



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on May 30, 2012

## Michelle Obama's Food Desert Myth

It may be a peculiar manifestation of American exceptionalism, but the United States has the distinction of being a nation that actually has fat poor people. This doesn't sit well with those who want to grow government faster than waistlines, and thus do we have Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign, designed to fight obesity by eliminating "food deserts."



No, that isn't supposed to be "desserts"; although the health Nazis aim to eliminate those, too. (That is, except for themselves. Michelle can clear a table like a hurdler it's said; as for the commoners, however, it's "Let them eat whole grain bread!") It is "food desert," which, we hear, is a poor area "underserved" by food suppliers, creating a situation wherein its denizens are relegated to a hell of fatty fast food offerings. And, you guessed it, Michelle wants to use our tax money to remedy this problem.

Only, it appears it's a cure in search of a disease.

Even the *Boston Globe* now admits this in an editorial. The paper writes, [according](#) to *American Thinker*:

...[S]tudies found that, while poor neighborhoods indeed had more fast food restaurants than wealthier neighborhoods, they also had *more large-scale supermarkets*. [Emphasis added.] The authors of the studies, Helen Lee of the Public Policy Institute of California, and Roland Sturm of RAND, both said in telephone interviews that the findings indicate a much more complex challenge for policymakers fighting obesity.

As Lee noted, there are plenty of "crazy cheap" healthy items in supermarkets, such as bananas, carrots, and seasonal vegetables. "But you are dealing," she said, "with more nuanced issues like taste, like whether a low-income mother on limited funds will spend money on healthy produce she ends up throwing away because the kids don't like it. Cabbage is cheap but will the kids eat it?"

This should be obvious to all but the arts-and-croissant crowd. I mean, where did anyone ever get the idea that poor people who can afford McDonald's can't obtain healthful food?

For the record, I know whereof I speak. While in my youth I did have the benefit of summering every other year in Germany, I grew up in the Bronx and also spent quite a bit of time in rough-hewn neighborhoods, places where I sometimes was one of the few white kids around. So I've seen both sides of the tracks.



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And I can tell you that there are no food “deserts” in poor areas. In fact, consider a supermarket I often patronize, Stop & Shop. There’s an outlet in the nice suburb in which I now live, but there’s also one in my old neighborhood. What’s the selection like? Barring a few higher-end items such as a certain brand of blue cheese I’m partial to, the Bronx Stop & Shop carries everything the suburban one does.

Prices are lower, too, for obvious reasons. In a place where the market has less to spend and rents are cheaper, there’s pressure to keep prices down; this is especially true when competition abounds. And it does. Not only do such neighborhoods tend to have other supermarkets, they also have bodegas, and produce carts and trucks on the street.

So here’s what bothers me. If Michelle Obama really had spent time in tough parts of town as she claims, she couldn’t possibly be unaware of what I’ve explained. This leaves only two possibilities: She’s lying or she’s rationalizing, the latter being when you lie to yourself. Whatever the case, she’s peddling propaganda.

Of course, the upside-down phenomenon in which the poorer you are, the fatter you tend to be is a reality in the United States; for example, Mississippi often rates not just as the poorest state but also the one where obesity is most common. In typical liberal fashion, however, M. Obama et al. would rather blame society for allegedly creating areas “underserved” — another loaded term such as “underprivileged” — than actually recognize and accept reality. Of course, though, reality is seldom as useful a pretext for creating wasteful government programs.

So why in America is it the case that the thinner the wallet, the fatter the waist? First, obsession with fitness, health and appearance is mainly a phenomenon of those with (too much?) time and money on their hands (like Michelle). Wealthy people are the ones who get the cosmetic surgery, frequent the health clubs, hire the personal trainers and obsess over what they eat. In contrast, poorer people are consumed with trying to make ends meet. And when one is concerned with survival, the superficial takes a back seat.

In keeping with this, there is also a lot more pressure among the rich to look good; if you don’t, it diminishes you in social circles. Again, though, the poor are, by necessity, more down-to-earth. It’s also true that small pleasures, such as delicious fast food, are some of the few things the poor can look forward to.

And what of the more unhealthy diet poorer people feed their children? Part of this, no doubt, is due to education, as they probably aren’t as conversant on nutrition. Again, however, when life is a struggle and your problems are things such as keeping your child away from drugs, gangs and stray bullets, what he puts in his mouth isn’t going to figure prominently on your priority list.

Of course, it is true that junk food reigns in poor neighborhoods. For example, I’ve never seen a White Castle (which my father, patrician that he was, was crazy about) in a wealthy area. But this is a result of market forces, and I don’t think poor folks would be too happy if you replaced their KFC with GNC.

And the proof is in the pudding. You know those healthful lunches schools are instituting and that receive all sorts of accolades? Well, students are [throwing them in the trash](#) — by the thousands — and instead eating junk food they acquire elsewhere.

This is where we could say that the road to Hell is paved with good intentions, but I won’t give M. Obama and company even that much credit. These people impose their values at the end of a gun — with our money — so they can say they’ve done their good deed for the day. But squandering money isn’t just irresponsible. It’s evil. It means that resources — which represent the sweat, toil and tears of



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taxpayers — cannot be used to actually do good because they've been spent to make Michelle feel good. And, I wonder, would these statisticians pursue these fool's errands if they had to finance them on only their own dime?

Frankly, it's none of Michelle's business how fat people are. Nor is it a problem, except to those with too much time and (other people's) money on their hands. Our real health danger is a government so obese that, in reality, it might be a blessing if it just keeled over from a heart attack.



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