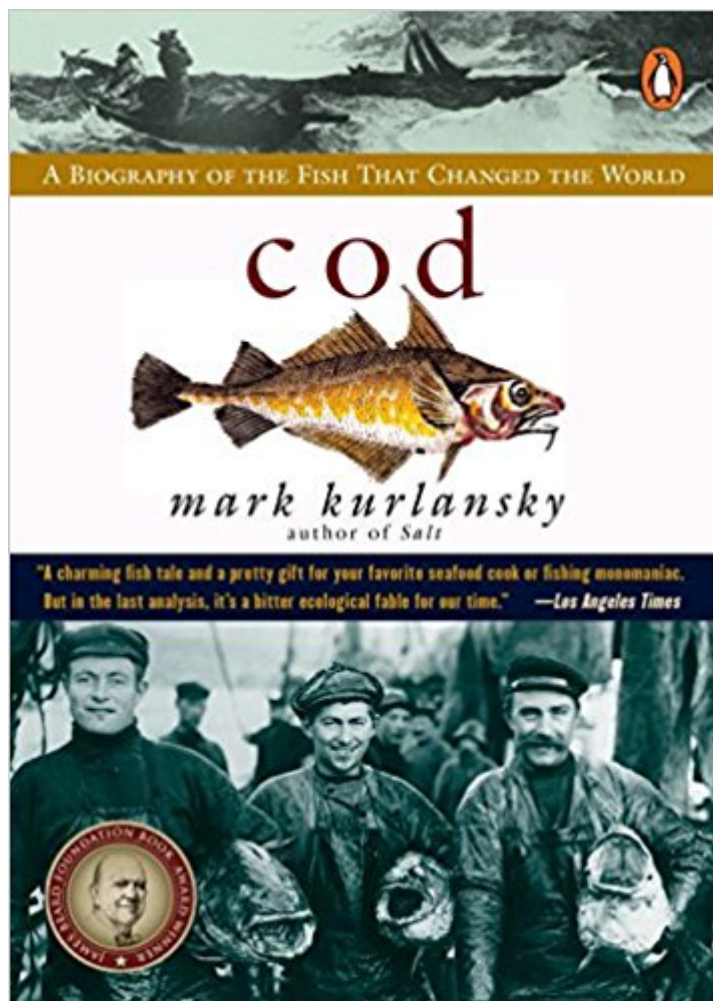


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Cod: A Biography Of The Fish That Changed The World



Synopsis

An unexpected, energetic look at world history on sea and land from the bestselling author of *Salt and The Basque History of the World* Cod, Mark Kurlansky's third work of nonfiction and winner of the 1999 James Beard Award, is the biography of a single species of fish, but it may as well be a world history with this humble fish as its recurring main character. Cod, it turns out, is the reason Europeans set sail across the Atlantic, and it is the only reason they could. What did the Vikings eat in icy Greenland and on the five expeditions to America recorded in the Icelandic sagas? Cod, frozen and dried in the frosty air, then broken into pieces and eaten like hardtack. What was the staple of the medieval diet? Cod again, sold salted by the Basques, an enigmatic people with a mysterious, unlimited supply of cod. As we make our way through the centuries of cod history, we also find a delicious legacy of recipes, and the tragic story of environmental failure, of depleted fishing stocks where once their numbers were legendary. In this lovely, thoughtful history, Mark Kurlansky ponders the question: Is the fish that changed the world forever changed by the world's folly? "Every once in a while a writer of particular skill takes a fresh, seemingly improbable idea and turns out a book of pure delight. Such is the case of Mark Kurlansky and the codfish." David McCullough, author of *The Wright Brothers* and 1776

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 1200L (What's this?)

Paperback: 294 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; 1 edition (July 1, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140275010

ISBN-13: 978-0140275018

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.5 x 7.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 339 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #19,376 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Cooking by Ingredient > Fish & Seafood #3 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Fish & Sharks #40 in Books > Science & Math > Agricultural Sciences > Food Science

Age Range: 18 and up

Grade Level: 09 - 12

Customer Reviews

You probably enjoy eating codfish, but reading about them? Mark Kurlansky has written a fabulous book--well worth your time--about a fish that probably has mattered more in human history than any other. The cod helped inspire the discovery and exploration of North America. It had a profound impact upon the economic development of New England and eastern Canada from the earliest times. Today, however, overfishing is a constant threat. Kurlansky sprinkles his well-written and occasionally humorous history with interesting asides on the possible origin of the word codpiece and dozens of fish recipes. Sometimes a book on an offbeat or neglected subject really makes the grade. This is one of them. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

In this engaging history of a "1000-year fishing spree," Kurlansky (*A Continent of Islands: Searching for the Caribbean Destiny*, LJ 1/92) traces the relationship of cod fishery to such historical eras and events as medieval Christianity and Christian observances; international conflicts between England and Germany over Icelandic cod; slavery, the molasses trade, and the dismantling of the British Empire; and, the evolution of a sophisticated fishing industry in New England. Kurlansky relates this information in an entertaining style while providing accurate scientific information. The story does not have a happy ending, however. The cod fishery is in trouble, deep trouble, as the Atlantic fish has been fished almost to extinction. Quoting a scientist from the Woods Hole Biological Laboratory, Massachusetts, Kurlansky notes that to forecast the recovery of the cod population is to gamble: "There is only one known calculation: 'When you get to zero, it will produce zero.'" Highly recommended for all general collections. ?Mary J. Nickum, Bozeman, Mont. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

A great book by Mark Kurlansky that explores the globalization of cod and shows its impact of history. This book taught me so much about this simple fishes influence on the past and current world. The book was as informative as it was entertaining. This book was by no means boring and I often found myself losing a few hours getting lost in the story of cod fishermen. Kurlansky writing is rich and full of an unexpected amount if emotion about his topics. The various recipes the use cod scattered around the book were a novelty touch and seem very interesting! I'm really considering trying one...only I find myself stopped by the knowledge provided by Kurlansky of how over fished cod are!

Mark Kurlansky's incredibly readable "Cod" is a 1997 look at the history, and the uncertain future, of

the humble cod, staple fish of Europe and North America for a millenium.Kurlansky relooks recent history from the perspective of the pursuit of Atlantic cod, a once unbelievably prolific species overfished into near oblivion. Kurlansky traces the fishing history from multiple perspectives, including that of the Basque, who may have been fishing for abundant cod off Newfoundland even before Columbus "discovered" the New World. The Basque were followed by the French, the Spanish, the Portuguese, the English, and the Americans; the cod catch fed populations on both sides of the Atlantic. The overfishing led to the present state of the fishing fleet of Gloucester, Massachusetts, all but shut down by restrictions intended to save remaining cod stocks, a situation shared by fellow fishermen in Newfoundland.Kurlansky's narrative moves back and forth between the past and the present, as cod fuels the economic growth of colonial New England and eastern Canada, but dwindles in the present. The author closes each chapter with a selection of historical recipes for cooking cod, which should be quite interesting to the seafood cooks in the audience. He successfully mines what could have been a mundane topic for lots of human interest angles, and a possibly prophetic look at the future of wild fish harvesting, a future still in doubt when Kurlansky closed out his book. "Cod" is very highly recommended to readers with an interest in the fish and the industry.

I purchased this book thinking it would be a dry reference on the deep sea fish of legend. Instead it became an adventure, sailing around the Atlantic Ocean in small and large ships as history was being created all over!!! What a read! To think that a fish might have such an influence on world events was a step I had never taken but Mark Kurlansky tells a very deeply researched tale that ranges from the Viking Sagas up to the end of the 20th Century, that shows the contribution this fish made to world history!Of course this is not the complete story. This book also tells of rapacious greed and hypocrisy on the part of fishermen and governments all around the Atlantic Ocean. The fish pays the price!The near extinction of this once most plentiful ocean resource is a blight on man and his incapacity to control his greed and destructive nature.There is ultimately hope. Hope that the legendary cod will return in the vast schools it once did, and that we will be better able to maintain a healthy population!Well worth reading!

I can't recommend this book often enough. Kurlansky is a brilliant writer and does this sort-of "all the world's connected" kind of history extremely well. After reading, you think, "D'uh, I should've known that" when considering the centrality of food acquisition and production to the political-economy of the modern era, but Kurlansky is so gifted a writer that each discovery -- the reader's and those

historical figures who are doing the discovering -- is an absolute delight. The book is also a splendid demonstration of just why the basics -- food and water -- are likely to be sources of conflict in coming decades.

Eye opening, lots of history, a real page turner, I now have something to talk about besides "Salt". I'm not an English major, the writing was attention grabbing and really hard to put this book down.

I found the book -- *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World* -- fascinating as the author stepped me through the history of Man searching for Cod to feed a burgeoning population in Europe and the nationalistic forces at work as well as the technological advances in fishing methods that allowed for ever growing catches while the fish stocks were dwindling over time due to overfishing. The fact that explorers who "discovered" North America found basque fishing vessels already there was another interesting fact. The book is also filled with recipes and interesting anecdotes to help the reader understand how much the Cod has been an enabler in Western cultural development. The information on the development of Iceland into a modern western country during and after World War II and the "Cod Wars" between Iceland and Great Britain were interesting and to my surprise have come up in recent news reports about fishing quota disagreements between Iceland and the European Union. The writing is accessible and well done. As a comprehensivist I appreciated the well-crafted narrative that weaves all the connections between history, biology, technology, the rise of nations and geopolitical forces into a rich tapestry with a panoramic scope of interconnectedness. I look forward to reading his next book -- *Salt: A World History* -- which I just bought.

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