesburg under British political influence, the preliminary phases before the adoption of a modern fast food system, and the development of local fast food chains that catered to new consumer desires and aspirations. The research emphasizes the role of socioeconomic factors, urbanisation, and consumer culture throughout this process.

The methodology involves making use of comprehensive review of available historical and contemporary sources, including restaurant records, advertising materials, and news articles and secondary literature on South African food culture and globalisation. Additionally interviews with former industry leaders and various examples of digital ephemera offered insights into the lasting impact of fast food chains on South African society.

The implications of this research are significant, and reveal how fast food has become ingrained in South African culture, shaping dietary habits, social practices, and economic development. By exploring these shifts, the research project encourages further discussion on the broader effects of globalised food systems and their influence on local cultures, providing a framework for understanding the complexities of food identity in a rapidly evolving society.

Introduction

This research project offers a preliminary examination of the historical evolution of dining culture in Johannesburg, South Africa, focusing on how industrialisation, urbanisation, and socio-political change shaped eating habits. Additionally it looks at the rise of a local fast food industry which today competes with its international counterparts. The evolution of dining in South Africa reflects a complex interplay of cultural, economic and social transformations. The study of food in history provides a compelling way to understand the nature of a population because food, the consumption thereof and access to it is intimately tied to survival. Eating itself is a biological process but studying the kinds of foods consumed can reveal processes of cultural creation in a population[1]. When making choices about food, humans send powerful messages about their identities in broader social, cultural and economic terms because by deciding how, what, where and when to eat you are ingesting not just a physical product but a metaphorical set of ideals related to religion, race, class and gender[2].

This research project aims to study these intersecting concepts focusing on the ways in which food and dining practises in South Africa responded to the interplay between local and global forces. By examining the relationship between food; consumer culture associated with food and the social identities around food; this project aims to uncover ways in which the practise of eating out evolved from an exclusive, elitist activity into an accessible practise available to a much wider group of South Africans than before, regardless of where they situate themselves within the social, racial or economic hierarchy. Ultimately, the emergence of the quick service dining model in South Africa is an American practice which reflects broader shifts in the global balance of power as well as changes in how food is commodified and consumed in modern South Africa, highlighting the significant role this sector plays in South Africa's economic and social transformation.

Key Questions:

This research project seeks to answer how industrialisation and urbanisation in Johannesburg influence the development of dining practices and contribute to the rise of the fast food industry in South Africa? In what ways did colonialism, imperialism and racial segregation impact the development of dining practises spatially and socially? Finally, to what extent did the growth of American fast food chains influence and shape the development of South Africa's own fast food industry.

The argument presented in this research project demonstrates that the growth of Johannesburg as a modern city was unique, as it found itself being shaped by local, internal forces as well as

[1] Peter Farb and George Armelagos *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 15.
[2] Vivian Bickford-Smith, *The Emergence of the South African Metropolis: Cities and Identities in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 2.

international, external forces concurrently[3]. This development set the stage for a distinctive food culture influenced by local socio-economic realities and by global forces such as the expansion of Western consumerism. The rise of the South African fast food industry can be understood similarly, as both a product of local cultural, political and social shifts and a symbol of American cultural influence. Food anthropologists argue that the act of eating brings human beings into contact with their broader environment in the literal, physical sense as much as it does in a metaphorical sense[4]. The choices societies make regarding how, when, where, what and with whom they eat reflects a broader sense of that society's culture, social values, economic climate and political environment as much as it reflects what foods are physically available for consumption. Consequently, this research project highlights the crossing of these boundaries by tracing the evolution of dining practises across class and racial divides to emphasise how the tensions between global and local food consumption patterns reflect more than just the biological and physical need to eat[5].

This research project contributes to historical scholarship by bridging a gap between American studies of their own fast food industry and the culinary history of Johannesburg, the writing of which has primarily focused on racial politics and food provisioning up to this point. By tracing the growth of local fast food conglomerates, this research offers new insight into the intersections of socio-political dynamics, consumption patterns, and the development of modern South African identity.

Historical Context:

Johannesburg was built on the back of the gold mining industry. In the years leading up to the Boer War, Johannesburg was responsible for producing 27% of the world's gold[6] and was quickly becoming a major hub of industrialisation and centre of immigration in Southern Africa[7]. Initially the population of Johannesburg was made up of mostly men who were either unmarried or had left their wives and families behind as they moved to Johannesburg in search of employment on the mines. This immigrant population was greatly varied with Europeans, Americans, local Afrikaners and black South Africans all making up great percentages of those who lived and worked on the mines[8].

The huge influx of migrants brought with them their traditional culinary traditions but feeding and provisioning these workers proved to be a challenge for mine owners[9]. Food instability due to inadequate transportation channels and drought amongst other challenges; cultural ideals which emphasised the kitchen as the woman's domain and a lack of suitable cooking facilities in the mine

[3] Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, eds., *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 7.
[4] Farb and Armelagos, *The Anthropology of Eating*, 15.
[5] *ibid.*, 105.
[6] Bickford-Smith, *South African Metropolis,* 54.
[7] Nuttall and Mbembe, eds., *The Elusive Metropolis*, 40.
[8] John Burgess, *The Road Through the Grove: Friendship and Adventure Along Louis Botha Avenue, Johannesburg in the 1950s, '60s and '70s* (Cape Town: Redsky Publishing , 2016), 9.
[9] Charles van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand 1886-1914* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2001).

compounds created a market need for the establishment of alternative dining options for the labourers, business men and mine owners alike[10].

During this period the British political dominance over the area allowed British dining and culinary traditions to establish themselves as those most aligned with ideas of class and sophistication[11] and therefore became the most common style of dining available to the upper classes as "Britishness was the prime nationalism of South Africa against which all subsequent ones reacted"[12], this attitude trickled down to most societal practises and influenced multiple facets of South African life until after World War II. Everything from our sporting culture to our education system was affected by British cultural hegemony and created a feeling of aspiration in the lower classes. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that alternative culinary traditions—ranging from imported Indian and Malay style cuisines in the Cape and Natal to diverse local foodways through the presence of Shebeens and other informal dining options—have persisted, even if they no longer occupy the mainstream. These enduring practices remind us that fast food did not erase older identities, but emerged alongside them in a shifting, contested food landscape.

By 1948, Johannesburg was shifting from Anglicisation to Afrikaner nationalism while experiencing rapid economic growth, employing 38% of South Africa's population across its various industrial sectors[13]. This period was marked by economic prosperity, greater social mobility, and shifts in traditional gender roles as more women entered the workforce[14]. These changes fuelled consumerist aspirations and a growing desire to engage with modern lifestyles. Within this context, dining out became a viable form of entertainment across social classes and as more people used their disposable income on dining outside of the home the market expanded and grew accordingly.

Literature Review

The literature consulted for this project establishes a foundational understanding of Johannesburg's socio-economic transformation and the cultural dynamics at play which shaped its identity. Both of these are central to the exploration of food consumption patterns in the city. The historical growth of Johannesburg, specifically as a mining hub, established a complex socio-political landscape marked by capitalist dynamics and racial policies. One influential study on the city's development highlights the socio-economic struggles faced by its population, notably in marginalised groups such as those involved in the prostitution and alcohol trade[15]. This historical context is essential for understanding

[10] This idea is explored in detail in Charles van Onselen's *New Babylon, New Nineveh* (2001), particularly in relation to the development of the prostitution and alcohol industries. I posit that the growth of the dining industry fits within this broader framework.
[11] Bickford-Smith, *South African Metropolis*, 45.
[12] *ibid.*
[13] *ibid.*, 155.
[14] *ibid.*, 136.
[15] Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh.*

the socio-economic factors that also influenced food consumption, which is overlooked in that work but is addressed later in this review.

The transition to modern Johannesburg from its roots as a mining town reflects the spatial evolution of the city. One analysis highlights the blending of African, European, and American influences, offering a broader understanding of the city's cultural complexity, particularly through its architecture and urban organisation[16]. Another expands on this by examining how Johannesburg was continually shaped and reshaped in response to both local South African perspectives and international currents, arguing that these perceptions contributed to the construction and reinforcement of social identities[17]. As the urban fabric of Johannesburg merged various cultural influences, the role of food as a social and cultural marker became increasingly evident. This interplay of global and local dynamics mirrors broader patterns of food consumption in the city, where fast food practices and global culinary trends shaped local diets and identities. While one approach centres race and racial dynamics within the analysis[18], the other suggests that since race has long dominated discourse on South African urban spaces, other forms of exclusion—such as those based on class or gender—warrant focused attention[19]. Though these perspectives share thematic overlap, they differ in analytical lens. Taken together, these accounts of Johannesburg's expansion and history provide a comprehensive understanding of how the city developed and how waves of migration, particularly those linked to the mining industry, helped shape its identity.

The link between food, power, and identity is explored through an analysis of hunger and nutrition in South Africa. While the focus is on systemic responses to issues such as poverty and malnutrition, the work also opens a discussion on the political dimensions of food consumption, which complements the broader study of fast food consumption in South Africa[20]. The emphasis on food scarcity and insecurity provides an important context for understanding the rise of the local fast food industry, which paralleled the expansion of the industry in the United States as it responded to growing demand for affordable and accessible food options across colour and class lines.

Studies and writings about the fast food industry specifically in South Africa are scarce in other fields and almost completely non-existent from a historical scholarly viewpoint. One study contextualises the rise of the industry from an economic standpoint by noting how the local fast food sector forms part of a larger economic system that promotes American food culture within South African markets[21]. Another analysis explores the extent to which American food culture has influenced young

[16] Nuttall and Mbembe, eds., *The Elusive Metropolis.*
[17] Bickford-Smith, *South African Metropolis.*
[18] Nuttall and Mbembe, eds., *The Elusive Metropolis.*
[19] Bickford-Smith, *South African Metropolis.*
[20] Diana Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach: Hunger and the Triumph of Cultural Racism in Modern South Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).
[21] Blessing Maumbe, "The Rise of South Africa's Quick Service Restaurant Industry," *Journal of Agribusiness in Developing and Emerging Economies* 2, no. 2 (2012).

South Africans from a psychological perspective, examining the impact of American products and fast food on youth identity. These findings underscore the role of fast food consumption in shaping modern South African identities, with fast food serving as both a symbol of Westernisation and a tangible expression of modernity and trendiness[22]. Additional sociological research reflects the complexities and ambitions tied to South Africa's rapid social transformation, illustrating how patterns of consumption within various spaces reveal deeper aspirations and desires[23]. This work also offers comparisons and points of intersection between South African and American consumer behaviours, aligning with the broader objectives of this project.

The edited volume Conspicuous Consumption calls for a more nuanced consideration of historical and contextual factors when analysing patterns of consumer behaviour, particularly in African settings. The contributors argue that the emergence of African middle classes and the overall rise in disposable income across the continent have not necessarily resulted in broader economic inclusion. Instead, they suggest that this shift has fostered a middle class focused more on personal advancement and sustained economic mobility than on collective economic justice. The volume also critiques the disproportionate levels of cultural and social scrutiny directed at the consumption habits of Black Africans—a scrutiny that is rarely applied with the same vigour to the conspicuous consumption of Western middle and upper classes, whose spending behaviours are often more extravagant[24]. This work is particularly relevant to the present study, as it supports the investigation of consumer culture within a defined socio-political and historical context, while also tracing its links to global narratives of aspiration, material acquisition, and the performance of status and prosperity.

Similar work on the complexity of consumer goods can be seen in research that examines the practice of skin lightening and the prevalence of skin lightening products used by Black South African women between the 1930s and the 1950s. This research suggests that the consumption of these products extended beyond a mere desire to imitate white beauty standards. Much like the decisions individuals make regarding food consumption, the motivations behind the use of skin lighteners were multifaceted and revealed how these women positioned themselves within a modern society and sought to express femininity. The research further highlights how Black South African women were influenced by racial beauty norms, yet also exercised agency by actively participating in the consumer process[25]. While not directly aligned with the focus of this study, the findings reinforce observations on how Black South Africans involved in the fast food industry contributed to its growth—not only as

[22] Gail Ferguson and Byron Adams, "Americanization in the Rainbow Nation: Remote Acculturation and Psychological Well-Being of South African Emerging Adults," *Emerging Adulthood* 4, no. 2 (2015).
[23] Bridget Kenney, "Servicing a Racial Regime: Gender, Race and the Public Space of Department Stores in Baltimore, Maryland and Johannesburg, South Africa, 1940–1970," in *Race and Retail: Consumption across the Colour Line*, eds. Mia Bay and Ann Fabian (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 199–217.
[24] Deborah Posel and Ilana van Wyk, eds., *Conspicuous Consumption in Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019).
[25] Lynne Thomas, *Beneath the Surface: A Transnational History of Skin Lighteners* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

workers but also as consumers. The study also introduces the idea of "technologies of visibility," referring to products consumed to signal one's identity as modern, which closely parallels the role of fast food products in conveying status and aspiration.

Robert Ross's work expands the understanding of the anti-apartheid struggle by highlighting how access to modern consumer goods was also contested. Apartheid policies restricted Black South Africans from acquiring many consumer items, while the white minority's consumption flourished. This economic divide created social tensions that contributed to resistance movements[26]. Ross challenges the notion that Black consumption was mere imitation of white lifestyles. Instead, Black consumers developed their own patterns, resisting inferior products targeted at them and seeking higher-quality goods[27]. This analysis is useful for fast food studies as it situates consumption within broader struggles over identity, status, and economic exclusion. Fast food, as a modern consumer good often linked to global culture and class identity, can be seen as part of these dynamics in South Africa. Understanding how consumption reflects social tensions and aspirations helps explain the fast food sector's growth and significance in post-apartheid urban settings.

Unlike in South Africa, the fast food industry has been the subject of significant academic attention in the United States. Various scholars have explored the pivotal role that American fast food culture has played in the global diffusion of Western consumer practices[28]. This Americanisation through food consumption parallels the emergence of fast food in South Africa. As fast food chains became established in South African urban centres, they came to symbolise American influence and the idea of modernity, reinforcing global consumption patterns and cultural identities. Additional research has focused on the origins and expansion of the American fast food industry, offering insight into how and why these chains achieved widespread success and became representative of American food culture[29]. It is argued that prior to the rise of the fast food chain; American food culture was largely fragmented and regional. However, by aligning themselves with national pride in industrial progress and promoting their products as emblems of modernity and technological advancement, these chains forged a food culture that came to be recognised as distinctly American[30]. This process of Americanisation has also been contextualised through broader studies of consumer behaviour in post-war economies, where the proliferation of American products influenced consumer patterns across

[26] Robert Ross, *Things Change: Black Material Culture and the Development of a Consumer Society in South Africa 1800-2020* (Boston: Brill, 2023).
[27] *ibid.*
[28] See both Adam Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams: A Journey through the Heart of America's Fast Food Kingdom* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2019); and Andrew Smith, *Eating History: 30 Turning Points in the Making of American Cuisine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
[29] Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *How America Eats: A Social History of U.S. Food and Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).
[30] Andrew Smith, *Hamburger: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008).

Europe[31]. A similar shift occurred in South Africa, where fast food items inspired by American prototypes became increasingly integrated into the local cultural fabric.

While the focus of this project is specific to the development of the urban informal dining sector in white Johannesburg, Black informal food and leisure practices, especially as seen in the shebeen, played a vital role in everyday life within Black South African townships. Although not a fast food outlet in the Western commercial sense, the shebeen served as a casual, local space for food and drink consumption that was deeply rooted in community culture[32]. Shebeens offered not only traditional alcoholic beverages but also simple, affordable food, providing an important source of nourishment and social gathering in areas where formal dining options were scarce[33]. The foods consumed in shebeens were also expressions of cultural identity, connecting individuals to their heritage and community through shared tastes and culinary traditions[34]. These informal establishments arose in response to economic hardship and the restrictions imposed by apartheid[35]. While often compared to American speakeasies or British pubs, shebeens had a broader role beyond the illegal sale of alcohol. They became popular due to the lack of public recreational spaces, long commuting times, and limited transport options for Black urban residents[36]. Over time, shebeens evolved from small home-based operations serving traditional beer and simple meals to larger, more exclusive venues frequented by the emerging Black middle class.

Together these works contribute to an understanding of Johannesburg's spatial and cultural development that opened the floor for the establishment of various dining spaces. They also indicate how fast food has played a role in the global spread of American consumption patterns. As global food trends intersect with local socio-economic dynamics, food itself becomes a lens through which we can explore and begin to understand the complexity of identity formation and how it can be linked to ideas of power and culture in a broader sense.

Research Methodology and Limitations:

This research project relied on being able to look at the available sources through an anthropological and sociological lens which was informed heavily by the work of Farb and Armelagos (1980) assisted in critically thinking about what these sources indicated about society and the things we value beyond simply looking at them as practical examples of what was eaten and when. "To know what, where,

[31] Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth Century Europe* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2005).
[32] Mary Rörich, "Shebeens, Slumyards and Sophiatown: Black Women, Music and Cultural Change in Urban South Africa, c. 1920–1960," *The World of Music* 31, no. 1 (1989): 79.
[33] Christian Rogerson and David M. Hart, "The Survival of the Informal Sector: The Shebeens of Black Johannesburg," *GeoJournal* 12, no. 2 (1986): 159.
[34] *ibid.,* 162.
[35] Rörich, "Shebeens," 79.
[36] Rogerson and Hart, "Informal Sector," 156.

how, when and with whom people eat is to know the character of their society"[37] and careful examination of a piece of evidence such as a menu reveals so much more than simply what produce might have been available or where the chef was trained. By taking on this approach and considering these sources critically we can learn how certain foods carried social value as much as nutritional importance as well as how they indicated people's aspirations and desires in a broader sense. We can learn how people chose to orientate themselves amongst the other cultural, economic and political forces surrounding them and how they process their experience in terms of others as well.

Food and its consumption over time have always held significance beyond the basic need for survival. Specific foods are closely tied to religious, ethnic, and social identities[38], all of which evolve through societal, economic, cultural, and political changes. The sources reveal that in the late 1800s, British food served as a vehicle through which South Africans expressed their desires and aspirations. However, as society shifted, American cultural hegemony replaced these dining traditions.

Creative destruction, a concept initially introduced by Marx and later elaborated by Joseph Schumpeter[39], describes capitalism's inherent tendency to transform production processes through innovative techniques and technologies aimed at increasing efficiency and profitability. Capitalists replace out-dated methods and older forms of production with new ones, creating instability that affects both the labour force and society at large. Schumpeter argues that this process is not incidental but a crucial driving force behind capitalism's advancement[40]. This concept is particularly relevant to the emergence of fast food and quick service industries, as it highlights how technological advancements and shifts in societal values reshaped perceptions of dining spaces in South Africa. The British dominance in dining gave way to the new and more modern American-modelled fast food system.

In this project, creative destruction also frames how, through the process of glocalisation—the adaptation of global products to local tastes—consumers actively participated in reshaping dining spaces and expectations. Thus, businesses were not solely responsible for disrupting traditional processes; the cultural and social agency of consumers played a significant role in this transformation.

Allan Ambor, the founder and former CEO of the Spur Corporation served as the initial source for this research project. His autobiography and later on, his willingness to be interviewed created a baseline from which a picture of the origins of the South African fast food industry could be created. Oral sources come with a unique set of challenges. Issues relating to memory recall and bias were a concern during our interview process. Mr Ambor is no longer the CEO of the company but it was clear from the way he spoke that he was immensely proud of what he had achieved in his time at

[37] Farb and Armelagos, *The Anthropology of Eating*, 209.
[38] *ibid.*, 10.
[39] Marx does not use the term "creative destruction", this was coined by Schumpeter.
[40] This is a simplified summary of the concept as discussed by Joseph Schumpeter in *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942).

Spur. Memories help an individual locate themselves in time and in space but they contain influences of the present[41]. When an interview subject, such as Mr. Ambor, recalls a particular memory, they do so from their present perspective. While the core content of the memory may remain unchanged from their point of view (excluding factors such as forgetfulness due to age or injury), the lens through which they interpret and present it may have shifted over time[42]. This evolution in perspective can influence a participant's willingness to share certain details, particularly when the memory involves sensitive topics—such as the treatment of Black South African staff during Spur's early years or the circumstances surrounding his separation from the Halamandres family. This process of conscious or unconscious self-censorship introduces a degree of bias into the source material. Consequently, it became necessary, to some extent, to interpret omissions and ambiguities through non-verbal cues, such as tone and body language, to gain a fuller understanding.

From there a broader search using the *Rand Daily Mail* online archives helped to establish and clarify a wider understanding of what the South African restaurant space looked like before the beginning of Steers and Spur. These sources offered valuable insight into the mind of regular South Africans, helping to establish how important dining spaces were, what social functions they served and whether or not they were at all aware of the growing presence of American food culture within South Africa. These sources may not have been comprehensive but they were useful in providing direction in the search for more specific primary sources. While identifying and analysing visual sources related to food marketing—both in more broadly and in specific relation to Steers and Spur—could form the basis of a future study, this project has adopted a more focused approach. As a result, many insights from these sources have been excluded from the main text and used only when necessary to contribute to the larger discussion on consumerism.

The history of fast food, restaurants and dining out has been neglected by scholars and the general South African populace. The presence of these dining spaces has not drawn any formal scholarly attention and their presence in our lives is simply taken as something which exists and will continue to exist. As a result, fast food establishments, restaurants, and dining spaces have been largely overlooked in formal archives. However, community-based online platforms have helped preserve everyday objects that may have previously lacked scholarly significance but held sentimental or personal value. Digital ephemera from these platforms have played a crucial role in filling the gaps left by formal archives and oral sources. They have helped create a clearer and more complete picture of restaurant spaces before and after World War II by providing access to items such as menus and photographs.

[41] Gregor Feindt, Felix Krawatzek, Daniela Mehler, Friedemann Pestel, and Rieke Trimçev, "Entangled Memory: Toward a Third Wave in Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 53, no. 1 (2014): 28–29.
[42] *ibid.*, 31.

Large gaps in the availability of sources has led to this research project's results being heavily skewed towards the experience of white, males in South Africa. Consequently this research project is limited in its reflection of the experiences of marginalised groups or more diverse communities. Black South Africans are under-represented in the research project as are their consumptive experiences with the early days of the fast food industry in South Africa. This research project very briefly makes mention of the options available to black South Africans and women but acknowledges that the purpose of this research project is to lay a preliminary foundation for the area of study and does not claim to be a comprehensive history of the subject. Black South Africans were employed within the fast food industry from its outset but finding concrete examples of these people to interview or use as sources proved difficult due to the transient nature of employment within the restaurant industry and age which unfortunately meant that many of the available sources had passed on before their stories could be collected. Future focused oral-history projects, more varied engagement within communities of Black South African food entrepreneurs or engagement with alternative media sources may be a way forward in combatting these limitations.

This research centres western models through the comparison of Johannesburg's dining culture and the dining culture of the United States and so may downplay the complexities of the South African reality. South Africa's unique socio-political history and the impact of Apartheid on racial and spatial divisions no doubt impacted the nature of food consumption within dining spaces beyond what is indicated in this research project.

Wimpy opened its first South African restaurant in 1967 in Murchie's Passage, Durban[43]—the same year Allen Ambor launched the business that would become the Spur brand. Although the exact opening date is not specified in available sources, this location marked the brand's entry into the South African market. The inaugural branch played a pivotal role in establishing Wimpy as one of the country's earliest fast-food chains, introducing a blend of British and American dining influences. While the original Wimpy brand was founded in Indiana, United States, in the 1930s[44], the South African franchise was established under licence from the British Wimpy chain, which had acquired international rights and was operating independently from its American origins by that time[45].

Despite its significance, Wimpy has been consciously omitted from this study for several reasons. First, this project focuses on the rise of American-style quick-service eateries, particularly those whose branding and business models are more directly aligned with American fast-food conventions. Second, the geographic focus of this study lies primarily in Johannesburg, where the Halamandres family's Steers operations—and Allen Ambor's original Spur franchise—were based. As Wimpy's first South African branch opened in Durban, its early development falls outside the main regional

[43] Wimpy, "Our Story," accessed May 5, 2025, https://wimpy.co.za/our-story/.
[44] Andrew Smith *Eating History: 30 Turning Points in the Making of American Cuisine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 31.
[45] Wimpy, "Our Story" [Online]

scope of this research. Lastly, space constraints have necessitated a more selective case study approach. Nevertheless, Wimpy remains an important part of South Africa's fast-food history and its influence is acknowledged accordingly.

This research project has only scratched the surface of what is possible with this area of study and opens up multiple new avenues of research across academic disciplines and does not claim to be comprehensive or conclusive in its nature. Rather it gives an opening and serves as an opportunity to draw more scholarly attention to the study of South African culinary history and the South African fast food industry in particular.

Chapter Outline:

This research project opens with a chapter which examines the evolution of Johannesburg's early dining culture, focusing on its connection to the city's mining economy, racial divisions, and the influence of immigration. It draws parallels with the food culture of the United States, particularly in terms of the rise of informal dining in urban centres. The chapter argues that Johannesburg's food culture mirrored global trends and was shaped by industrialisation, racial segregation, and class distinctions, with food practices serving as a marker of social identity across binaries and socio-economic realities. The comparison with the U.S. highlights how technological and social shifts influenced the accessibility and status of dining options. The chapter explores the origins of Johannesburg's food culture in the mining sector, contrasting the elite British-style dining with informal eating houses for labourers, before drawing parallels to the emergence of fast food in the U.S. and examining how racial and economic divisions in Johannesburg shaped the city's dining scene.

The second chapter examines the rise of fast food in both the United States and South Africa, with a focus on the evolution of the hamburger and how it became a cornerstone of the industry. Broader societal changes such as increased numbers of white women entering the workforce, also contributed to the growing demand for fast food locally and abroad. The chapter argues that the hamburger, as a symbol of modernity and convenience, signalled a shift toward mass consumption and the democratisation of dining in South Africa, where fast food became a global phenomenon that transcended class and racial barriers, reflecting significant cultural and social shifts. It begins by exploring the origins and rise of the hamburger in the United States, then transitions to South Africa's adaptation of fast food, seen in the emergence of local establishments like roadhouses and milk bars, and concludes by analysing the social, cultural, and technological forces that drove the popularity of fast food in South Africa.

Finally this research project closes with a chapter which explores the commodification of food through the global spread of McDonald's and the rise of local chains like Steers and Spur in South Africa, examining how food consumption intersected with Western ideals and local identity during

Apartheid. The chapter argues that the spread of fast food, led by McDonald's and mirrored by local chains, became a symbol of modernity and affluence, reflecting broader social and political dynamics, particularly in the context of Apartheid, South Africa. It begins with an analysis of McDonald's global influence and its impact on South Africa, then explores how local chains like Steers and Spur adapted to the shifting socio-political landscape. The chapter concludes by addressing the involvement of black South Africans in the fast food industry and the on-going commodification of food in the post-Apartheid era.

This research project explores the evolution of Johannesburg's dining culture, highlighting the rise of the fast food industry and its connection to broader social, economic, and political transformations. Tracing the shift in dining practises from early the days of Johannesburg as an early mining town and the expanding global influence of fast food, the research project reveals how food consumption reflects issues of race, class, and modernity in South Africa. The expansion of American fast food chains not only transformed dining practices but also intersected with local traditions and economic realities, reshaping the South African culinary landscape. This research project positions the fast food industry as a symbol of South Africa's modernisation and engagement with the global economy. It acknowledges gaps in available sources, particularly regarding marginalised communities, and calls for further research into the contributions of Black South Africans and women in shaping the fast food sector. Ultimately, the study underscores the role of food consumption in the nation's cultural, economic, and social evolution, inviting further scholarly inquiry into its impact on South African identity.

Chapter 1: The First Taste: Johannesburg's Early Dining and America's Culinary Boom

The transformation of Johannesburg from a small mining town to a bustling urban centre is deeply intertwined with the evolution of its food culture. As the city expanded, driven by the growth of the mining industry, the need to supply a diverse and ever-expanding population with food became crucial. This led to the establishment of a complex food supply chain that evolved alongside Johannesburg's demographic and economic changes. As with many growing cities, this food culture was shaped by social, economic, and political forces, each of which had profound implications for both the production and consumption of food.

Johannesburg's early dining scene was closely connected to the mining industry, where a largely male workforce, many of whom were separated from their families, relied heavily on external dining options. The influx of immigrants—primarily from the British Empire—introduced new culinary traditions, with the British-style dining model becoming the dominant form of dining among Johannesburg's elites[1]. These formal dining venues, frequented by the city's wealthy who were and often connected to the British colonial influence, became symbols of status, power, and modernity. But this was not the case for the majority of the population; African migrant labourers in particular, were excluded from access to these formal dining experiences due to racial and economic segregation. For these marginalised workers, the primary alternative became the native eating houses.

These eating houses, often situated in working-class and immigrant neighbourhoods, were usually run by Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe[2] and served affordable, if sometimes unappealing, meals to labourers. They became a key aspect of Johannesburg's food culture, though often stigmatised for their perceived poor hygiene and associations with illicit activities[3]. Despite their negative reputation, these eateries were essential to sustaining the city's labour force and reflected a broader trend in industrial cities around the world, where informal dining venues, such as "lunch-wagons" in the United States[4], emerged to meet the needs of workers who were excluded from higher-status dining spaces.

The dynamics in Johannesburg echo similar trends seen in other industrialised nations, particularly the United States. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the rapid expansion of the American railroad system revolutionised the food industry by enabling the widespread transportation of food across vast distances. This technological innovation made fresh and preserved foods more accessible to the growing urban population, contributing to the rise of dining outside the home. In parallel, America

[1] Bickford-Smith, *South African Metropolis*, 61.
[2] Joseph Sherman, "Serving the Natives: Whiteness as the Price of Hospitality in South African Yiddish Literature," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, no. 3 (2000): 505.
[3] *ibid.*, 509-510.
[4] Smith, *Eating History*, 324.

saw a shift from home-based meal preparation to eating out, as industrialisation and suburbanisation altered the way Americans interacted with food. The rise of the fast food industry, fuelled by innovations in refrigeration and transportation, mirrored Johannesburg's own transformation, where formal dining spaces for the elite contrasted sharply with more accessible, informal food options that catered to the working class.

In both Johannesburg and the United States, the evolving food culture reflected broader economic and social shifts. In Johannesburg, this shift was deeply influenced by the city's mining economy, the mobility of labour, and the racial and class divisions that shaped the urban landscape. Meanwhile, in the U.S., technological advancements in transportation and refrigeration helped broaden the availability of food to a wider population, making eating out an increasingly common experience for Americans. However, while American cities embraced convenience foods and quick-service dining as symbols of affluence and progress; Johannesburg's food culture remained divided along racial and economic lines, with marginalised communities still excluded from mainstream dining establishments.

This chapter explores the development of Johannesburg's food culture within this context, highlighting the ways in which the city's growing diversity, industrialisation, and racial policies shaped its dining scene. By examining the contrasts between the formal, British-influenced dining options for the elite and the informal, often stigmatised dining options for the working class, this chapter underscores how food practices became a powerful marker of social and economic identity. Furthermore, by drawing parallels to the American experience, it highlights the broader global trends that influenced both Johannesburg's and the United States' evolving relationship with food and dining.

Immigration, Industry, and Dining in Johannesburg and the United States.

Before WWI

As Johannesburg grew from a small, informal mining town to a thriving city, a necessary supply chain developed to connect food production with consumers. This chain became longer and more complex as the population grew and industry expanded, introducing more middlemen between suppliers and consumers[5]. Restaurants and eateries became integral parts of this growing supply chain, influenced by the city's diverse immigrant population. African cities like Johannesburg grew in unique ways, differing significantly from Western cities[6]. Unlike most Western cities founded around a trade port, river, or manufacturing centre, Johannesburg began as a mining town, which evolved and formalised as mining operations became more profitable. A significant portion of Johannesburg's immigrant labour population was kept transient, with African labourers excluded from property ownership and

[5] Elizabeth Cripps, *Provisioning Johannesburg, 1886–1906*, unpublished Master's thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2012, 2.
[6] Nuttall and Mbembe, eds., *The Elusive Metropolis*, 7.

permanent settlement—contrasting with the more settled labour populations found in Western cities[7]. Later, Apartheid policies and urban planning decisions reinforced these dynamics by forcing African labourers to live on the outskirts of the city, further entrenching Johannesburg's unique spatial and social divisions[8].

As cities develop, new social structures and practices shape their cultures, and food supply chains expand to adapt to these changes. In Johannesburg, the growth of the mining industry particularly influenced the restaurant sector. The influx of immigrants from Europe brought diverse food traditions to the city, and over time, as the British came to dominate with greater social, political, and economic power they institutionalised their food practices, making them the "standard" or "desirable" way of eating. Meanwhile, marginalised groups adapted their culinary practices to fit into the broader food culture. This dynamic underscores the role of food in shaping social identity and group boundaries[9].

Until 1900, the British-occupied Johannesburg hotels were simple boarding houses, primarily designed for function rather than form, to accommodate and feed the large white male workforce, many of whom were unmarried or had families living abroad[10]. With the formalisation of British occupation, British cuisine and dining values became the dominant model for the city's eateries[11]. The British not only controlled the political landscape but also represented the largest group of migrants on the mines[12], with census data from 1896 indicating that of the 24,489 white people in Johannesburg, 12,389 were British immigrants[13].

Available dining options were primarily formal affairs, where meals were prepared with precision, served in multiple courses, and consumed using proper cutlery and crockery[14]. Some of the earliest establishments, such as the Rand Club (1887), the Johannesburg Country Club (1906) [15] and the original Carlton Hotel (1895), catered to this style of dining. To emphasise their links with Britishness and British culture it was common in these country clubs to include the singing of the British national anthem or swearing an oath of allegiance to the British monarchy before or after sitting for the meal[16]. In contrast, less formal dining options like fish and chip shops and cafés were not widely documented, despite their popularity. These establishments often operated outside traditional building codes and

[7] Tim Den Dekker, "The Fall and Rise of the Heart of Johannesburg," accessed March 15, 2024, https://urbanstrategylab.com/the-fall-and-rise-of-the-heart-of-johannesburg/.
[8] Nuttall and Mbembe, eds., *Elusive Metropolis*, 10.
[9] Cripps, *Provisioning Johannesburg*, 68.
[10] Marc Latilla, "Hotels of Early Johannesburg," accessed April 17, 2024, https://johannesburg1912.com/2023/09/23/hotels-of-early-johannesburg/.
[11] Cripps, *Provisioning Johannesburg*, 68.
[12] *ibid.*,
[13] *ibid.*, 70.
[14] Christian Rogerson, "Shisha Nyama: The Rise and Fall of the Native Eating House Trade in Johannesburg," *Social Dynamics* 14, no. 1 (1984): 31.
[15] Latilla, "Hotels of Early Johannesburg" [Online]
[16] Bickford-Smith, *South African Metropolis*, 55.

frequently occupied existing shops rather than standalone buildings. Their transient nature, influenced by the mobility of the migrant labour force, further complicated the documentation of these venues[17].



Figure 1: Image taken at the Rand Club in the early 1900's[18]

The establishment of dining options in Johannesburg was driven by several factors. First, large numbers of male workers were unable to bring their families with them, and in many cultures, food preparation was traditionally a woman's responsibility; leaving men reliant on external options. Second, limited space in mining barracks and other accommodations meant that functional kitchens were often not feasible for those who wished to prepare their own meals. Lastly, as the city expanded, workers in the growing business sector, separate from the mines, needed accessible dining options near their workplaces[19].

While Johannesburg's dining scene was shaped by its immigrant population and mining economy, similar shifts were happening elsewhere, particularly in the United States. By the late 1800s, the U.S. had a more established system for dining outside the home, partly due to the western expansion of the early 1800s and the development of an extensive railroad network[20]. Prior to this, most Americans ate at home, and food options for travellers were limited to what could be carried or found at taverns and inns along their routes[21]. The quality of food at these rest stops varied widely, often overshadowed by the sale of liquor[22].

The rise of the American railroad system revolutionised transportation and had far-reaching consequences for the American economy and social structure. Railroads supplanted canals, as they were more reliable, could be built anywhere, and were unaffected by seasonal freezes. The railroads

[17] Cripps, *Provisioning Johannesburg*, 68.
[18] Unknown photographer, "The Rand Club," accessed October 18, 2024, https://www.randclub.co.za/about-randclub/rand-club-heritage/.
[19] Cripps, *Provisioning Johannesburg*, 104.
[20] Wallach, *How America Eats*, 59.
[21] *ibid.*, 65.
[22] *ibid.*

enabled the rapid transport of seasonal and imported foods across the continent[23], while innovations in canning and refrigeration further broadened food availability. This expansion benefited the working class, who saw their purchasing power increase alongside the nation's growing industrial capacity.

The development of the transcontinental Dixie Highway between 1915 and 1920 reduced the isolation of rural areas[24] and contributed to the growth of the restaurant culture in the U.S[25]. Technological advances in refrigeration—such as refrigerated railcars, trucks, and later airships—allowed fresh products to travel longer distances without spoiling[26]. This expanded the accessibility of fresh foods for the middle class and contributed to a shift in social and economic values around food. By 1920, half of the American population was urban; having moved into cities seeking employment in the growing industrial sector[27], and these newly urbanised Americans developed a different relationship with food, as they were no longer responsible for producing and preserving their meals but relied instead on being able to purchase readily available products[28]. They also had their palates and diets expanded due to the technological advancements in transportation of the age because new foods could be transported to areas where they were previously unavailable because they were not found indigenously in the local area or their cultivation could not be supported due to climate.

Social advancements like the Meat Inspection Act of 1906 further influenced the food culture in the U.S., allowing government officials to inspect meat products for cleanliness and quality[29]. These laws repaired some of the damage done by the publication of "The Jungle" the previous year[30] and encouraged consumers to purchase pre-prepared meat products and ready-cooked meals from vendors. This shift also paved the way for the widespread adoption of convenience foods, which became fixtures in urban households. Products like Campbell's Condensed Soups were marketed to women as ways to enhance, rather than replace, traditional cooking methods, and many embraced these products. These industrialised foods came to symbolise national success and pride[31], and by 1927, the convenience of these foods began to overshadow the traditional "home-style" meal, as industrial food production surpassed artisanal methods[32].

[23] *ibid.,* 91.
[24] Similar circumstances encouraged the development of the road house industry in South Africa in the 1950's and 1960s – further discussion in chapter 2
[25] Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams,* 28.
[26] Jeffrey Pilcher, "Culinary Infrastructure: How Facilities and Technologies Create Value and Meaning Around Food," *Global Food History* 2, no. 2 (2016): 112.
[27] Wallach, *How America Eats,* 84.
[28] *ibid.,* 85.
[29] *ibid.,* 102.
[30] "The Jungle" was a novel published in parts, written by Upton Sinclair with the intention of exposing the disgusting conditions of the factories in which meats sold to the consumer were processed.
[31] *ibid.,* 85.
[32] *ibid.,* 102.

Innovations in South Africa and in the United States after World War II

Both South Africa and the United States were fortunate to emerge from the Second World War with their industrial sectors intact. The United States specifically emerged from World War II with its economy thriving off of the back of its massive industrial sector which was responsible for the production of 50% of the world's manufactured goods[33].

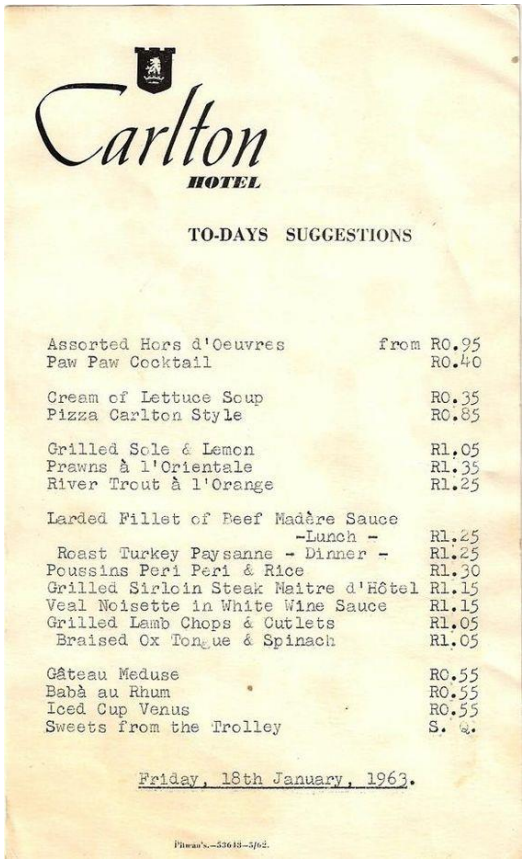
Post-war America also saw the rise of suburbanisation as the highway network continued to expand due to the interstate highway system receiving federal funding through the 1956 Federal Highway Aid Act[34]. Automobiles also had become more affordable which meant that there was no longer a need to stay within the city centre in order to find employment. Millions of people now commuted to and from work along the highways and moved towards the outskirts of the cities into the suburban areas and proprietors of the early fast food chains sought to exploit this new market.

Technological and social advancements laid the foundation for an industry that challenged established societal patterns of food consumption. They created opportunities for the expansion of the restaurant sector and encouraged consumer participation, reflecting American economic success and ingenuity. As a result, Americans became eager to engage in the fast food and quick service industries, which were closely linked to notions of American affluence and dominance in a world still recovering from the ravages of war.

In South Africa by the 1950's the previously established formal sit down venues had become a marker of class division with wealthy, white men and women dining in spaces that were inaccessible to poorer, black and white workers, who were entirely excluded and forced to establish alternative means of feeding themselves. A look at a Carlton Hotel menu from 1963 reveals a strong French influence in the dishes offered. This was a deliberate choice by the business to project an air of elegance and exclusivity. French cuisine, widely regarded as the pinnacle of refinement, allowed the hotel to align itself with the idea of Europe as the centre of modernity and cultural sophistication. This association not only elevated the hotel's status but also allowed it to justify higher prices. Dining at the Carlton Hotel was positioned as more than just a meal; it was an aspirational experience that offered patrons the opportunity to engage with symbols of high culture, reinforcing their sense of belonging to an elite social class[35]. Through this careful curation of menu options and ambiance, the hotel exemplified the way formal dining spaces acted as sites of both cultural and economic distinction in mid-20th-century Johannesburg. An article from the Sunday Times reinforces this idea about venues such as the Carlton by saying:

[33] Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams*, 42.
[34] *ibid.*, 48.
[35] Carlos Amato, "Phantom Hotel," *Sunday Times*, accessed April 24, 2024, https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/2013-11-10-phantom-hotel-/.

> *"The Carlton radiated glamour. Limousines would drift along Main Street like ships disgorging the rich and beautiful."*[36].



Carlton
HOTEL

TO-DAYS SUGGESTIONS

Assorted Hors d'Oeuvres	from RO.95
Paw Paw Cocktail	RO.40
Cream of Lettuce Soup	RO.35
Pizza Carlton Style	RO.85
Grilled Sole à Lemon	Rl.05
Prawns à l'Orientale	Rl.35
River Trout à l'Orange	Rl.25
Larded Fillet of Beef Madère Sauce -Lunch -	Rl.25
Roast Turkey Paysanne - Dinner -	Rl.25
Poussins Peri Peri & Rice	Rl.30
Grilled Sirloin Steak Maitre d'Hôtel	Rl.15
Veal Noisette in White Wine Sauce	Rl.15
Grilled Lamb Chops & Cutlets	Rl.05
Braised Ox Tongue & Spinach	Rl.05
Gâteau Meduse	RO.55
Babà au Rhum	RO.55
Iced Cup Venus	RO.55
Sweets from the Trolley	S. Q.

Friday, 18th January, 1963.

Figure 2: Carlton Hotel Menu, 1963[37]

Restaurant options for white, wealthy members of Johannesburg were very well established by the 1950s, especially in and around the suburban areas in the North Eastern parts of Johannesburg. The main through-fare road in the North Eastern suburbs was Louis Botha Avenue. Originally known as Pretoria Road until 1917, it was a mostly dirt road leading away from the mining activities concentrated in the city centre towards the farming homesteads located on the outskirts of the city[38]. By 1917 it had become a "busy, vital artery" linking the growing suburbs with the larger business district[39]. Before it was renamed, there was already a burgeoning restaurant scene with one of the first major landmarks being the restaurant at the Orange Grove Hotel which served as a pleasure resort and also provided a venue for a supper club, after dinner dancing and live music[40]. Other similar restaurants were common but required patrons to adhere to a dress code as the atmosphere of these tended towards the more formal. Similar to the trend we saw developing in the United States at the

[36] *ibid.*
[37] Unknown photographer, "Carlton Hotel Menu, 1963," accessed October 18, 2024, https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/7248049389924159/.
[38] Burgess, *The Road Through the Grove*, 9.
[39] *ibid.*, 12.
[40] *ibid.*, 38.

same time, these restaurants were expensive venues frequented only for more special occasions as opposed to an every-day possibility for the working class in Johannesburg.

Cost and the appearance of expense is a major exclusionary factor in the consumption of goods, the appearance of being able to afford something gives a group of people access not only to the good itself but to the values and feelings of modernity associated with the possession of that particular good[41]. Having strict dress codes was a way for these restaurants to control the perceptions of consumers as well as the implied value that consumers ascribed to being able to eat at that particular establishment.

One source recalls feeling grossly underdressed in a "gouache[42] " green dress at the Dawson's Hotel, feeling that even though it was the best dress she owned, it was still too informal for the setting[43].

Native Eating Houses

Black South African workers were excluded from participating in British-style dining experiences due to systemic racial segregation. Since the first establishment of the mining industry in Johannesburg; the question of how and where to provide meals for black migrant labourers had sparked on-going debate. These challenges were further compounded by Johannesburg's rapid industrialisation, which intensified the difficulty of establishing adequate and equitable food facilities for the growing workforce[44]. The solution at first was the establishment of the native eating house trade which became an imperfect solution to the problem. The majority of these eating houses were located near mining compounds and away from the white suburbs in areas such as Marshalltown, Ferreirastown, Newtown and Fordsburg[45], with some being opened in and around Sophiatown for use by black South Africans who were not employed on the mines.

According to Cripps, the establishment of eating houses was significantly influenced by a drought in 1889, which led to sharp increases in food prices, straining the mines' ability to feed their African labourers. Unlike white labourers, who were accommodated in boarding houses and hotels, African workers were fed in mine canteens—a cost-saving strategy that allowed the mines to justify paying low wages, as meals were provided directly. The drought jeopardised the mines' capacity to purchase sufficient provisions, creating instability in feeding their workforce[46].

[41] Deborah Posel, "Races to Consume: Revisiting South Africa's History of Race, Consumption and the Struggle for Freedom," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 2 (2010): 161.
[42] In this case the meaning of the word "gouache" points to the source feeling like they were dressed tackily or incorrectly for the situation in which they found themselves.
[43] Jean Collen, "A Memory of Dawson's Hotel," accessed June 18, 2024, https://websterboothanneziegler.wordpress.com/2017/03/14/a-memory-of-dawsons-hotel-johannesburg-1962/.
[44] Christian Rogerson, "Feeding the Common People of Johannesburg, 1930–1962," *Journal of Historical Geography* 12, no. 1 (1986): 56.
[45] Rogerson, "Shisha Nyama", 27.
[46] Cripps, *Provisioning Johannesburg*, 39.

Additionally, the Chamber of Mines introduced a policy allowing higher wages for skilled African workers, giving some migrant labourers disposable income to purchase extra provisions or liquor. As Johannesburg's population expanded and diversified, the need for food provisioning extended beyond the mines. African workers employed in small-scale industries like bakeries, who lived outside the compounds in multiracial slums such as Ferreirastown, lacked access to the mine kitchens, further increasing the demand for external eating establishments[47]. Racist ideals of the time were another contributing factor as even informal dining options such as cafes and chip shops which allowed African workers to purchase food at the establishment, had to insist that the consumption thereof had to take place elsewhere[48].

In addition to the prevailing racist attitudes of the time, the sale of illicit liquor and participation in prostitution trade by some eating houses meant that these eating houses received a poor reputation[49]. This reputation was such that it led to a strong desire to have them located as far away from white urban areas as possible[50]. The majority of these establishments were owned and operated by immigrant Jews from Lithuania and Croatia[51] and became a source of employment for the lower classes of white citizen as they were cheaper to run and start up than other forms of business[52]. Much research has been done on the poor conditions which existed in these eating houses and most sources agree that they were dirty, unhygienic and expensive for patrons which necessitated the establishment of alternative ways for black workers in the city to be able to feed themselves. This economic need created an opportunity for coffee cart operators to establish their trade in the city which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The idea of being able to eat out as a special treat for a specific occasion is so well entrenched in all western societal systems that they would never truly be replaced completely. There will always be sections of the population who are able to afford to patronise these high class venues and will seek to imbue their identity with the symbolic values associated with the patronisation of that particular eatery. However economic, social and political change also demands that the options available diversify themselves and expand to include as many members of the population as possible. With the idea that modern consumerism becomes a driver of this socioeconomic change, the forerunners to what we think of today as our modern fast food and quick service system which is underpinned by the modern franchise industry arose in response to this need for expansion and diversification.

[47] *ibid.,* 81.
[48] Rogerson, "Feeding the Common People", 57.
[49] Rogerson, "Shisha Nyama", 26.
[50] Cripps, *Provisioning Johannesburg*, 81.
[51] *ibid.*
[52] Rogerson, "Shisha Nyama", 20.

Conclusion

Early dining culture in Johannesburg was shaped by the city's unique socio-economic and political context, influenced by its origins as a mining town and the influx of diverse immigrant groups. The food culture developed in parallel with the city's industrial expansion, with informal dining options emerging to support the needs of a predominantly male, immigrant workforce, while formal British-influenced dining establishments catered to the elite. These dining practices reflected the city's racial and class divisions, reinforcing the stratification that marked Johannesburg's social landscape. The contrast between elite dining venues and informal "native eating houses" mirrors broader global trends observed in industrialised nations, especially the United States, where similar shifts in dining practices took place during the same period.

In both Johannesburg and the United States, the evolution of food culture was deeply connected to the rise of industrial economies, the movement of populations, and advancements in transportation and refrigeration. However, the food cultures of these two nations diverged significantly due to racial and economic divides, with Johannesburg's food scene remaining largely segregated, while the United States embraced the convenience of eating out as a symbol of modernity and mass consumption. This divergence underscores how food, as both a commodity and a cultural practice, serves as a powerful marker of social identity and status.

The development of Johannesburg's dining culture in the early 20th century, while reflecting global industrial trends, also reveals the complex ways in which food practices intersect with issues of race, class, and political power. The city's food scene was shaped not only by technological advancements but also by the racial segregation that restricted access to dining options for many of its inhabitants. Despite these barriers, informal dining spaces, such as native eating houses, played a crucial role in sustaining the city's working-class population, even as they were stigmatised for their associations with illicit activities and poor hygiene.

The evolution of Johannesburg's early restaurant culture offers a rich lens through which to understand the city's broader social and economic development. By examining the interplay between food, race, and class, this chapter highlights how dining practices were both a reflection of and a contributor to the socio-political realities of early 20th-century Johannesburg. The parallels with the United States serve to contextualise the city's food culture within global industrialisation, while also underscoring the unique challenges faced by Johannesburg due to its racial and economic divisions. The legacy of these early dining practices continues to shape the city's food culture today, illustrating the enduring connection between food, identity, and power.

Chapter 2: The Next Course: The Hamburger's Arrival and the Shift to Fast Food in South Africa

The late 19th and early 20th centuries were a period of significant transformation in both the United States and South Africa, with industrialisation, urbanisation, and the growth of consumer culture reshaping societies in profound ways. As the demands of modern life increased, particularly in rapidly growing urban centres, the need for quick, affordable, and easily accessible food became a driving force in shaping eating habits across the globe. The hamburger, once a simple sandwich rooted in European culinary traditions, would come to symbolise the emerging fast food culture, particularly in the United States, where it evolved from a working-class meal to an international icon and a pillar of the modern fast food industry.

As the hamburger gained popularity in the United States, the fast food industry was also shaped by wider shifts in social roles, particularly as women increasingly entered the workforce. This shift brought with it greater disposable income and a growing desire for convenient dining options. In both the United States and South Africa, women's participation in the workforce expanded the reach of dining-out culture. Fast food outlets such as tea rooms in South Africa, offered an alternative to traditional dining and became more appealing to women looking for quick, affordable meals. In many ways, these shifts reflected not only changing food preferences but broader societal transformations and aspirations—the desire for modernity, convenience, and changing gender roles all played a part in the development of the modern fast food industry.

In South Africa, the hamburger became a significant part of the dining culture, transcending class and racial boundaries. The emergence of roadhouses, milk bars, and coffee carts provided more accessible food options to the growing urban working class, as well as a growing number of black South Africans with more disposable income. These establishments played a crucial role in shaping South Africa's own fast food culture, serving as more than just places to eat—they became social gathering spots that reflected the country's changing dynamics and greater mobility, especially with the increasing ownership of cars. This shift represented a democratisation of dining, offering people from all walks of life the chance to experience food and community in new ways.

The hamburger's evolution—first as a humble meal for workers, then as a symbol of mass consumption and modern convenience—speaks to broader cultural shifts. The fast-food industry's development, driven by consumer demand, technological advances, and changing social trends, has forever altered how we think about food and dining. This chapter begins by exploring how the hamburger evolved in the United States. It also discusses the development of various quick service dining options in South Africa, examining how the cultural significance of what it meant to eat

outside of the home changed over time and the ways in which social trends, gender roles, and technological advancements have shaped our relationship with fast food today.

Reinventing the Hamburger's Image

As the American industrial sector expanded and created large populations of migrant factory workers, taverns and inns were joined by street-carts which sold food to the hungry labour force. In 1900 the average workweek for a factory worker was estimated at 53 hours per week, the Great Depression years and its associated economic fallout saw this time decrease to about 34.6 hours per week but this stabilised after the Second World War with averages indicating a work week which lasted between 39 and 41 hours on average[1]. More time off of work as well as more standardised working hours meant that Americans had time to seek out entertainment, this led to a boom in the film industry as well as the idea that food could also function as something more than just a biological necessity[2]. Long working hours and an increased time spent travelling to places of work as suburbanisation increased, created a need within the workforce for cheap food options which could be eaten quickly during their lunch breaks or on their commutes to or from their place of work[3]. These "lunch-wagons" were set up with small grills which allowed their operators to serve hot food. It is here that we see the first appearance of the quick service industry staple - the hamburger.

Historians cannot seem to pinpoint the exact origin of the hamburger as primary evidence points to the discovery being made by multiple people across the states at roughly the same time, however there is consensus that the hamburger has some relation to a meal served by these lunch-wagons called "Hamburg steak"[4]. The invention of the meat grinder in the 1840's meant that small amounts of chopped or minced beef could be pressed into small patties and sold as a low cost option for the lower classes. These patties were commonly grilled and served with condiments but it was traditionally eaten with a knife and fork, by the 1890's however, the practise of putting a Hamburg steak between two slices of bread was being reported in American newspapers[5].

By the 1920's "hamburger sandwiches" were common fare served in cafés and "greasy spoon" dining rooms across the country[6]. Alongside the development of these smaller establishments frequented by the working class, formal eating establishments, heavily influenced by German, French and Italian cooking styles also gained popularity, but these were mostly male dominated spaces which were unsuitable for women or families[7]. Racial statistics from data drawn from a 1900 census indicates the

[1] Donald M. Fisk, "American Labor in the 20th Century," *Compensation and Working Conditions* 6, no. 1 (2011): 4.
[2] Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams*, 37.
[3] This parallels the development of the coffee-cart system in South Africa – further discussion later on in this chapter.
[4] Smith, *Eating History*, 93.
[5] Smith, *Hamburger*, 20.
[6] *ibid.*, 24.
[7] Wallach, *How America Eats*, 66.

racial profile of the working class to consist mostly of white male workers (86%) with the remaining 14% being made up of mostly black workers[8]. A study focused on the subaltern experience in America with these early dining options creates an interesting opportunity for future research.

Despite its popularity as an accessible food option for labourers, the hamburger and the quick service industry might still have remained contained in the lower classes had it not been for the work of J. Walter Anderson and his business partner Edgar Waldo Ingram, who with their business, White Castle began establishing business practises we most often associate with the nature of modern franchising today. White Castle built brand loyalty, provided a predictable, quick, low-cost but still high quality experience to their customers, standardised the look and feel of their restaurants and controlled production methods and recipes under a centralised corporate authority[9]. The ideal of fast-food and quick service offerings tie together concepts of architecture, technological advancement with the basic human need to eat into an integrated and entertaining experience for the customers[10]. Ingram and Anderson built their business on the ideals of quality and hygiene to try and separate themselves and their business from the "greasy spoon" cafes and lunch counters which had come to be associated with hamburgers in the urban centres[11]. Even the name of the business – White Castle was designed to emphasise quality and hygiene[12].

Within the business they insisted that their employees wore standardised white uniforms and followed protocols to both give the impression of and ensure cleanliness while they worked. To build customer confidence in light of the various meat packing scandals they arranged for their meat to be delivered during the lunchtime hours so that customers could see that the meat they were using was as fresh as possible. To bring down operation costs and speed up cooking times to be able to serve more customers they shaped their patties of ground beef into thin squares so that they could use more of the surface area available on their grills[13]. By 1924 they had opened White Caste outlets in Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska and by 1931 they operated 131 White Castles across the central United States[14]. Their success rested on their ability to standardise and control the way in which their franchisees operated under the White Castle name by employing training consultants whose job it was to drive between the franchises and preform quality control checks. Ingram himself was also known to personally travel to the franchises to check on them. They also saw success based on the locations in which they chose to open their franchises, by focusing their expansion on urban areas specifically

[8] Fisk, "American Labor in the 20th Century", 3.
[9] Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams*, 16.
[10] Constantin Boym, "My McDonald's," *Gastronomica* 1, no. 1 (2001): 8.
[11] Smith, *Hamburger*, 26.
[12] Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams*, 16.
[13] Smith, *Hamburger*, 25.
[14] *ibid.*, 28.

near bus stops and large factories they were able to capture a large portion of urban workers who were making their commute either to or from work as their customer base[15].

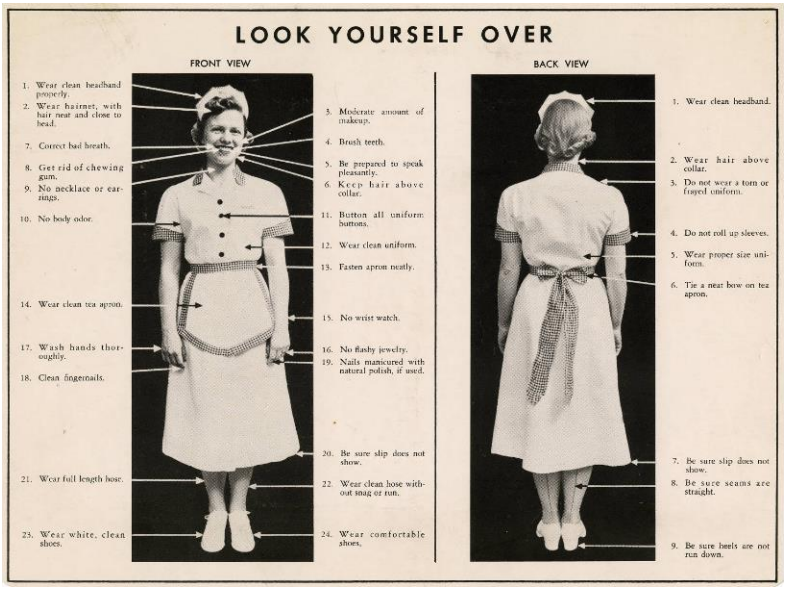


Figure 3: A White Castle employee uniform code from 1939[16]



Figure 4: A White Castle Employee standing with a sign saying that White Castle only uses "U.S. Government inspected meat" as a way of emphasising the quality of their products[17]

The desire to consume American-made products in a show of national pride, along with the aspiration to project increased social status and ensured that White Castle was able to establish itself as a reliable and affordable way for people to enjoy a meal. By popularising the hamburger and marketing it as a

[15] *ibid.*
[16] White Castle Systems Inc., *"Look Yourself Over"* (1939), accessed December 6, 2024, https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p15005coll29/id/206/.
[17] White Castle Systems Inc., *White Castle Employee and White Castle Inspected Meat Sign* (c. 1930s), accessed December 6, 2024, https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p15005coll29/id/608/rec/554.

symbol of modernity and economic success, White Castle transformed it into a fast-food staple that appealed to a broad audience. This shift not only redefined the hamburger but also solidified its role in American culture, as consumers began to associate fast food with convenience, social status, and a sense of belonging in an evolving society. Ultimately, White Castle's influence laid the groundwork for the fast food industry[18], demonstrating how food could transcend its basic function as a tool for survival and become a marker of identity and aspiration in the American socio-economic landscape.

The participation of women in the workforce and its effect on the growth of the fast food and quick service industry

Both in the United States and in South Africa the increasing participation of women in the workforce increased the amount of surplus spending money available to families. Women, who were now earning increasingly more of this money, expressed the desire to participate in the food based consumer culture. This led in part to the development of dining establishments and businesses designed with the specific intention of attracting female patronage.

Close to half of the women within the American labour force were married; middle-class women who used their incomes to purchase American-made consumer goods[19] and the ability to eat outside of the home became an increasingly important indicator of prosperity[20]. In 1940 only 15% of typical household income in Middle America was dedicated to dining out but estimates from the mid-1950's show that this allocation had grown to up to 25% as the rise of quick service food options made dining out more fashionable and attainable to the middle class[21]. The rise of quick-service food options made dining out not only more fashionable but also more attainable for the middle class. These shifts suggest that women, who were already challenging traditional gender roles by joining the workforce, further disrupted the conventional expectation that they should be solely responsible for feeding their families. As dining-out culture became more accessible, many American women increasingly turned to restaurants and quick-service options to supplement family meals.

[18] White Castle, "Our Story," accessed January 14, 2025, https://www.whitecastle.com/about-us/our-history.
[19] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 146.
[20] Wallach, *How America Eats*, 126.
[21] Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams*, 37.



Figure 5: A White Castle Advertisement from the 1930's encouraging husbands to give their wives a "night off"[22]

It would be incorrect to suggest that dining-out culture ever completely replaced traditional home-cooking methods as there were many technological advancements which helped women balance working life with their roles at home. Gas and electric stoves made cooking quicker, refrigerators and freezers meant that food did not spoil as readily, frozen, canned and other convenience foods made food preparation easier and the introduction of large chain supermarkets made the process of shopping more streamlined[23]. Instead dining out became a way for working women to enjoy "a break" from the responsibility of feeding their families[24] and to use their added disposable income to partake in modern society.

By the 1950's in South Africa the appetite for a more casual, convenient and quick dining experience had also grown in part due to the growing presence of women within the labour force. White women were increasingly entering the workforce in positions such as administration assistants, teachers and nurses which offered them a disposable income.[25] This created a two-fold need as the emergence of dual income households meant that women had less inclination to spend their time away from work cooking and there was more disposable income available for luxuries such as going out of the home to eat[26]. This disposable income, driven by a consumer culture, caused a shift in the traditional social order. Middle class white women wanted to show their prosperity by buying more consumer goods and participating in previously inaccessible leisure activities, like eating out. By showcasing their economic success in this way, white women aimed to be seen as modern and independent[27].

[22] White Castle Systems Inc., *Give Mother the Night Off*, accessed December 6, 2024, https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p15005coll29/id/204/.
[23] Wallach, *How America Eats,* 126.
[24] Samantha Barbas, "Just Like Home: 'Home Cooking' and the Domestication of the American Restaurant," *Gastronomica* 2, no. 4 (2002): 47.
[25] Albert Grundlingh, "Are We Afrikaners Getting Too Rich? Cornucopia and Change in Afrikanerdom in the 1960s," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21, no. 2 (2008): 151.
[26] Eric Parker and Kurt Illetschko, *Franchising in South Africa: The Real Story* (Johannesburg: Frontrunner Publishing, 2007), 4.
[27] Grundlingh, "Cornucopia and Change", 148.

Tea rooms located in upscale department stores—such as John Orrs on Kerk Street, Stuttafords on Pritchard Street, and Ansteys on Jeppe Street—served as convenient lunch spots for white women completing their weekend shopping[28]. This activity became a weekly ritual for many, offering a temporary escape from domestic life and an opportunity to enjoy the social aspects of dining out. The experience also allowed women to participate in a performance of prosperity and modernity. These tea rooms and cafés often borrowed names from European cities to evoke a sense of elegance and cosmopolitan sophistication[29], reflecting the desire among Johannesburg's upper and middle classes to align themselves with European standards of taste and status.

European imagery was widely romanticised and associated—by both white and Black women—with ideals of elegance and class. In 1959, Nimrod Mkele, a Black South African employed by the advertising and market research firm J. Walter Thompson, delivered a presentation to the Confederation of Advertisers. He observed that the consumer habits of Black South Africans were shaped by aspirational models: black South African men, he argued, sought to emulate an imagined American lifestyle as portrayed in mass media, especially films, while black South African women gravitated toward specifically Parisian cultural imagery in the goods they bought and the venues they frequented[30]. This design strategy speaks to a key dimension of modern consumerism, wherein the purchase and display of consumer goods becomes a powerful means of forging global connections—both materially and imaginatively[31]. Consumption allowed individuals to situate themselves within broader networks of aspiration and identity. Social gatherings at tea rooms were often accompanied by the purchase and display of other consumer items. One source recalls:

> *"Upmarket ladies of leisure from the suburbs, complete with matching hats, gloves, and seamed stockings, with their hair newly set, met their friends for morning tea in the big department stores."* [32]

One such tea room, located on Louis Botha Avenue—now the site of the Radium Beer Hall—opened in 1929 to serve tea and light meals such as sandwiches and cakes to white women shopping along the avenue, remaining a popular venue until the 1940s[33].

In contrast to formal dining rooms and supper clubs, tea rooms offered South African women a more casual and accessible alternative. Dining out and engaging with food-related consumer culture

[28] Les Pivnic, "Johannesburg as Seen Through the Eyes of a Young Schoolboy in the Late 1940s, Early 1950s and Later as a Young Married Man in the Early 1960s," *The Heritage Portal*, https://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/johannesburg-seen-through-eyes-young-schoolboy-late-1940s-early-1950s-and-later-young (accessed June 23, 2024).
[29] Marc Latilla, "History of Hillbrow," *Johannesburg 1912 – Suburb by Suburb*, https://johannesburg1912.com/2016/01/07/history-of-hillbrow-pt-1/ (accessed June 23, 2024).
[30] Robert Ross, *Things Change: Black Material Culture and the Development of a Consumer Society in South Africa 1800-2020* (Boston: Brill, 2023), 114.
[31] Posel, "Races to Consume", 162.
[32] Jean Collen, "Life in Kensington and Johannesburg Fifty Years Ago," *Jean Collen's Weblog*, October 29, 2012, https://jeancollen.wordpress.com/2012/10/29/life-in-kensington-johannesburg-fifty-years-ago/ (accessed June 24, 2024).
[33] Burgess, *The Road Through the Grove*, 55.

provided a space for self-expression and offered women a degree of agency beyond their traditional roles as homemakers. Eating out thus became a way to signal political beliefs, social class, ethnicity, and gender identity[34].

Milk Bars and Coffee Carts

Milk bars were a popular concept imported into Johannesburg from the United States. Unlike formal dining establishments, they did not serve full meals but focused on offering ice cream and cold drinks. These milk bars became social hubs, especially for teenagers and young adults, providing a space for them to gather after school or in the early evenings. The milk bars filled a societal need by offering youths a place of their own, distinct from the formal dining rooms of their parents or the refined, often stuffy tea rooms frequented by wealthy women. Speaking of U.S Milk Bar chain Dairy Queen, writer Larry McCurty says that before small towns had an option like Dairy Queen people had no place to meet and talk, which highlights the need for community that was filled by Milk Bars[35]. One notable South African example was Milky Lane, which was opened by the Halamandres family in 1958[36] and capitalised on this trend[37]. Evidence suggests that these milk bars were incredibly profitable, with one advertisement highlighting a milk bar that was making a monthly profit of £600[38].

For black South Africans, whose dining options remained limited, coffee carts became an important feature of the urban landscape. The supply channels available to black workers were insufficient, and by the 1950s, Johannesburg had around 100 000 black workers[39]. However, as the number of black workers increased in the city the native eating house deteriorated, with many eating houses shifting from providing cooked meals to focusing on selling groceries and uncooked meat[40]. Coffee carts, which first appeared in the 1920s in areas on the fringes of commercial and industrial zones[41], took advantage of the shortcomings in the native eating house system. Unlike native eating houses, which had their operating hours regulated by law, coffee carts were able to open earlier and stay open later to capitalise on high-traffic commuting times when people were entering and leaving the city.

Since the carts were mobile, unlike traditional brick-and-mortar eating houses, they could adapt to and capitalise on changing demand patterns, allowing them to reach new markets effectively. The pricing and range of goods on offer were cheaper and larger than that of eating houses and through the sale of liquor and marijuana they were able to establish themselves not only as purveyors of essential

[34] Maren Möhring. "Transnational Food Migration and the Internalization of Food Consumption: Ethnic Cuisine in West Germany." In *Food and Globalization: Consumption, Markets and Politics in the Modern World*, edited by Alexander Nützenadel and Frank Trentmann, 139–160. New York: Berg, 2008.
[35] Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams*, 38.
[36] Burgess, *The Road Through the Grove*, 14.
[37] Milky Lane would later be incorporated under the Famous Brands conglomerate, also started by the Halamandres family.
[38] "Milk Bar for Sale." *Rand Daily Mail*, January 23, 1952, 5.
[39] Bickford-Smith, *The South African Metropolis*, 254.
[40] Rogerson, "Feeding the Common People", 57.
[41] *ibid.*, 59.

consumer goods but as social venues for people to meet and relax in the city[42]. Roadhouses further increased the pressure being placed on native eating houses as black South Africans were able to purchase relatively cheap pre-made food items from the establishments even though they were not permitted to consume their purchases on the premises[43].

Roadhouses

The ultimate culmination of these alternative dining and socialisation options was the roadhouse, which directly contributed to the decline in the popularity of tea rooms and milk bars. The roadhouse marked a significant shift in dining culture and was a direct precursor to the modern fast food and quick service franchise system we know today. Roadhouses became more popular than tea rooms and in-office canteens because they were cheaper to run, thanks to lower rent costs, which allowed them to serve food at more affordable prices[44]. For example, a letter sent to the *Rand Daily Mail* in 1956 complained that a cup of tea at a tea room cost 2s. 6d.[45], whereas at a roadhouse, the cost was only 6d. A comparison of menus from the Doll's House roadhouse (1961) and the Carlton Hotel (1963)[46] reveals that the prices at the Doll's House were significantly lower, emphasising its role as a more accessible and casual dining option.

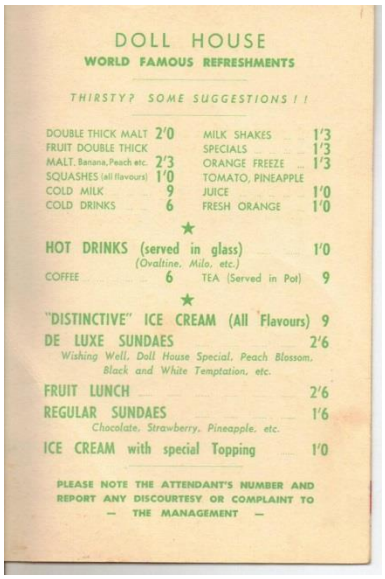

DOLL HOUSE
WORLD FAMOUS REFRESHMENTS
THIRSTY? SOME SUGGESTIONS ! !
DOUBLE THICK MALT 2'0
FRUIT DOUBLE THICK
MALT, Banana, Peach etc. 2'3
SQUASHES (all flavours) 1'0
COLD MILK 9
COLD DRINKS 6
MILK SHAKES 1'3
SPECIALS 1'3
ORANGE FREEZE 1'3
TOMATO, PINEAPPLE
JUICE 1'0
FRESH ORANGE 1'0
★
HOT DRINKS (served in glass) 1'0
(Ovaltine, Milo, etc.)
COFFEE 6
TEA (Served in Pot) 9
★
"DISTINCTIVE" ICE CREAM (All Flavours) 9
DE LUXE SUNDAES 2'6
Wishing Well, Doll House Special, Peach Blossom, Black and White Temptation, etc.
FRUIT LUNCH 2'6
REGULAR SUNDAES 1'6
Chocolate, Strawberry, Pineapple, etc.
ICE CREAM with special Topping 1'0
PLEASE NOTE THE ATTENDANT'S NUMBER AND REPORT ANY DISCOURTESY OR COMPLAINT TO — THE MANAGEMENT —

Figure 6: Doll House Roadhouse Menu from 1961[47]

Roadhouses attracted customers from all walks of life for several reasons. First, they were conveniently located along major roads in suburban or city areas, and many stayed open for long hours, even 24 hours a day, ensuring a steady stream of customers—especially during peak commute

[42] Rogerson, "Shisha Nyama", 30.
[43] Rogerson ,"Feeding the Common People", 57.
[44] "200 Per Cent Profit on Tea?" *Rand Daily Mail*, October 26, 1956, 10.
[45] "Nobody Interested in Food of the Country." *Rand Daily Mail*, October 24, 1956.
[46] Please see image attached in previous chapter
[47] Brandon Platt, *Dollhouse Roadhouse Menu*, 1961, https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150540180378406&type=3 (accessed December 9, 2024).

times. Second, the food served was simple, easy to prepare, and inexpensive for the business to make, which allowed them to pass the savings onto customers. Finally, roadhouses offered affordable options compared to formal restaurants, which were usually reserved for special occasions. This affordability opened the market to lower-income families, including those with children who had previously been unable to afford a formal dining experience regularly.

As roadhouses grew in popularity, on-site canteens located in office buildings and on mines experienced a similar decline to milk bars in popularity, particularly due to the growing demand for hamburgers at roadhouses and the overlap in products as Roadhouses were also often equipped with soft serve ice-cream machines and Multimixers to make milkshakes. One article pointed out that the sandwiches from work canteens seemed less worthwhile when workers could make the same meal at home. Instead, they were looking for something more substantial and unique—though the article lamented this trend, stating, "Great cultures are not built on hamburgers and pop." [48]

Based on the food they served, the manner in which it was served, and the pricing of the products, roadhouses are the most likely precursor to the quick service industry in South Africa. Much like in the United States, they began as a convenient option for travellers but quickly became the focus of an entire culture centred around the food and the informal atmosphere. During the 1950s and 1960s, advertisements in the *Rand Daily Mail* highlighted the profitability of these establishments, with one roadhouse in the East Rand generating a net profit of £120 monthly[49] in 1952, while another, listed for sale a year later, claimed an average monthly profit of £3500[50].

As in the United States of America, a clear sign of economic prosperity in Johannesburg was the increasing popularity of personal car ownership[51]. As the use of cars became more widespread roadhouses began to function as more than just an option to get a warm, quick meal for those who were travelling; they became social venues where young adults could meet and socialise in a less formal setting. Roadhouses all across Johannesburg became popular meeting spots for groups of teenagers who were looking for fun away from their homes and a big draw was that these roadhouses often remained open until late or stayed open all night[52]. A specific subcultural group known as the Ducktails even began to base many of their social gatherings around the roadhouses in their area, using them to denote one group's territory from another. Physical altercations such as fights or other displays of masculinity such as illegal racing between rival groups would break out when territory was not respected[53]. The presence of these Ducktails was widespread, as one article describes the

[48] "King Sandwich." *Rand Daily Mail*, March 23, 1956, 10.
[49] "East Rand Roadhouse for Sale" *Rand Daily Mail* (1952-01-23), 5.
[50]"Roadhouse Near City for Sale." *Rand Daily Mail*, October 24, 1956, 12.
[51] Grundlingh, "Cornucopia and Change", 149.
[52] Burgess, *The Road Through the Grove*, 64.
[53] Katie Mooney, "'Ducktails, Flick-Knives and Pugnacity': Subcultural and Hegemonic Masculinities in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, no. 4 (1998): 766.

"youths in exaggerated dress who roar around the streets in gangs on motorcycles with open exhausts" as they congregated at the local roadhouse and made "the roads hideous and dangerous"[54].

These roadhouses often employed gimmicks to draw their customers in, adding a layer of entertainment inherit to the experience. Various examples exist such as neon signage used at the Casbah in Brakpan which first opened its doors 1955, or creating conceptual building designs such as that which was employed at The Flying Saucer Roadhouse in Pretoria. Another notable trend in architectural design which emerged was the use of repurposed WWII fighter planes. Two notable examples are Vic's Viking Garage, which displayed a Vickers Viking Airliner on its roof[55], and The Dakota Café in Johannesburg. Cyril Murley, the owner of The Dakota Café, bought a defunct plane in 1946 when a shortage of corrugated iron made it difficult to complete the roof of his roadhouse[56]. Interestingly, the plane itself was complete and deemed still fit for flight[57] and so rather than dismantling the plane for scrap metal, he mounted it in its original state on the roof of the café, attracting customers with this novelty feature.

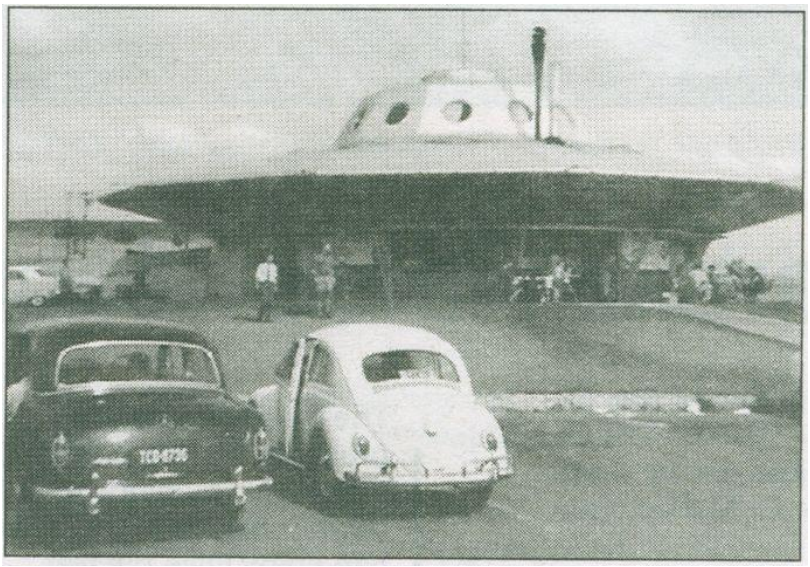


Figure 7: The Flying Saucer Roadhouse in Pretoria 1960's[58]

[54] "Milk Bar Cowboys." *Rand Daily Mail*, March 17, 1955, 10.
[55] Hannes Oosthuizen, "Retrospective: South African Roadhouses," Sentimetal Shop, https://www.sentimetal.shop/blogs/news/retrospective-south-african-roadhouses (accessed July 13, 2024).
[56] "The Rooftop Plane Flies Again." *Rand Daily Mail*, October 13, 1956, 1.
[57] Dakota Roadhouse Johannesburg South Africa, https://www.dc-3.co.za/dakota-roadhouse.html (accessed January 25, 2024).
[58] Unknown photographer, "The Flying Saucer Roadhouse in Pretoria," African Muscle Cars Forum, https://www.africanmusclecars.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=16670 (accessed November 15, 2023).



Figure 8: The Dakota Café in 1948[59]

The Doll House, located in Johannesburg's North-Eastern suburbs, was another iconic roadhouse. Opened in 1936 by three Mormon missionaries-turned-businessmen[60], it became a landmark for locals. In 1946, the business was sold to an American immigrant and continued to thrive until its closure in 2017[61]. One interview participant recalled,

> *"Saturday nights at the Doll House—the atmosphere was just unbelievable. Everybody used to get out of their cars and just have a party."* [62]

The Doll House roadhouse became a focal point and meeting place for those whole lived in the suburbs surrounding Louis Botha as well as for the whole of the North Eastern suburbs. Being one of the roadhouse options which were available 24/7 it was able to make a great success of itself off the backs of the late-night party scene in the 1960s as well as a family-friendly option for a quick daytime meal. Many considered it a local landmark for, "late night bites on your way home from a *jol* in Hillbrow, for biker gangs in the '60's and '80's disco bunnies"[63]. One final reflection sums up its cultural significance:

> *"The Doll House aint no Pantheon, but it is a ruin of lost cultures. If you were a 16 year old East Rand Italian disco princess in 1977, the Doll House was your Coliseum. If you were a*

[59] Dave Parsons, "The Dakota Café," 1948, https://www.dc-3.co.za/dakota-roadhouse.html (accessed November 15, 2023).
[60] Burgess, *The Road Through the Grove*, 64.
[61] Carlos Amato, "It's the End of the Road for Jozi's Iconic Roadhouse, The Doll House," *Sunday Times*, August 12, 2017, https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/2017-08-12-its-end-of-the-road-for-jozis-iconic-roadhouse-the-doll-house/ (accessed November 15, 2023).
[62] Jacqueline Joffe, personal interview by author, October 28, 2023.
[63] Oosthuizen, "Retrospective: South African Roadhouses" [Online]

> *sax-playing Orange Grove Bar mitzvah Boy in 1951, this was your godless shul. If you were a Yeoville cokehead in 1995, this was your three a.m confessional."*[64]

The Doll House and its contemporaries played an important role in introducing and solidifying the concept of casual, handheld, and informal dining in South Africa during the 1950s and '60s. These roadhouses paved the way for the development and popular acceptance of the quick-service dining model, which would become the backbone of the South African franchise industry in the 1960s and '70s. While these roadhouses never completely replaced formal dining, they opened up the dining experience to families who had never been able to take their children to upscale restaurants and to lower- to middle-class people with limited disposable income, making eating out more accessible and frequent than ever before.

Conclusion

The evolution of the hamburger from a simple, accessible food option for the working class to a fast-food staple of global significance illustrates the profound impact of social, cultural, and economic forces on the food industry. The introduction of the hamburger into the American landscape via street vendors and "lunch wagons" was driven by a growing need for quick, affordable meals to sustain an increasingly busy and industrialised workforce. The development of the hamburger, particularly in its transition from the Hamburg steak to the sandwich version, reflects broader societal shifts in how food was consumed: from formal, sit-down meals to the rise of on-the-go dining that could cater to the demands of factory workers, commuters, and busy families.

The critical role played by early pioneers like J. Walter Anderson and Edgar Waldo Ingram in transforming the hamburger into a recognisable, standardised fast food option is paramount. Their innovative approach to franchising, brand building, and focusing on hygiene, cleanliness, and standardisation laid the groundwork for the modern fast food industry. White Castle's success in promoting the hamburger as a symbol of quality and modernity demonstrated how food could transcend its role as a mere nutritional need and instead become a cultural and social marker of success and aspiration. By appealing to both the working class and the emerging middle class, the hamburger was solidified as a fast-food staple that signalled convenience, affordability, and social mobility, resonating with the growing American desire for efficiency and consumerism.

Similarly, the increasing participation of women in the workforce during the 1940s and 1950s had a transformative effect on the fast food and quick service industry, both in the United States and in South Africa. Women's newfound disposable income, along with the social and cultural shifts occurring in parallel, opened the door for dining-out culture to expand and become more accessible. In South Africa, tea houses, milk bars, and roadhouses provided women with an alternative to traditional home-cooked meals, offering them an opportunity to display social status, modernity, and

[64] Amato, "It's the end of the road for Jozi's iconic roadhouse" [Online]

independence. As quick-service dining became more fashionable and attainable, women were able to redefine their roles within both the home and society, disrupting gender expectations and asserting their participation in the consumer culture.

In South Africa, the rise of milk bars, coffee carts, and roadhouses further illustrated the global interconnectedness of the growing dining culture associated with fast food and the socio-economic changes that accompanied it. Roadhouses, in particular, marked a significant shift in dining habits, offering a casual, affordable, and social alternative to the more formal dining spaces previously associated with wealth and status. By catering to both the growing youth market and the working-class population, roadhouses became integral to the development of the quick-service dining industry in South Africa, mirroring trends seen in the United States.

Through this exploration of the hamburger's rise to prominence and the increasing demand for quick-service food, we see how food culture and societal shifts intertwined to shape the fast food industry. The accessibility, affordability, and appeal of quick-service dining provided an essential way for people across the globe to meet their evolving needs and desires for convenience, social engagement, and self-expression. As the hamburger became a symbol of modernity, the food industry itself became a driving force in shaping both individual identities and collective cultural movements. This chapter has shown that the quick-service industry did not simply emerge in response to economic pressures or consumer demands—it evolved alongside a larger narrative of social change, reflecting the shifting dynamics of gender, class, and cultural identity during a period of profound transformation in both America and South Africa

Chapter 3 – A Quick Bite: McDonald's, Steers, and Spur in the Age of Fast Food

McDonald's, with over 36,000 locations worldwide and 69 million daily customers, is more than just a business; it is a global cultural icon. From its origins as a small San Bernardino restaurant in 1940, McDonald's evolved into the prototype for the fast food industry, transforming dining through efficiency, mass production, and customer service. This chapter examines how the McDonald's model, shaped by Ray Kroc's influence, revolutionised fast casual dining in the United States and set the stage for the global expansion of fast food.

In South Africa, the rise of fast food chains influenced by the McDonald's model coincided with the broader adoption of Western consumer practices. Dining out, once considered a luxury, became a status symbol and a marker of modernity. Local businesses like Steers and Spur capitalised on the growing demand for Western-style fast food. Led by George Halamandres and Allan Ambor, these brands adapted the American model while incorporating local sensibilities, contributing to the rise of quick-service dining in South Africa. In 1967, the same year when Ambor opened his business which would become the Spur brand, Wimpy, another imported fast-food style chain also opened their first franchise in Durban South Africa[1]. Wimpy as a case study has been consciously omitted from this study due to space constraints but as a business has also had a profound impact on the growth and development of the fast-food industry in South Africa.

The franchising system used by McDonald's was instrumental in spreading its model, which in turn influenced local chains like Steers and Spur. These businesses replicated the American fast food experience but personalised it to fit the South African context.

This chapter explores how McDonald's success internationally, and the rise of Steers and Spur locally, represent more than just the spread of fast food. They embody the internalisation of American ideals during Apartheid, where the commodification of food became intertwined with broader consumer behaviour. These chains adapted global trends to local cultural dynamics, becoming symbols of modernity, affluence, and leisure.

In the post-Apartheid era, Steers and Spur expanded further, adjusting to the shifting socio-political landscape and catering to a more diverse customer base. While embracing globalisation, these chains navigated local identities, class, and race, adapting their offerings to reflect South Africa's evolving consumer culture.

Finally, this chapter briefly touches on the participation of black South Africans as both consumers and labourers in the fast food industry, particularly in the founding of Steers and Spur. While further

[1] Wimpy, "Our Story" [Online]

research into this aspect of South African consumerism is necessary, this project aims to lay the groundwork for understanding how labour and consumption are intertwined in this context.

McDonalds as the Definition of Fast Food

No other business encapsulates the success of the fast food and quick service industry quite like McDonalds. Internationally McDonalds has more than 36 000 individual locations worldwide and serves an estimated 69 million customers a day[2]. The cost of their Big Mac hamburger has even become an unofficial economic indicator through something known as the Big Mac Index where the local cost of the burger helps economists to assess the purchasing power of a specific currency[3].

The McDonald's model perfectly encapsulates a business that harnessed the mechanisation brought about by the success of the American industrial system, the economic opportunities created by the increased disposable income of families during the post-war boom, and the American desire to consume food as a commodity. This combination transformed McDonald's into a global phenomenon. The brand established a clear image of what a fast food or quick service dining option should look like, how it should operate, what products it should offer, and how to generate substantial profits through cleverly designed systems and procedures.

In 1940, Richard and Maurice McDonald moved to San Bernardino, Los Angeles and opened "McDonald Brothers Burger Bar and Drive In" which served a varied menu including American-style barbeque and of course - hamburgers[4].

The brothers keenly analysed their business and soon found that the majority of their profits were made through the sale of their hamburgers and this discovery led them to revamp and refocus their business model[5]; laying the groundwork for the global giant we have today. To reduce costs and increase profits they focused on factory-like efficiency, employing the use of an assembly line process similar to the one which had been popularised by Henry Ford. This process simplified the tasks involved in building and serving hamburgers into a series of smaller tasks which could be performed quickly and with minimal training[6]. All of their hamburgers became further standardised with the same condiments so that the time between when an order was received by the kitchen and when the customer received their order was sped up, allowing more customers to receive service in a shorter time-span. They replaced breakable crockery and actual utensils which would need to be washed with paper and plastic packaging alternatives so that no time would be wasted by employees in cleaning up after the customers. They installed larger, specially built grills so that they could cook more patties at

[2] McDonald's Corporation, "How many McDonald's restaurants are there in the U.K. and the world?," McDonald's, accessed June 9, 2024, https://www.mcdonalds.com.
[3] The Economist, "Our Big Mac Index Shows How Burger Prices Differ Across Borders," *The Economist*, accessed June 9, 2024, https://www.economist.com/big-mac-index.
[4] Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams*, 48.
[5] Smith, *Eating History*, 325.
[6] *ibid.*, 326.

once and purchased multiple Multimixers with specially adapted paddles that mixed milkshakes in their paper cups[7]. They removed indoor seating options and eliminated female waitresses. Customers were expected to queue to place their order, pay at the window, eat quickly, throw away their mess and then leave independently, this cut down on staff costs. They also reduced the size of their menu significantly, stripping it down to only their best selling items[8].

All of these innovations meant that the products at McDonalds could be sold for a significantly lower price than at contemporary cafés or diners[9]. The novelty of their method struck customers, the food was cheap, predictable, simple and tasty and the service was efficient. Through this new assembly line like process they had basically eliminated the chance of human error involved in the production of food and in doing so saw repeat patronage that soon created astronomical profits for the brothers[10]. The mechanisation employed by the brothers heralded a new age in food production and restaurant experience upon which our modern quick-service industry continues to base its design. These methods were the direct result of a uniquely American set of circumstances and led to the hamburger becoming the national food of the United States.

In the early 1900's the United States was a fractured country socially and physically with very few things which bred a unifying American ideal[11]. McDonalds unified an emerging middle class who now had the opportunity to experience food as entertainment as well as sustenance for the first time. These working class people had never previously been able to dine at the more upmarket establishments in the city but were welcomed and felt comfortable in their local McDonalds[12]. In 1965 McDonalds became a publically traded company and other quick-service sector entrepreneurs soon adopted their model or were bought out by competitors who had already adopted the McDonalds model. These led to major expansions in the size of the businesses that caused the solidification of the corporate rhetoric that is now characteristic of the quick service industry[13].

Eating Out as Commodity: Consumer Perceptions of Fast Food in South Africa

Eating out itself is a method of consumption which is unique because the action of eating is a necessity and has historically functioned as a method for socialisation[14]; by turning it into a leisure activity for members of the lower social classes to expand the range of dining out options available it has created a situation where the act of eating no longer simply fulfils a biological need for survival.

[7] Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams,* 50.
[8] Smith, *Eating History,* 322.
[9] Smith, *Hamburger,* 44.
[10] Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams,* 51.
[11] *ibid.*, 19.
[12] *ibid.*, 51.
[13] Smith, *Eating History,* 330.
[14] Sophie Chevalier, "Food, Malls and the Politics of Consumption: South Africa's New Middle Class," *Development Southern Africa* 32, no. 1 (2015): 3.

Rather the act of eating out fits more traditionally into the definition of consumption as it illustrates the desire of human beings to acquire goods that are not precisely necessary for survival[15]. The ability to go out of the home for a meal became something that was a desirable and fun activity which transcended class and gender boundaries, commodifying the experience and thereby creating a desire for the food on offer as a product to have and display. Eating out involves crossing boundaries by bringing elements from the external environment into the body. This process highlights the unique complexity of food and its commodification, which is not shared by other consumer goods[16]. When a customer physically ingests a good they are also symbolically ingesting the values inherit to the product and therefore it is necessary for companies responsible for the design and production of consumer goods to be more aware of the desired customer experience which is prompted by the consumption of their product. The more consumer orientated a product's design and production is, the more likely it will be for a business to experience economic success[17].

The customer experience at the Seven Steer under the leadership of Halamandres ensured that the restaurant enjoyed local popularity. Their reputation was such that George Halamandres was able to use his personal name as a successful selling point in advertisements[18]. In this case instead of the food or the restaurant being the link to the consumer to inspire loyalty, it was the personal reputation of the owner which inspired repeat patronage from customers and their subsequent loyalty to the restaurant itself. Brand awareness has become a key aspect of Western consumerism, as personalising an item fosters customer loyalty[19]. When a brand is personified with human traits like predictability, reliability, honesty, and trustworthiness, it meets the values customers expect from their interactions. In this way effective brand personification ensures a loyal customer base. By 1971, ten years after they initially opened the first Seven Steer in Highlands North, the business had expanded to include 19 other locations spread around the greater Johannesburg area[20].

Allan Ambor, the founder of the Spur Corporation began working in the food industry initially as a waiter at the Halamandres owned Seven Steer steakhouse in Highlands North. While on holiday with friends in Cape Town he noticed the Sea Point area lacked a steakhouse and approached "Uncle" George Halamandres[21] in search of the opportunity to open a Seven Steer franchise in Cape Town[22]. Initially the Halamandres owned locations varied in name, with some locations bearing similarly

[15] Peter Stearns, *Consumerism in World History: The Global Transformation of Desire* (London: Routledge, 2001), 1.
[16] Möhring, "Transnational Food Migration", 138.
[17] Siet Sijtsema et al., "Variables Influencing Food Perception Reviewed for Consumer–Oriented Product Development," *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition* 42, no. 6 (2002): 565.
[18] "Fete at Sandringham Gardens," *Rand Daily Mail*, May 4, 1965, 22.
[19] De Grazia, Irresistible Empire, 8.
[20] "Steers," Rand Daily Mail, April 29, 1971, 19.
[21] For the sake of clarity, I'm choosing to use Ambor's affectionate terms to help differentiate between "Uncle" George Halamandres Senior and his son George "Georgie" Halamandres Junior who took over the business in the 1980's.
[22] Allan Ambor, *A Taste for Life: How the Spur Legend Was Born* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2021), 88.

themed names but lacking the standardisation we expect from a franchise operation today. The "Golden Spur" had been a Halamandres owned steakhouse located in Rosebank, Johannesburg but was no longer in operation when Ambor began selecting an appropriate name for his franchise in Cape Town. Since the name was available, Ambor made the decision to use it despite being directed to use "Golden Steer" in his initial franchise agreement[23].

Ambor's close personal connection to the Spur brand is evident in both his autobiography and the interview he granted for this study. His recollections frequently included personal reflections, such as his views on the breakdown of the business relationship between himself and the Halamandres family:

> *"I owe a great deal of gratitude to Uncle George but I was let down by them, seriously, but I tried to be an honourable man."*[24]

This level of personal investment suggests a potential bias in his narrative. Emotional investment can significantly shape both one's perception of past events and the manner in which those events are recounted in the present. While there is no indication that Ambor intentionally misrepresented information, it is important to acknowledge the possibility that certain details were subconsciously omitted or reframed in ways that aligned with the context and objectives of the interview conducted for this research.

Ambor opened the "“Golden Spur”" steakhouse on 24 October 1967[25]. Ambor felt that the name alone carried weight and "had some goodwill" in Cape Town since it had been a well-known restaurant in Johannesburg[26]. He felt that using it would serve as a draw card for Cape Town locals who were eager to partake in what they perceived as the cosmopolitan restaurant scene in Johannesburg[27]. He also believed using a familiar name would entice holiday makers and travellers from Johannesburg who were visiting Cape Town. American chains entering the South African market later on benefited from similar logic that saw South Africans eager to associate themselves with the perception of status and modernity that comes with purchasing products from an international source[28]. Consumers desire to associate themselves with the socially constructed image of affluence as well as with a cosmopolitan, western lifestyle which is implied to be superior to their own by virtue of the product or brand's connection to the United States[29].

The other reason for choosing the name "“Golden Spur”" over "Golden Steer" was to do with the presence of another restaurant operating under the name "Black Steer" near Ambor's proposed location. "Black Steer" was also in use by the Halamandres' in Johannesburg but this location in Cape

[23] Allan Ambor, personal interview by author, October 31, 2023.
[24] *ibid.*
[25] Ambor, *A Taste for Life*, 114.
[26] Allan Ambor, personal interview by author, October 31, 2023.
[27] *ibid.*
[28] Ferguson and Adams, "Remote Acculturation", 106.
[29] Blessing Maumbe, "Quick Service Restaurant Industry", 152.

Town was a completely unrelated third party. Neither Ambor nor the Halamandres' wanted customers to assume that the "Black Steer" operational in Cape Town was in any way associated with the Johannesburg locations or with Ambor's new restaurant. They feared that poor customer experiences with the Cape Town "Black Steer" restaurant would have negative long-term impacts for their businesses[30].

Ambor was given much room to manoeuvre within the terms of his initial franchise agreement with the Halamandres'[31]. Modern franchise agreements do not allow the franchisee to deviate or negotiate the majority of the particulars laid out within the agreement[32]. This is done intentionally to protect the brand's image and public perception as well as to ensure standardisation for customers. From the beginning of the chain in the early 1920s Anderson and Ingram of White Castle insisted on this standardisation which dictated everything from building design, decor and aesthetic of White Castle restaurants to specific meat suppliers and bakeries which franchisees were compelled within the terms of the contract to make use of[33]. By not specifying and enforcing these and other particulars for Ambor, the Halamandres' allowed Ambor to begin separating his new business from the parent company.

The name change from "Golden Steer" to "“Golden Spur”" began a pattern of differentiation that would eventually lead to the creation of Ambor's separate "Spur" brand which he began franchising himself after buying "Uncle" George Halamandres out of their initial contract[34]. Simply changing the name changes the nature of the product on offer and separated the food available from Ambor’s Spur locations from the products available at one of the Halamandres owned enterprises in Johannesburg. The food products available at the “Golden Spur” in Cape Town became imbued with their own unique set of values in the minds of its customers. The only way to interact with these products and their associated social values was to patronize the "“Golden Spur”" in Cape Town as they were completely different to those available to patrons of the Halamandres owned restaurants in Johannesburg.

Apart from changing the name, Ambor also did extensive remodelling to the aesthetic of the new restaurant by customising the logo as well as all of the artwork to reflect his personal aesthetic taste[35]. Logos and other artworks associated with brand aesthetics contribute to the commodification of a product as it creates an implied idea of distinctiveness, status and concreteness around the product and it is especially necessary in cases where a particular item is easy to reproduce, such as a meal[36]. By attaching a stylised aesthetic that can be associated with a product the simple meal is transformed into

[30] Allan Ambor, personal interview by author, October 31, 2023.
[31] *ibid.*
[32] Parker and Illetschko, *Franchising in South Africa,* 14.
[33] Chandler, *Drive-Thru Dreams,* 18.
[34] Allan Ambor, personal interview by author, October 31, 2023.
[35] Ambor, *A Taste for Life,* 119.
[36] Sijtsema et. al, “Variables Influencing Food Perception”, 567.

something that becomes intimately associated with a particular restaurant and can't be replicated outside of the particular circumstance. Anyone with some kitchen experience can make a hamburger or a steak but the experience of eating a "Spur" hamburger or a steak is connected to the aesthetics and experience of eating in a Spur restaurant as much as it is tied to the product itself. This links to the commodification of food as the aesthetic appeal connects to customer's values and informs their particular choices. Logos and other media associated with a particular brand act as powerful unifying agents which influence public perceptions and can influence whether or not a consumer is able to identify with the brand in question[37].

The value of food as it relates to a consumer is symbolic as well as concrete in nature. Food and food-based products are understood to embody four key types of consumer value, and by aligning a specific value with a targeted customer group, businesses can more effectively secure consistent profitability. Concrete values are those which relate directly to the practises involved in the production of the food as well as the physical properties and nutritional characteristics of the food item itself.[38] However it is the location and emotional value embedded in a product which impacts the discussion on logo and aesthetics as it is these which influence a food item's ability to be successfully marketed as a consumer good. Brand awareness is a key aspect of Western styled consumerism[39] and the display of brand aesthetics and associated artworks in a public space such as a shopping centre encourages consumers to actively perceive and decide whether or not to participate in a product[40]. Location value refers to the characteristics of the setting in which the food is purchased or consumed and the emotional value is framed by the connection of the individual to the brand by virtue of the food's linkages to their individual lived experiences[41].

Franchise business models such as Steers and Spur as well as the broader idea of franchising itself, fits within the definition of a "market empire" as articulated by Victoria De Grazia. In her book she argues that a "market empire" reflects a formal system of hierarchical political relationships, where the most powerful state wields the most influence. De Grazia applies this concept to the expansion of the Western market, suggesting that a single specific product marketed by a particular company acts as an agent of this empire. At the helm of the empire, the parent company exercises considerable control over the product's design, purpose, creation and eventual transport. The product is then introduced to a new region, fostering a beneficial relationship between the parent company, which

[37] Mehita Iqani and Bridget Kenny, "Critical Consumption Studies in South Africa: Roots and Routes," *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 29, no. 2 (2015): 101.
[38] Hans Dagevos and Johan Van Ophem, "Food Consumption Value: Developing a Consumer Centred Concept of Value in the Field of Food," *British Food Journal* 115, no. 10 (2013): 1477.
[39] Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, 168.
[40] Kenney, "Servicing a Racial Regime", 110.
[41] Dagevos and Van Ophem, "Food Consumption Value", 1477.

reaps economic benefits, and the subjects of the empire, who receive not only the tangible product but also the values embedded within it[42].

By his own definition Ambor feels that franchising forms part of this quasi-imperialistic system of control, even going so far as to use language which creates the image of a traditional empire:

> *"In this (the business) realm of franchising can be seen as a benevolent form of colonisation, expanding the empire of an idea in a way that promotes the greater good. The franchisor – the emperor – puts down roots and raises the flag in new territories. The franchisee – the emissary – builds on a tried and tested premise for growth, backed by logistical support, the transfer of relevant skills and the provision of proprietary knowledge and technologies in return for a monthly royalty. The customers – the citizens – enjoy a consistent and predictable experience wherever they may wander into a branded outpost of the realm."* [43]

A "market empire", such as what occurs when a business is able to successfully replicate its pattern for turning a profit by expanding the business not only to larger consumer bases but also by expanding the nature of the business, is able to change the value of the product from something that holds value because it is necessary for survival, into a status item which is valuable because it can be purchased and owned for personal enjoyment and fulfilment[44].

By beginning their market empires Spur and Steers began a commodification process whereby restaurant meals became consumer goods imbued with their own set of values and ideals which when purchased by a consumer are ingested physically as well as metaphorically. The change which saw food items go from being a human necessity to a product which could be purchased for sheer enjoyment showed a change in the perceptions of food items in the consciousness of white middle class South Africans. The next section deals with how this Western style of consumption was indicative of the internalisation of American ideals in Apartheid era South Africa, but that these ideals were not simply absorbed by South Africans, rather they underwent a process of adaptation within the consciousness of South African consumers to become a hybrid set of ideals reflective of both South African and American value systems.

Steers, Spur, and the Americanisation of South African Dining

When South Africans began to engage in the commodification of food in the form of recognisable brands, the consumption of which carried through the implied idea of modernity and social change for the better; South Africans also began to internalise other ideas linked to the American culture of consumption and the ideas of prosperity associated with the American dream. By using Steers and Spur as examples of the development of the South African quick service industry, historians are able

[42] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 6.
[43] Ambor, *A Taste for Life*, 93 – 94.
[44] Sijtsema et. al, "Variables Influencing Food Perception", 565.

to analyse South African attitudes and responses to American influence over local patterns of food consumption and the attitudes associated with consuming food as a social act. The success of these businesses with their overt American influences fundamentally changed the way South Africans think about how the consumption of food intersects with necessity and leisure.

Greek immigration into South Africa can be traced back to as early as 1850, however due to the ravages of the Greek Civil War between 1946-1949 South Africa experienced a boom in Greek immigration leading to a large Greek diaspora concentrated primarily in Johannesburg[45]. Many of these Greek immigrants became involved in various food related businesses throughout the city; initially because opening businesses which catered to the needs of the mine workers was more lucrative than working in the mines as labourers[46] but later on as a means of maintaining a connection with their heritage. Producing Greek food in restaurants became a key way for the Greek community to express their identities and by 1919, 139 food related business licenses had been issued to members of the Greek immigrant community[47]. These businesses ranged from formal restaurants to convenience stores, tea-rooms and green grocers.

One such Greek immigrant to solidify his place within the convenience food sector was Taki Xenopoulos who opened the first 24 hour convenience store in the Southern Hemisphere, Fontana Highpoint in Hillbrow in 1966[48]. The store became synonymous with its speciality rotisserie chicken which was available at all times, the chicken was especially popular due to Hillbrow's cosmopolitan club and bar scene in the 1970's and 1980's [49]

> *"Everyone loved a late night brown chicken from his (Taki Xenopoulos) shop called Fontana"*[50]

The family which started the Steers brand were also members of this Greek diaspora. Steers as a brand started as an American styled milk bar[51]. George Halamandres opened Milky Lane in 1954 after he spent a sabbatical in the United States[52]. After his father passed away at the age of 16, he worked

[45] Alyssa Vratsanos, *Diasporic Landscape: A Geosemiotic Analysis of Greekness in Johannesburg* (PhD diss., University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2023), 77.
[46] *ibid.*, 120.
[47] *ibid.*
[48] Jason Xenopoulos, "My Father and I: A Personal Journey into Business," *Ventureburn*, March 2014, https://ventureburn.com/2014/03/my-father-and-i-a-personal-journey-into-business/ (accessed February 10, 2025).
[49] *ibid.*
[50] Chris Marais, "The Journey Man Extracts – We Remember Hillbrow," *SAPeople*, February 10, 2025, https://www.sapeople.com/fab-south-african-stuff/the-journey-man-extracts-we-remember-hillbrow-south-africa/ (accessed February 10, 2025).
[51] When first introduced, milk bars functioned similarly to a convenience store but by the 1940's it acted as a social gathering spot for young people. These venues sold ready-made food and non-alcoholic drinks, creating a space for socialising. Typically, milk bars featured jukeboxes and pinball machines, included tables and chairs to encourage customers to linger and spend more. Over time, fast food franchises gradually replaced milk bars as the primary social venues, offering a similar but more standardised and widespread experience.
[52] Ambor, *A Taste for Life*, 96.

with his mother in the Good Hope Café in Main Street, ironically on the site where the Carlton Hotel containing a later Steers would be built[53], and so was equipped with enough experience to start his own food based business when he returned from the United States in the early 1950's. While overseas he observed the popularity of the Milk Bar culture, which didn't serve entire meals but focused on sweet treats like ice-creams and milkshakes. His nephew Peter Caradas recalls:

> *"He was in America just as the brothers McDonald overhauled their burger drive-in to make speed the core of the business, and introduced assembly-line procedures. George came back with all these ideas, press clippings and catering magazines – and he had this black book in which he jotted down ideas and inspirations."*[54]

Struck by the novelty of the idea and feeling like he had identified a gap in the South African market, he purchased a Multimixer and brought it back with him[55] later he would import soft-serve ice-cream machines and the specific grills he saw being used in America to make his restaurant's burger patties as well[56]. Multimixers were a tool employed by the majority of the early American fast food chains to mix and prepare milkshakes, Ray Kroc of McDonald's fame was originally a salesman of these drink-mixers whose performance was able to keep up with the growing market demand for reasonably priced milkshakes and food options outside of the home[57]. Interestingly by importing the Multimixer, Halamandres himself was engaging in the process of acquisition associated with Western consumerism, by purchasing the first drink mixer he began to form an identity around the product which in turn would, become an identifying feature of his businesses[58].

Halamandres did not remain as a partner in Milky Lane for long as he sold the company before he opened the first Steers in 1961[59]. Ambor, theorised that the reason for this was that Halamandres had taken on a partner to open Milky Lane initially because he sought the security and the financial assistance provided by the partner. However he later realised that he would not be able to grow his personal wealth to the extent that he wanted while in business with a partner who was entitled to a share of his profits[60]. Another source highlights a different reason for selling Milky Lane, in her book Cari Maas highlights the family's concern for the political state of South Africa after the Sharpeville Massacre and suggested that they considered immigrating to Spain in the aftermath so they decided to

[53] Cari Maas, *From Corner Café to JSE Giant: The Famous Brands Story* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2013), 6.
[54] Peter Caradas, personal interview by author, November 10, 2023.
[55] *ibid.*
[56] Maas, *Corner Café to JSE Giant,* 10.
[57] Sterling Multimixer, "Soda Fountain Multimixer History," accessed January 16, 2024, http://www.sterlingmulti.com/multimixer_history.html.
[58] Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, 1.
[59] Parker & Illetschko, *Franchising in South Africa,* 35.
[60] Allan Ambor, personal interview by author, October 31, 2023.

sell their stakes in the business in response[61]. The "Golden Spur" in Rosebank was "Uncle" George Halamandres' first exploration into steakhouses, another concept he experienced in the United States.

Eating at a steakhouse was a novelty experience growing steadily in popularity in Johannesburg in the early 1960's[62]. According to Peter Stearns the appeal of something foreign lies in its perceived difference to what consumers have come to expect from the markets they are familiar with, and because participating in the foreign gives people the opportunity to associate with a larger set of values and images[63]. These values often imply change, and by its association with change they imply modernity. In the case of Apartheid era South Africa, association with modernity via the consumption of a particular product gave white South Africans the ability to feel like they were somehow connected to a larger global experience[64]. The success of any business trying to capitalise on this foreign attraction hinges on whether the receiving group of potential customers are able to find a way to connect with the new products.

Every group of people have a particular style of food which speaks directly to their culture and that group's willingness to experiment outside of this comfort zone has shown to be quite resistant to change[65]. In this way food imports such as the fast food concepts need to adapt to the local environment in order to find a measure of success. Möhring, (2008) suggests the term "*glocalisation*" better suits the process involved in the spread of Western consumer goods and the implied identities that the consumption of these goods develops in their new countries. To define "*glocalisation*" she says that as a term it, "tries to grasp the mutual constitution of the local and the global, enabling local adaptations of globally traded goods and their social and cultural reading."[66] In Johannesburg in the 1960's this *glocalisation* process was shown by the increased interest in patronising establishments such as steakhouses which were American imports, but within these restaurants we see that the menu items reflected as much a local palate as they did an international one, evidenced by the inclusion of a traditional South African *malva pudding* and custard on the desert menu at the "Golden Spur" alongside brownies and ice-cream as an international option[67]. To do this successfully businesses need to strike a balance between the modern and the familiar, so the transformations caused by the consumerism model introduced by the United States in the post-war era altered consumer culture by making products symbolise the ideals of freedom and modernity as well as their tangible features[68]. Food products resist this change to a certain extent and the Halamandres' and Ambor founded businesses which straddled that line.

[61] Maas, *Corner Café to JSE Giant*, 12.
[62] Ambor, *A Taste for Life*, 96.
[63] Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, 74.
[64] Chevalier, "Politics of Consumption", 10.
[65] *ibid.*, 3.
[66] Möhring, "Transnational Food Migration", 129.
[67] Allan Ambor, personal interview by author, October 31, 2023.
[68] Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, 23.

The global popularity of American movies further paved the way for audiences to internalise the principles they conveyed. Between the 1940s and the 1960s, Western-themed movies had a significant impact on the South African psyche. According to the American Film Institute, Western movies are defined as films which are set in the American West during the gold rush era, that also embody the spirit, struggle, and demise of the new frontier[69]. The popularity of the genre reached its peak from 1945 to 1965, where it is estimated that almost a quarter of major movie studio outputs fell into the Western genre[70].

Iconic images such as the cowboy, the wild open desert like space and various examples of iconography to do with Native American tribes are all associated with the Wild West and featured heavily in movies and other media which Ambor and other restaurateurs at the time actively consumed during their youths. Using images associated with these Western styled films was a common aesthetic choice for many steakhouse restaurants:

> *"The Porterhouse in Hillbrow, The Black Steer in Yeoville and later the Six Gun in Linksfield, went out of their way to evoke the character and the spirit of the Old West, even if the only authentic connection was the mystique they drew from those old Hollywood movies."*[71]

Using the Native American chief as a figurehead was a calculated choice for Ambor who wanted to emphasise that the food served in his restaurants was connected to the United States[72], he also claims to have chosen the image because he felt that by using imagery associated with a marginalised group from the United States he would subtly be portraying a message of welcome to South Africa's own marginalised groups who were suffering under Apartheid[73]. In his own words:

> *"Round about the early 80's I could sense politically that the country was changing so I wanted to signal to people of colour that they would be made to feel welcome in our restaurants."*[74].

However, with close reading of the available sources it seems that the use of the Native American chief and associated Native American imagery has in recent years become more controversial than what Ambor expected with his supposed intentions. Rather they appear to align with modern distaste for cultural appropriation and seem to encourage the stereotyping of marginalised groups. While a recent study conducted in 2015 indicated that local brands acknowledging media influence in their design are more likely to be popular among consumers[75]; the use of the American Indian chief

[69] American Film Institute, "AFI's 10 Top 10: The 10 Greatest Movies in 10 Categories," accessed July 22, 2024, https://www.afi.com/afis-10-top-10/.
[70] Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. "Western history, genre & iconic characters," accessed June 2, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/art/western.
[71] Ambor, *A Taste for Life*, 102.
[72] Allan Ambor, personal interview by author, October 31, 2023.
[73] Ambor, *A Taste for Life*, 200.
[74] Allan Ambor, personal interview by author, October 31, 2023.
[75] Ferguson and Adams, "Remote Acculturation", 105.

specifically and associated imagery has raised concerns to do with cultural misappropriation and the use of stereotypical imagery. On the one hand, given the geographical distance between the United States and South Africa, and the lack of pre-existing colonial or immigration ties, American influences are perceived more positively by consumers when compared to those with influences which could be easily identified as British or Dutch[76]. But on the other, the branding has been labelled as an "antiquated and offensive" caricature of Native American culture which an American journalist felt was at odds with South Africa's struggle for racial equality post-Apartheid[77]. Criticism has also been placed locally on the chain, as in 2023 they announced a complete rebrand that would still leave the figurehead of the Native American chief in place.

> *"It is perplexing that the company didn't grab the opportunity to spend millions of rands reinventing itself for a more enlightened time. We were perhaps able to forgive this flagrant act of cultural shoplifting on the grounds of historical context. Having decided to throw the big bucks at a rebrand, however, what excuse now remains for polishing, rather than flushing, the turd (the logo featuring the Native American Chief)?"*[78]

The author of the above article argues that while one could forgive the existence of the logo when its appearance is taken into the historical context out of which it emerged, but our world has become completely interconnected since then. Simply because the particular group of people being stereotyped and appropriated are not South African, nor do they live anywhere near South Africa; their historical suffering is still valid and should be taken into consideration and treated with the same sensitivity we would expect from an American brand trying to use South African cultural imagery.

As of 2020 Ambor no longer has any active dealings within the Spur corporation and so no longer holds any power within the corporate structure, but he maintains that the symbol of the chief is one which should remain. In his opinion its distinctiveness contributed directly to the success of the business and to remove it would negatively impact the brand's ability to make itself stand apart from other similar restaurant concepts in the current market[79].

George Halamandres from the beginning of his businesses was also inspired by American restaurants and responded to the local desire for more dining options by opening his own various restaurant concepts. The steakhouses he owned and operated in the 1960s and 1970s were immensely popular but in response to the competition in that field from Ambor they began to focus more on the hamburger and quick service nature offered by their Burger Ranch restaurants. In 1984 Halamandres'

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[76] *ibid.*, 106.
[77] Erin Conway-Smith, "South Africa's Strange 'Native American' Fetish," *USA Today*, January 4, 2016, accessed June 5, 2024, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/01/04/south-africa-restaurant-chain/78251822/.
[78] Jarred Cinman, "Spur Rebranding Offensive Native American Imagery," *The Citizen*, accessed June 5, 2024, https://www.citizen.co.za/news/opinion/spur-rebranding-offensive-native-american-imagery/.
[79] Ambor, *A Taste for Life*, 200.

son Georgie took over the reins of the business and began restructuring the format of their menus[80]. He approached the task similarly to the McDonald's brothers who stripped their menu down to a few simple items and focused on producing those efficiently in order to please as many customers as possible, something which "Uncle" George had always envisioned as part of his business model. In a 1971 interview he remarked:

> *"Fast food is the thing of the future. Eat it and beat it is the modern theme. The food must be in front of the customer within five minutes."*[81]

This idea is further supported in an article from 1975 which emphasised that "quickness of service is what the customer is looking for and of course, quality of food"[82]. The refocus of Steers helped to differentiate their business from Spur which was continuing to grow as its own entity. In changing the nature of the business, Georgie Halamandres was able to exit the competition pool where he was competing directly with Ambor and the Spur Corporation. Today we see a stark contrast between the two businesses with the restaurant concepts franchised by the Spur Corporation being focused on casual, family friendly dining enterprises which offer a sit down meal, while Steers and the Famous Brands conglomerate having embraced the idea of fast, quick meals served at a drive-through in disposable containers for convenience.

Both Halamandres and Ambor were heavily influenced by America and its consumer media and through the process of *glocalisation* they were able to establish American styled eating concepts successfully in South Africa. In doing so they aided the spread of Western style consumerism in South Africa and established the foundation of an economic sector which today collectively reports an estimated turnover of R999 billion[83].

The participation of Black South Africans as consumers of the commodified experience of eating out

The dynamics of race, gender and class are thoroughly intertwined with the idea of consumerism, as the ability to choose and exert freedom and agency through the products one purchases are inexplicably linked to the ability to afford specific products[84]. Links also exist between an individual's constructed identity and their ability to consume specific products[85]. The wish to sell and the wish to own and buy helps to soften or legitimise other types of social and economic changes, but this wish is

[80] Parker and Illetschko, *Franchising in South Africa*, 30.
[81] Hugh Carruthers, "Fast Food is the Big Thing," *Rand Daily Mail*, August 1, 1968, 5.
[82] "Those Business Lunches Are Not Always So Fattening," *Rand Daily Mail*, May 21, 1975, 12.
[83] "A Comprehensive Overview of the South African Franchise Industry: Stability, Growth, and Future Prospects," *Franchising Plus*, accessed October 14, 2024, https://www.franchisingplus.co.za/a-comprehensive-overview-of-the-south-african-franchise-industry-stability-growth-and-future-prospects/.
[84] Posel, "Races to Consume", 162.
[85] Stearns, *Consumerism in World History*, 110.

not shared equally[86] and in the case of South Africa, it takes on a racial aspect whereby certain forms of consumption were limited and withheld from the black population. Being labelled white was a guarantee of access while being labelled as black in Apartheid South Africa was equivalent to exclusion from various social, political, and economic opportunities[87]. Within the context of Apartheid South Africa, the efforts to regulate the consumer behaviour of black South Africans aimed to restrict their personal agency and control their aspirations, interests, and influence as consumers. This attempt to manage their consumerism was a way to curb their autonomy and economic power[88]. More research is necessary to gain a true picture of the extent of the participation of black South Africans in the fast food and quick service industry and while this is outside of the scope of this project, I would like to establish that black South Africans participated in the success of the franchise businesses from the outset of their formation; both as consumers and as workers within the companies themselves.

Consumption is often contrasted with work as a binary opposition[89], where the fact of being employed in a particular sector is seen as an opposite action to the ability to purchase products, but the two actually work together to create a cyclical system of interdependent economic functions. Even if an employee is not purchasing the particular products of the company in which they are employed, they are still contributing to the consumption process by facilitating the purchase of those products by other consumers. By virtue of their employment they are earning money which they will in turn use to purchase other specific products which appeal to their independent individual needs and value systems. So regardless of whether they were employed within or engaged with businesses in the fast food sector as patrons they have contributed to the growth of that sector in South Africa. The fast food franchising sector is today is responsible for employing close to 10% of the country's total work force[90] indicating its continued importance in facilitating this circular process.

Shadrack Yeza was employed by Ambor, after he was recommended by the Bantu Affairs Department. During his employment, Ambor became almost completely reliant on Yeza's skills as a griller and meat cutter[91]. Yeza was also responsible for recruiting other black employees to work for Ambor in the original and subsequent restaurants opened between 1967 and 1986[92]. According to Ambor, he was willing to go against the typical expectation of Apartheid laws and practises which favoured the employment of white workers instead by being willing to promote black employees alongside white employees. Two specific examples exist to support his recollection, firstly Maureen,

[86] *ibid.,* 73.
[87] Posel, "Races to Consume", 168.
[88] *ibid.,* 160.
[89] Kenney, "Servicing a Racial Regime", 148.
[90] Oswald Mhlanga, "The Fast Food Industry in South Africa: The Microenvironment and Its Influence," *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* 7, no. 4 (2018): 2.
[91] Allan Ambor, personal interview by author, October 31, 2023.
[92] *ibid.*

who was initially brought on by Shadrack, and secondly Thembi, who was initially employed as a private domestic worker in Ambor's home. These two women were the first people, besides Ambor himself, to produce the sauces used in house as well as the fruit juices sold in the business. By 1973 these women were removed from the retail setting entirely and tasked with the management and operation of a central industrial kitchen responsible for producing the same products[93]. Ambor claims that when the structure of Spur became more formalised they both transitioned to the management of the division on a corporate level until their individual retirements from the business[94]. Whether or not their remuneration at the time was reflective of their enhanced status or equal to what a white woman in their respective positions would have earned within the business is unclear but unlikely.

The Halamandres' seemed to share similar ideals to Ambor with regard to the treatment of black staff members. Police officers would often lie in wait for a rush hour at the restaurants in order to conduct raids in search of staff members who were not carrying their passes. "Uncle" George Halamandres and his son were known to either pay the bails of the staff members who were arrested or would even get into physical altercations with the police in defence of their staff when necessary[95]. In the book from *Corner Café to JSE Giant* a worker, Lukas Sandawana recalled:

> *"MaBogwene I used to call him (Uncle George), or lion, as he didn't want to hear anything bad about his workers. He wanted to fight for people,"*[96]

The value of these labourers in the service industry is an area which deserves more in depth research as the nature of service labour within retail spaces such as restaurants creates a situation that allows for the constant reproduction and shifting in the dynamics of race relations[97]. Restaurants are a public space where a diverse population intersect and interact with one another and therefore they reflect more than simply the process of consumption, they are "positioned at the crossroad of labour, consumption, aspiration and inclusion"[98] and they provide a unique window into the interactions between the various groups who occupy the physical and symbolic space.

The restriction of the consumption of specific goods to specific racial groups during Apartheid saw products and commodities imbued with physical, monetary value but also social and psychological value as well[99] and in South Africa as well as other parts of the world people who were excluded or deprived of access to these consumer goods also desired the prosperity indicated by the possession of these goods[100]. It benefits the parent company to expand its market to include as many potential customers as possible to take advantage of this desire and the Steers franchise contained in the Carlton

[93] *ibid.*
[94] *ibid.*
[95] Maas, *Corner Café to JSE Giant,* 20.
[96] *ibid.*
[97] Kenney, "Servicing a Racial Regime", 102.
[98] *ibid.*, 101.
[99] Posel, "Races to Consume", 161.
[100] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire,* 76.

Hotel specifically became embroiled in the drive towards allowing black customers to be seated and served in their restaurants[101]. Their first attempt at applying for "international status" which would allow patronage from black South Africans was made and denied in 1978[102]. Their attempts to become registered as a multiracial restaurant would continue in the coming years as debates involving why so few restaurants who applied for the international status actually received the permission to do so from the government continued to be on-going in parliament as well as in public newspapers. As of 1979 only eight of twenty-two applications by various eateries seeking international status were approved[103], this despite evidence which indicated that the greater Johannesburg area saw its population split at the time 70% being black South Africans[104]. While the Steers at the Carlton was never able to get their application approved, the Wimpy in the same centre was able to achieve international status[105].

Deborah Posel conducted a study into the images shown in Drum magazine between the 1960s and 1970s and her research indicated that Black South Africans idealised American media figures with rates comparable in frequency to white South Africans[106]. Despite the Apartheid government's attempts to limit the consumption of Black South Africans, consumption is a capitalist process and by its very nature capitalist expansion requires a constant stream of new customers to continually spend increasing amounts of money on the products on offer. In an interconnected world, shifting norms of living overflow from one group to another as the desire for social equity merges with contemporary aspirations for consumer contentment[107]. Historically marginalised communities are drawn to the affluence and possessions prevalent in more affluent communities and in this way participation in the consumptive process feeds the idea of *glocalisation* as new ideas and values become intertwined with traditional modes of being.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the rise of McDonald's and its influence on the development of fast food culture, both in the United States and South Africa. By examining McDonald's transformation from a small San Bernardino restaurant into a global cultural icon, we have seen how its principles of efficiency, mass production, and customer service set the template for the fast food industry worldwide. The franchising system that McDonald's pioneered proved crucial in spreading this

[101] Roy Devenish, "Mixed Food Flop," *Rand Daily Mail*, July 14, 1978, 1.
[102] "Top Clubs Bid for Open-To-All Drinking," *Rand Daily Mail*, June 7, 1978, 1.
[103] "'Why So Few International Restaurants?' Asks Dalling," *Rand Daily Mail*, March 8, 1979, 6.
[104] "White City That Is Going Black," *Rand Daily Mail*, June 16, 1978, 11.
[105] James Ball, "South Africa's First Multiracial Restaurant during Apartheid," *The Heritage Portal*, accessed January 3, 2024, https://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/south-africas-first-multiracial-restaurant-during-apartheid.
[106] Posel, "Races to Consume", 171.
[107] De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 76.

model, and its influence is evident in the subsequent success of local South African chains like Steers and Spur.

The South African context presents a unique case, where the rise of fast food was intricately tied to the adoption of Western consumer ideals. During Apartheid, dining out, once seen as an elite luxury, became an increasingly accessible form of consumption and a symbol of modernity and affluence. Brands like Steers and Spur capitalised on this shift, incorporating both the American fast food model and local sensibilities to create a new dining culture that resonated with South African consumers across racial and class lines. While Steers and Spur borrowed heavily from their American counterparts, they also adapted to local tastes, class dynamics, and cultural identities, becoming integral to the South African food landscape.

The internalisation of American ideals, as seen through the commodification of food, was not simply about replicating a business model. It reflected broader shifts in consumer behavior during a time of social and political upheaval. Local fast food chains like Steers, and Spur did more than offer meals—they shaped consumer identity, becoming symbols of a new, modern lifestyle. These brands helped normalise Western-style dining in South Africa, making it accessible and desirable to an increasingly diverse population. As these chains expanded post-Apartheid, they adapted their marketing strategies and menu offerings to reflect a changing socio-political landscape, embracing a more inclusive approach to consumerism.

While the success of these fast food brands signals the adaptation of global consumer trends to local contexts, it also highlights the complexities of labour and consumption within South Africa's socio-political framework. The role of black South Africans as both consumers and labourers in the founding and growth of Steers and Spur is an important but often overlooked aspect of this narrative. While this chapter has briefly touched on the intersection of labour and consumption, further research is needed to fully explore how these two forces shaped the development of the fast food sector in South Africa.

The story of McDonald's, Steers and Spur is a story of adaptation, cultural exchange, and transformation. These chains exemplify the ways in which global consumer culture, particularly American fast food, was not only embraced but also reinterpreted and reshaped within the South African context. Their rise reflects broader societal shifts, where the commodification of food became a defining feature of modern consumer behaviour. Through the lens of these fast food chains, we can better understand the intersection of globalisation, local identity, and socio-political change in South Africa, offering valuable insights into the on-going evolution of the nation's consumer culture.

Time to Get the Bill: Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research

This research has shown that fast food culture in South Africa is not merely a result of changing tastes or technological progress, but a multifaceted arena where power, identity, and socio-economic transformation intersect. Across three chapters, the study has traced how dining practices—from Johannesburg's racially segregated early eateries to today's fast-food landscape—both reflected and shaped the evolving contours of South African society. Food emerges not only as a marker of global consumer trends, but also as a medium through which individuals and communities negotiate status, assert belonging, and navigate inequality. Fast-food culture is positioned as both a consequence and a catalyst of broader social, political, and economic change. Examining the trajectory of dining practices—from local segregation-era establishments to the widespread presence of domestic and international fast food chains—has offered a critical lens through which to understand the entanglement of globalisation, local identity, and socio-economic transformation in South Africa. The legacy of these shifts continues to shape present-day food cultures, and underscore how fast food consumption remains a powerful signifier of social status, identity, and power in both global and local contexts.

Firstly this report argues that food functions simultaneously as a mirror of existing conditions and a mechanism for change. In Johannesburg's early dining scene, culinary practices laid bare the deep racial and class divisions structuring and underpinning urban life. The city's foodscape—marked by stark contrasts between elite establishments and informal "native eating houses"—reflected global patterns while also exposing the unique exclusions produced by South Africa's racial and class hierarchies. In this context, food became both an indicator of and a force within the socio-political fabric of the city, highlighting the inseparability of dining from broader questions of identity and power.

The second chapter explored the rise of the hamburger and the commodification of fast food, revealing how concepts of modernity and mobility became inseparable from shifting gender roles and the aspirations of working-class white South Africans. For this group, fast food became a vehicle through which to participate in a consumer culture that symbolised progress and upward social mobility. The growth of quick-service dining and the embrace of global trends provided new avenues for the emerging white middle class to position themselves within a modernising society.

Finally, the South African reinterpretation of Western fast food models—exemplified by home-grown chains such as Steers and Spur—demonstrates that global consumer ideals were not simply unquestioningly accepted, but underwent a process of adaptation to align with the South Africa's unique socio-political conditions. These brands not only offered accessible and affordable meals, but also came to symbolise modernity and helped to reshape eating habits across racial, class, and gender divisions.

Viewed together, these chapters argue that fast food consumption carries the capacity to influence ideology and identity, functioning well beyond its biological or nutritional utility. Fast food operates as a powerful symbol of both inclusion and exclusion—offering accessible modernity to some while often reinforcing structural inequality to others. Its spread across South Africa reflects the nation's deep integration with global capitalism, while also highlighting the ways in which local actors have reshaped global food practices to reflect their own cultural and social realities.

Though this report focuses on the historical and cultural trajectory of fast food in South Africa, future research might explore how these dynamics are evolving. Topics such as the rise of local food movements, food sovereignty initiatives, the revival of indigenous culinary traditions, or the gendered and racialised patterns of consumption could further illuminate the on-going tensions between global consumer culture and local resistance or adaptation. Comparative studies with other post-colonial societies could also enrich understanding of how food continues to mediate relationships between identity, economics, and power in the South African context.

By treating food as a central site of cultural production rather than a marginal detail of everyday life, this research underscores the importance of consumption practices as a revealing and generative lens for examining broader processes of transformation.

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