

income professional class operating in both the national and international arenas fuels a demand for state-of-the-art office buildings, luxury residences, and luxury “consumption spaces.” Households and profit-making firms of more modest income, no matter how healthy they might be for the economy, are displaced. And this trend sets up a fundamental 21st-century urban rivalry: the gentrifiers vs. the displaced.

It’s been more than 30 years since President Gerald Ford turned down New York’s pleas for aid and earned the slightly unfair, if memorable, headline, “Ford to City: Drop Dead.” No one talks anymore about poor, sad, ailing New York—or London, Tokyo, Chicago, Hong Kong, Singapore, even Frankfurt. Everyone’s too busy servicing the international knowledge economy.

SOCIETY

Immigrating to Obesity

THE SOURCE: “Immigration and the American Obesity Epidemic” by Lingxin Hao and Julie J. H. Kim, in *International Migration Review*, Summer 2009.

IMMIGRATION AND THE INCIDENCE of obesity in the United States both started increasing around 1965, but don’t blame newcomers for the nation’s bulging bellies. Without mass immigration, America’s obesity crisis would be even worse.

The average immigrant is slimmer than the average native-born American and stays that way for some 10 years after coming to the

Immigrants to America help the national obesity numbers, at least for awhile.

United States, report Lingxin Hao, a sociologist at Johns Hopkins University, and Julie J. H. Kim, a Hopkins Ph.D. candidate. Part of the explanation is self-selection. Migrating from one country to another (even under good conditions) tests even the fittest, and those who take the risk tend to be in good health. And if immigrants get sick, they exhibit what sociologists call the “salmon-bias effect”—they head for home. Moreover, the exercise and nutrition patterns of immigrants stay in place for a few years after they emigrate, giving them an “immigrant advantage” before they embrace America’s fast-food lifestyle.

The typical native-born American male, 5’8” tall, weighs 187 pounds. This makes him officially seriously overweight, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A man of that height should weigh 170 pounds, at most. His immigrant counterpart weighs, on average, 175 pounds. An immigrant woman of average stature (5’4”) is also about 12 pounds lighter than a corresponding native-born woman. Roughly 30 percent of Americans are obese, which is defined as weighing more than 205 pounds for men of typical height, and 180 for similar women. One’s body mass index, the formal measurement of healthy weight, tends to increase until age 60, then level off.

America would be better off if newcomers were inoculated against the national penchant for gobbling fries and shakes in front of the television. A shrewd public-health policy, Hao and Kim conclude, would aim to delay the erosion of the immigrant advantage.

SOCIETY

Damned Either Way

THE SOURCE: “Want to Lose Friends? Make Tough Choices” by Tom Jacobs, in *Miller-McCune News Blog*, July 23, 2009.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT KNEW from personal experience what it was like to be damned if you do and damned if you don’t. “Do what you feel in your heart to be right,” she said, for “you’ll be criticized anyway.” New research suggests she had it right. Elected officials cannot win when they have to choose between bad alternatives.

Given a choice between awarding child custody to either of two equally rotten parents, a judge takes heat no matter what the decision, according to a study conducted by Justin Kruger and Laura M. Kressel of New York University and Jeremy Burrus of Columbia. After students read a summary of a court case in which a judge, who ostensibly had no other choice, awarded custody to the parent who appeared to be the lesser evil, one group was informed of the actual outcome and the other was told the losing parent had won.

In both cases, the students evaluated the judge negatively. Their disapproval of the parents seemed to