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* Three main themes in American media coverage of obesity 1990-present.

* What can these themes tell us not only about obesity, but about contemporary American politics and society more generally?



- * NYT as the “paper of record” in the United States. Noted for science and health reporting.
- * Occupies a privileged place as a leading opinion *center* and *setter* among intellectuals, professionals, policy makers and the general educated public.
- * With access to health-related information via the media and the internet, sources like the NYT become more central to the lay person’s understanding of health, science, and medicine



- * Obesity as a *physical* and *fiscal* threat.
- * The obesity crisis as a scientific given.
- * Obesity as a problem of the poor, minorities, children and, by extension, mothers



“The proportion of the population that is obese is incredible. If this was about tuberculosis, it would be called an epidemic”

- Obesity Researcher Dr. F. Xavier Pi Sunyer, 1994

"Obesity is the terror within. Unless we do something about it, the magnitude of the dilemma will dwarf 9-11 or any other terrorist attempt."

- Dr. Richard Carmona, Former U.S. Surgeon General, 2006



*Obesity as a Physical
and Medical
Challenge*

*Rates

*Costs (present and future)

*Cause, prevention, and cures



Obesity as a physical
and medical
condition

* *Obesity causes 318,000 excess deaths a year.*

* NYT 1990

* *Obesity is near to overtaking smoking as the No. 1 cause of death in the United States, and other research shows that its adverse health effects could soon wipe out many recent improvements in health...Poor diet and physical inactivity caused 400,000 deaths last year.*

* NYT 2004



THE OBESITY CRISIS AS A
SCIENTIFIC DIAGNOSIS

- * *We live in a toxic environment with regard to obesity. Food is very palatable, very cheap, very easy to get. Labor saving devices are everywhere. Everybody is working at desks, expending a lot less energy and eating a lot more -NYT 1999*
- * *If the child learns to eat from their overweight parent, who learned from their overweight parent, and Mom buys the same way and does the same thing she did years ago, and now that kid isn't even running and jumping the way kids used to, that child is in trouble -NYT 2000*

* ...there are three doctors, no hospitals, no ambulances, no 911 services....The population is 79 percent African-American; the jobless rate is edging towards 14 percent and the median family income is \$12,497... Browse the shelves: along with ingredients for Southern staples like corn bread and fried chicken stretches a range of pig parts from head to foot, including brains and fatty ham hocks and tails. Pork chitterlings for frying are available in ten-pound buckets; fatback by the slab and fatty beef parts are popular, too. Lard flies off the shelves in eight-pound cans.

*NYT 1998



Obesity as a problem of
the poor, minorities and
children

- * In a society that is uncomfortable talking about poverty, race, and ethnicity, obesity has become a way to talk about all three.
- * Seeing health as a product of individual behaviors reproduces and furthers the emergence of health as the new morality.
- * The persistence of these frames fits with the government's need to individualize ill-health and inequality and the weight-loss industry's need for increased profits.



CONCLUSION
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