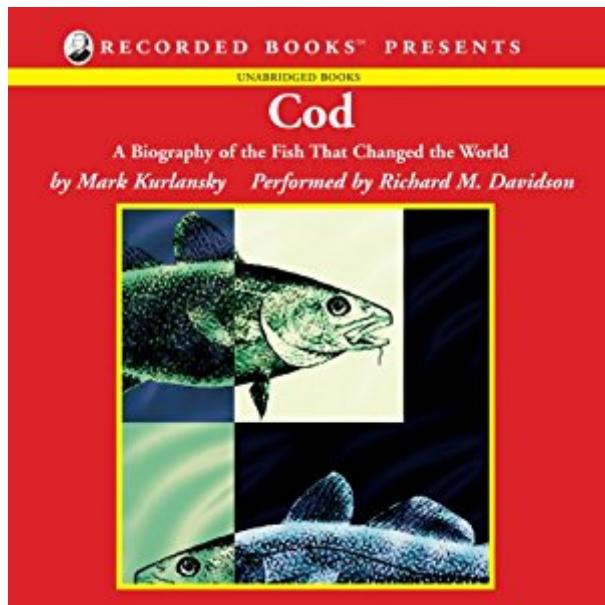


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Cod: A Biography Of The Fish That Changed The World



Synopsis

Author Mark Kurlansky pleasantly surprised the world with this engaging best-seller that garnered rave reviews from critics and casual readers alike. His subject for this whimsical biography is the codfish, a species remarkable for its influence on humanity. Cod, Kurlansky argues, has driven economic, political, cultural and military thinking for centuries in the lands surrounding the Atlantic Ocean. Nations like England and Germany have waged wars for cod. Vikings survived on frozen cod during their expeditions to the present America. And, it turns out, European explorers were driven toward North America in pursuit of this humble fish. Kurlansky fills this biography with fascinating anecdotes that show cod surfacing time and again throughout history. The book also serves as a wake-up call, alerting us that the species has nearly been fished out. Richard M. Davidson delivers a reading that is often amusing and always enlightening.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The marvel of Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World is that anyone could write a book this interesting about a subject so lackluster- a fish so boring that it does not even struggle when it is caught, instead allowing the fisherman to haul it up without a fight. Somehow Mark Kurlansky was able to make the codfish interesting enough that I continually drive my co-workers insane, insisting that they should read this book. Wars have been fought over it, revolutions have been spurred by it, national diets have been founded on it, economies and livelihoods have depended on it. The lowly cod really is the fish that changed the world. This book is a sober reminder of the impact of man on the environment, but it is also an enjoyable and readable book filled

with curious cod tidbits and a historical cross-section of odd cod recipes. In the same vein as The Perfect Storm or Longitude, this book is more entertaining than either of those maritime titles, although unlikely to be made into a movie starring George Clooney. If seeing the title Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World made you crack a smile, then you should read this book and tell your friends about it, so that they too can wonder if you're just making it up.

If you're one of the many people who's been caught up in the wave of highly focused historical books that have inundated our book stores, then this book is for you. Kurlansky presents the history of one of the most mundane items possible (excepting the humble potato and there's a book on that too) with an engaging and informative style. The book presents as a mix of history, current events, and recipes. It misfired at times. There is not discussion (or recommendation) regarding management of resources or planning for the future of our fisheries. And some absolute statements (such as the superior development of Basque cod cuisine) deserve to be challenged. And Kurlansky doesn't consider the fishing history of Native Americans; although, it may be for lack of documentation (I don't know; I'm not a historian; that's why I read these things). In spite of this, it's an outstanding book. It meets the two key requirements for me in this regard; one, I recommend it to other people who report back on how much they liked it; and two, I'll read it again. Buy it. Read it. You'll probably enjoy it.

There's a cartoon in Matt Groening, the nine types of professors. One is the single-minded type, as in "The country that controls magnesium controls the world!" His main drawback is that he could be right. Cod sort of reminds me of that. You may not have known how important or popular this particular fish was to most of our ancestors in Western civilization, but, according to Kurlansky, Cod was practically like bread. It was easy to fish, there was a ton of it, and once Europeans learned the various ways of drying it (with cold and/or salt) all people could think about was trading this staple. Yes, Kurlansky's book is single-minded, and at times you might forget this is a fish tale. When the Vikings found America, what were they looking for? And how did they manage to sustain themselves through the long ocean voyage? The answers are of course, cod. Kurlansky also has a few outlandish things to say about another favorite topic of his, the Basque, who it appears had been regularly fishing for Cod in Newfoundland long before Columbus found America. They were really good at keeping a secret, you see. Fortunately, there's a serious, or, at least more socially acceptable side, to Kurlansky's fish story. The fishing trade really is threatened. You can no longer practically walk on Atlantic cod. Even Icelanders who found their entire economy changing from one

of sustenance to a first world service economy, during the two world wars, have a difficult time protecting their dwindling stock. If Aldous Huxley's grandfather, Thomas, asserted in the 19th century that cod would never become extinct, it was only because he could not imagine the rapid technological changes which would turn fishing into harvesting, and the classic practice of drying fish into freezing it, on board the fishing boats themselves. Good bye bacalao, hello fishsticks. It's a sad tale as ways of life dwindle and change, and even the very essentials of human existence that have lasted for thousands of years go unheard of by the post-industrial society. But are we really evolving into something better? Kurlansky peppers his narrative with quotes from notables throughout the ages and interesting, if often archaic, recipes.

Mark Kurlansky has written a breezy (yet ultimately gloomy) little book, full of tidbits of knowledge about the cod. It's a fascinating subject, especially if you have ever lived in the parts of the world where cod has reigned supreme. And yes, the author not only tells us about the fish itself, but how nations have struggled over the centuries to protect their collective livelihoods, occasionally warring against each other as national pride and survival were at stake. Several months ago I read Mr. Kurlansky's book, "Salt: A World History". This newer book is far better than "Cod" as it delves deeper into a comestible that REALLY changed the course of history. A problem that I have with both books is the author's writing style. It's very disjointed. He jumps from one geographic area of cod harvest to another and from one time period to another as well. There is no real weaving of a story line here....it's as if he wrote each chapter on a whim. However, I especially like the inclusion of recipes in this book. It gives a "human" side to the cod and allowing readers to view recipes from Europe and North America is a great way to end the book. If you have any desire to read "Cod", I would suggest reading it first before going on to "Salt".

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