

— conversations on —
FOOD JUSTICE

A series hosted by
Share Our Strength and Food & Society at the Aspen Institute

SUMMARY TO ACTION REPORT
SESSION #12

SESSION DESCRIPTION

On June 28th, 2022 Share Our Strength, in collaboration with Food & Society at the Aspen Institute, hosted the latest edition of the **Conversations on Food Justice Series** “Food and The Powerful Impact of Media” featuring speakers, Omni Cassidy, Marcia Chatelain, moderated by Christina Economos. The panel discussed how media, marketing, and the world around us shape how we eat, and also explored the potential of media as a force for good in helping families access good food with dignity.

FEATURED PANELISTS

Omni Cassidy, PhD

Assistant Professor, New York University Grossman School of Medicine/ Langone Health



Omni Cassidy is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Population Health at NYU Grossman School of Medicine/Langone Health. She received her Ph.D. in 2019 in Medical and Clinical Psychology from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences and completed her postdoctoral fellowship at NYU Grossman School of Medicine in the T32 Population Health Science Scholars Program. Dr. Cassidy’s research is at the intersection of food, eating, culture, and technology. She received an F31 award sponsored by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities to examine the effect of racially-targeted television food ads and food-related attentional biases on eating behaviors in Black adolescent girls. Her current work focuses on leveraging innovative technologies to assess the food environment and equip communities of color with navigating their food environments. Dr. Cassidy is ultimately committed to promoting higher quality food environments for the planet and people, particularly people of color. Follow NYU Grossman School of Medicine on Twitter @nyugrossman

Marcia Chatelain, PhD

Author & Professor, Georgetown University



Marcia Chatelain is a Professor of History and African American Studies at Georgetown University. The author of *South Side Girls: Growing up in the Great Migration* (Duke University Press, 2015) she teaches about women’s and girls’ history, as well as black capitalism. Her latest book, *Franchise: The Golden Arches in Black America* (Liveright Publishing Co./W.W. Norton, 2020) examines the intricate relationship among African American politicians, civil rights organizations, communities, and the fast-food industry. In 2021, Chatelain received the Pulitzer Prize in History, the Hagley Prize in Business History, and the Organization of American Historians (OAH) Lawrence W. Levine Award for Franchise. An active public speaker and educational consultant, Chatelain has received awards and honors from the Ford Foundation, the American Association of University Women, and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. At Georgetown, she has won several teaching awards. In 2016, the Chronicle of Higher Education named her a Top Influencer in academia in recognition of her social media campaign #FergusonSyllabus, which implored educators to facilitate discussions about the crisis in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. She has held an Eric and Wendy Schmidt Fellowship at New America, a National Endowment for the Humanities Faculty Fellowship, and an Andrew Carnegie Fellowship. Follow Marcia on Twitter @DrMChatelain

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Christina Economos, PhD

Professor, Dean for Research Strategy, Director of ChildObesity180, New Balance Chair in Childhood Nutrition, and Chair of the Division of Nutrition Interventions, Communication, and Behavior Change at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy and the Medical School at Tufts University.



Dr. Christina Economos' research efforts have addressed the interaction among nutrition, exercise, body composition, bone health, and the built environment, toward preventing osteoporosis and obesity, starting in early childhood. As the principal investigator of large-scale research studies, her goal is to inspire behavior, policy, and environmental change to reduce obesity and improve the health of America's children. She has worked effectively with diverse communities and has crafted, implemented, and evaluated a physical activity and nutrition education curriculum. With ChildObesity180 she develops, implements, evaluates and scales high-impact obesity prevention initiatives. Dr. Economos led the Shape Up Somerville study demonstrating that it is possible to reduce excess weight gain in children through multiple leverage points within an entire community.

Dr. Economos is the principal investigator for Catalyzing Communities. Other research interventions Dr. Economos has led include: the BONES (Beat Osteoporosis: Nourish and Exercise Skeletons) Project funded by NICHD; Shape Up Somerville, EAT SMART, PLAY HARD funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); The CHANGE Project with Save the Children; The Balance Project funded by the PepsiCo Foundation; and Assessing and Preventing Obesity in New Immigrants, funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). She has authored over 200 scientific publications and raised over \$55 million in research support.

Dr. Christina Economos is involved in national obesity and public health activities and has served on four National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine committees where she is currently Vice-Chair of the Roundtable on Obesity Solutions. She also co-leads the Tufts Institute for Global Obesity Research, which facilitates and supports research partnerships across the world. In addition, she has been featured in numerous media outlets including CNN, NBC Nightly News, The Wall Street Journal, and Newsweek. Dr. Economos received a Bachelor of Science from Boston University, a Master of Science in Applied Physiology and Nutrition from Columbia University, and a Doctorate in Nutritional Biochemistry from Tufts University. Follow Christina on Twitter @ChrisEconomos

SUMMARY AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

"We were raised on a commonsense understanding of health, and now we are at a place where we are starting to understand that it's not just about food and what people consume, but the conditions and the contexts in which these choices are made"
— Marcia Chatelain

We all consume messages from mass media about food every day. The messages we receive influence our behavior and have a real impact on communities: from targeted appeals to consumers experiencing inequities and consumers of color that push cheap and unhealthy foods while simultaneously shaming consumers for making "poor choices," to the reinforcing of racial and gender stereotypes through food and the stigmatization of obesity.

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Fast food companies and other food product companies spend billions every year on mass media advertising. In 2019 alone, fast food restaurants spent \$5 billion in total advertising¹, a dramatic increase from the \$400 million spent in 2012. Children are most affected by this as they are exposed to advertising and marketing through, TV, the internet, social media, cell phones, games, schools and other mediums. As panelist Omni Cassidy expressed, “The evidence is showing us, particularly in children, [...] that exposure to these disproportionately unhealthy food and beverage ads increases the risk of unhealthy eating, poor diet, [...] [and long-term] health effects over time.” While other systems also influence the consumption of these foods, advertising is a contributor.

A study by the University of Connecticut found that “fast food is the most frequently advertised food and beverage category to children and teens, representing 40% of all youth-directed food marketing expenditures and more than one-quarter of food and drink TV ads viewed”¹. These food companies disproportionately target unhealthy foods to Latino and Black youth. From 2012 to 2019 ad spending increased for Spanish-language TV, as fast-food restaurants spend \$318 million on ads, an increase of 33%¹. The study also found that “Black preschoolers, children, and teens viewed 75% more fast food TV ads than their White peers, an increase compared to 60% more ads viewed in 2012.”¹. These statistics are just advertisements from fast food companies and do not factor in the other millions of dollars spent by companies advertising sugar-sweetened beverages, and other high sugar, salt, and fat foods.

Another study by the University of Connecticut found that “8 out of 10 of the food and beverage ads seen by Hispanic children on Spanish-language television promote fast food, candy, sugary drinks, and snacks”². Food and beverage companies have even gone so far as to increase soda advertisements on days SNAP dollars are distributed. One study found that shoppers are two to four times more likely to see soda displays on days SNAP dollars are sent out, which for some states is the first 9 days of the month³. Beverage companies are also using tactics to attract consumers on social media. If you look at the Instagram account of Sprite, most of the posts are of Black rappers and athletes, thus attracting interest and dollars from Black customers⁴. In the conversation, Panelist Omni Cassidy shared her experience of being influenced by this targeted marketing, “I was unaware that there were certain tactics that food and beverage companies would use to market their products to encourage young black girls like me to purchase their products. [...] The feeling that I got [when Beyoncé accepted a Pepsi sponsorship], that I was being manipulated intentionally by these marketers, was the first time that I then started to really utilize and apply a lot of energy and knowledge and commitment towards the area of food and beverage marketing”.

¹ Harris, J. L., Fleming-Milici, F., Phaneuf, L., Jensen, M., Young Choi, Y., McCann, M., & Mancini, S. (2021). (rep.). Retrieved from <https://media.ruddcenter.uconn.edu/PDFs/FACTS2021.pdf>.

² Harris, J. L., Frazier III, W., Kumanyika, S., & Ramirez, A. G. (2019). (rep.). *Increasing disparities in unhealthy food advertising targeted to Hispanic and Black youth*. Retrieved from <https://media.ruddcenter.uconn.edu/PDFs/TargetedMarketingReport2019.pdf>.

³ Dewey, C. (2021, November 24). *Soda ad blitzes conspicuously match food stamp schedules, study says*. The Washington Post. Retrieved July 6, 2022, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/07/soda-ad-blitzes-conspicuously-match-food-stamp-schedules-study-says/>

⁴ Bryan, S. L. (2019, November 5). *“want a big mac?”: How food marketing fuels systemic racism*. AFRI 0090 S01 An Introduction to Africana Studies. Retrieved July 7, 2022, from <https://blogs.brown.edu/afri-0090-s01-2019-fall/2019/11/05/want-a-big-mac-how-food-marketing-fuels-systemic-racism/>

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This constant exposure of ads to the Latino and the Black communities is contributing to detrimental health outcomes in an already disproportionately affected community. Although it is important to recognize that marketing and advertisements are just one contributor to these negative health outcomes. Panelist Marcia Chatelain explained, “Because of racism, African Americans have always struggled to get a consistent and quality source of food. Whether it was because people were living under the share cropping system where they would eat whatever leftover they could get from harvest, whether it was the fact that urban Americans [...] were struggling against the quality of food in grocery stores, there has always been a real racial gap in terms of access to quality, well-rounded diets. Well I think that fast food has played an important role, it is not just the fast-food industry that is on the hook for these problems”. There are a multitude of policies, systems, and environmental efforts that make access to healthy food difficult for communities of color. Panelist Marcia Chatelain expands, “What I do know is that food advocacy really has to think about the quality-of-life issues, and if people cannot get quality healthcare if we don’t have an 8-hour-workday that pays a living wage if we don’t have childcare if we don’t have any of these things - then every refrigerator filled with fresh food will make no difference.” We need to recognize the context of people’s food choices.

RESOURCES

Book: [Franchise: The Golden Arches in Black America](#)



Just as [The Color Law](#) provided a vital understanding of redlining and racial segregation, Marcia Chatelain’s [Franchise](#) investigates the complex interrelationship between black communities and America’s largest, most popular food chain. Taking us from the first McDonald’s drive-in in San Bernardino to the franchise on Florissant Avenue in Ferguson, Missouri, in the summer of 2014, Chatelain shows how fast food is a source of both power- economic and political- and despair for African Americans, as she contends, fast food is, more than ever before, a key battlefield in the fight for racial justice.

Report: [Food Advertising and Marketing to Children](#)



Research shows that marketing and advertising of high-calorie, low-nutrient foods and beverages increases children’s preference and intake of unhealthy foods and beverages. Unhealthy food marketing aimed at children and teens is a significant contributor to poor diet quality and diet-related diseases worldwide. Poor diet quality is a major cause of ill health, contributing to chronic diseases like coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and obesity. Youth who have cardiovascular disease risk factors, such as high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes, are more likely to have these risk factors as adults, putting them at greater risk for heart disease and stroke. The American Heart Association sees no ethical, political, scientific, or social justification for marketing and advertising low-nutrient, high-calorie foods to children and supports efforts to diminish this practice.

Article: [Junk food ads on TV tend to target African American and Latino youth](#)



Food companies disproportionately target TV advertisements for unhealthy foods like candy and sugary drinks to African Americans and Latinos, according to a recent study.

Report: [Fast food advertising: Billions in spending, continued high exposure by youth](#)



Fast-food consumption among youth remains a significant public health concern. The findings in this report demonstrate that fast-food advertising spending increased from 2012 to 2019; youth exposure to TV ads declined, but at a lower rate than reductions in TV viewing times; many restaurants continued to disproportionately target advertising to

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Hispanic and Black youth, and restaurants did not actively promote healthier menu items. Restaurants must do more to reduce harmful fast-food advertising to youth.

Report: [Increasing disparities in unhealthy food advertising targeted to Hispanic and Black youth](#)



Unhealthy food marketing aimed at youth under age 18 is a significant contributor to poor diets and diet-related diseases. Therefore, greater exposure to this marketing by Hispanic and Black children and teens, both in the media and in their communities, likely contributes to diet-related health disparities affecting communities of color, including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Article: [Soda as blitzes conspicuously match food stamp schedules, study says](#)



Food companies have embraced a controversial tactic in their quest to sell more soda, a new study says: timing advertisements for sugary drinks to the day's states distribute food stamp benefits.

POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

[Operation Good Food and Beverages](#)



Operation Good Food & Beverages is by and for Black youth who recognize this history and want to spark a good food revolution. We're putting our voices and culture at the forefront of the movement for better food and beverage options in our communities

CALL TO ACTION LIST

"People are starting to recognize that food is also a radical act. Choosing what we eat - in the midst of the environment we are in - is a radical act. It is part of sovereignty." -Omni Cassidy

People often ask, what is the next step? If there is a right way to take the step, or if there is a formula. There is not, but we can all do something. Individual actions suggested by the panelists include the following:

- Increase access to healthy foods. Encourage farmer's markets in communities and limit the restrictions of the types of foods you can purchase on WIC and SNAP.
- Work to advocate for and improve the policies, systems, and environments of communities. There is more to food advocacy than targeting these food companies, we have to think about quality of life issues. If we don't give people access to healthcare, childcare, and paying a livable wage, access to fresh food won't make a meaningful impact.
- Put pressure on media, food companies, and local officials. Hold them accountable for limiting advertisements of nutritionally poor foods to children and communities experiencing poverty.

We hope you will continue the conversations in your organizations and your community! Please do not hesitate to let us know how you are keeping the conversations going or if you have thoughts or topics you would like to hear in the future. Reach out to us at foodjustice@strength.org Learn more about the initiative at <https://www.shareourstrength.org/foodjustice/>

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Share Our Strength is ending hunger and poverty – in the United States and abroad. Through proven, effective campaigns like No Kid Hungry and Cooking Matters, we connect people who care to ideas that work.

<https://www.shareourstrength.org>



Food & Society at the Aspen Institute brings together public health leaders, policymakers, researchers, farmers, chefs, food makers, and entrepreneurs to find practical solutions to food system challenges and inequities. The common goal is to help people of all income levels eat better and more healthful diets—and to enjoy them bite by bite.

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/food-and-society-program/>