



A BIOGRAPHY OF THE FISH THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

cod



Mark Kurlansky

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# Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World

*Mark Kurlansky*

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# **Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World**

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## **Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World** Mark Kurlansky

The Cod. Wars have been fought over it, revolutions have been triggered by it, national diets have been based on it, economies and livelihoods have depended on it. To the millions it has sustained, it has been a treasure more precious than gold. This book spans 1,000 years and four continents. From the Vikings to Clarence Birdseye, Mark Kurlansky introduces the explorers, merchants, writers, chefs and fishermen, whose lives have been interwoven with this prolific fish. He chronicles the cod wars of the 16th and 20th centuries. He blends in recipes and lore from the Middle Ages to the present. In a story that brings world history and human passions into captivating focus, he shows how the most profitable fish in history is today faced with extinction.

## **Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World Details**

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# From Reader Review Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World for online ebook

## Matt says

Continuing on my histories of odd things (and non-fiction binge), I returned to another Mark Kurlansky piece that may leave some readers swimming in the other direction. Kurlansky presents the cod and its importance in world history, which was surely as entertaining and educational as it was unique. Many may think cod as nothing more than a fish that finds its way onto the plate, best served with potatoes and green peas (or whatever vegetable one has on hand), but there is a great deal more to this creature of the water. Politics and industry play such key (and intertwined) roles in its discovery and ongoing exploration (exploitation?) that the reader will surely come away with a more thorough understanding of the complexity of the fish. Kurlansky offers up a few interesting insights to pique the reader's interest, if nothing more. Rest assured, a non-fish eater though I am, I was astounded with all that came from this piece, and the impact cod has had on the world for over two thousand years.

Cod have not only been fished extensively (and exclusively) for thousands of years, but they are some of the most sought after fish for their versatile nature. Well before refrigeration became an option, fishermen discovered the ability to salt them, which not only added a flavour, but also a distinct ruggedness. Allowing the fish to last that much longer, it could be transported, sold, and stored for longer periods, thereby making it highly profitable on the world market. Throughout his piece, Kurlansky shows just how desired salted cod became, in all corners of the world. But it is not only the salted fillets that prove to be a delicious treat, but most every part of the fish. From their livers (tasting and whose oil is highly medicinal) to their heads (a delicious chowder, without eyes) and even their skin (perfect for making bags and satchels), cod is one of the most versatile fish on the market. Kurlansky discusses at one point that there is even a use for the bones, particularly amongst the ever-thinking Icelandic population. Cod as food is likely the easiest way the reader will consider this fish, but there is so much more to the discussion.

Cod was not only a form of food on which to sup, for some it was a way of life. Kurlansky explores the life of a fisherman and how entire communities would rely on the bountiful cod catches that came from off the coast. Kurlansky returns throughout the piece to discuss the importance of cod fishing to Newfoundland (Canada), New England (America), and much of the country of Iceland. Entire livelihoods were based on enough cod coming off the boats to be sold on the open market. There are many parts of the world where cod is not plentiful, but it is sought after as a staple in the diet. Kurlansky explores how overfishing by other countries has helped to deplete the stock of cod, thereby adversely affecting the lives of huge portions of the populace. This has, at least in the Canadian example, forced multi-generational fishing families to turn to financial assistance for subsistence, their pride decimated. Politics abound when it comes to fishing and those who pull cod from the water are affected like no other. Kurlansky does provide a captivating and chilling narrative about the politics of cod fishing.

One would be remiss to simply accept that cod are a food, for anything that can be sold will surely have a price tag and a profit. Kurlansky explores how centuries ago, explorers would find their way in the open waters to take advantage of this new discovery, hoping to sell it and provide a large profit margin. The Basques were able to capitalise on this for centuries, particularly because they were situated in a plentiful area. The British Commonwealth ran likely a well-oiled machine, forcing colonial fishermen to send back their catches to be sold to others, without the full profits making back to the original source. In time, other countries were able to build large boats to join the 'game', entering the fray and taking what they could handle. However, cod are not as fertile as one might think, nor able to replenish as quickly as they are

captured. This led to a shortage of fish and a moratorium on fishing. An international agreement to extend sovereign waters led to many a clash between countries, only added proverbial blood to the water and turned ugly when the cod population shrunk. Countries went to (fish) war over cod and sanctions ensued, particularly a battle between Iceland and the UK in the 1970s. No one was safe and entire communities, as discussed above, suffered the most. This is likely some of the most disturbing parts of the narrative, as it pulls in the seal hunt and the economic livelihood of thousands of families and is only another example of how large corporations destroyed the little man for their own greed.

I am the first to admit that I do not like fish, though I was drawn to this piece and could not find a way to step back. Kurlansky has such a way with his storytelling that the reader finds themselves in the middle of the story before realising how much time has passed. Full of anecdotes and personal asides, Kurlansky personalises the topic more than many historians can do for actual human subjects. Who would have thought that cod could be such a complex food, while also being such a binding agent for small communities? Kurlansky does offer a great deal of information that the reader must digest, but it is all poignant and ties together throughout the narrative. I found myself relating events in early chapters on cod fishing to later discussions of wars between the governments of the UK and Iceland, fitting the two topics together seamlessly. With the added bonus of numerous recipes pulled from over many centuries, Kurlansky ties the discussion together and permits the reader to explore the culinary side of the topic, a less confrontational aspect of cod fishing. While there is no doubt that cod will long be a divisive topic when it comes to mass fishing quotas between countries, it is also the lifeblood for many people, which is easily forgotten, especially by a man on the landlocked Canadian Prairies. Kurlansky breathes life into the discussion and keeps the reader thinking, which can lead to talking and eventually acting on what they have come to learn.

Kudos, Mr. Kurlansky, for another stunning food-related biography. I am completely hooked and have a few more of your books to explore in the not too distant future. While I may not be rushing out to have cod-head chowder, you did get me thinking about an industry about which I know so little.

Love/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:  
<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

A Book for All Seasons, a different sort of Book Challenge: <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/...>

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### **Jason Koivu says**

Are you prepared for the excitement of reading a review about a book about fish? Well, strap yourselves in for a wild ride, folks!\*

Why write a book about cod? Why read it? Simple. Without you probably knowing it, cod has been one of the most important parts of our diets over the last thousand years. Without it, long distance sea exploration in medieval times (the era, not the ren fair) would've been just about impossible.

And now, ladies and gentlemen....**THE MAJESTIC COD!**

No?

Okay, it looks more like this...

Not very majestic, but oh so important.

Cod is a particularly unique fish. It eats just about anything and spawns like crazy. It's the frickin' rabbit of the sea! A single cod (well, a single cod who has "coupled"...heee...SEX!) can produce millions of eggs. Once full-grown, the cod has virtually no predators. And yet we still managed to nearly fish it into extinction.

Though he does spend some time on the history, a very interesting history indeed, much of Kurlansky's book is about how man recently almost wiped the cod off the face of the earth...or to be specific, netted it off the bottom of the ocean. *Cod* spends many of its pages devoted to the current crisis, looking at it from the variant points of view: fishermen, the governments controlling the waters and the catch, and the public's ravenous demand for this tasty dish.

Perhaps *Cod* won't appeal to everyone, but it is written with a sense of humor, gives tons of interesting facts (good pub quiz fodder!), includes recipes interspersed through out and, most importantly, it's short. My interest is probably stronger than most in that I was born and raised in Massachusetts, where Cape Cod has been vital to our way of life. Fish-n-chip shacks were in every little village, even out in the sticks where I lived (45 minutes away from the coast is considered "the sticks" in Massachusetts, and it feels like it, trust me). With the important fishing tradition of Gloucester and Maine, etc., so strongly engrained, most New Englanders grow up thinking of cod as a synonym for fish.

*Cod* is one of those books that most readers will pass up, but the few who do pick it up will be surprised at the high entertainment value and wealth of easily digestible knowledge to be obtained.

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\* Okay, so you didn't really need to strap yourselves in...*this time!* But you never know what's to come and hey, safety first kids, safety first!

## **Marilynmayer says**

I love books like this in which a very narrow topic gives broad insight into our world. This story tells the history of cod fishing, the Basque were one of the first grps. to successfully & secretly fish for cod on a commercial scale, all the way to modern fishing techniques in which schools of fish could be located & over-fished through GPS. Cod fishing brought wealth to many nations, became a treasured part of many diets (Its high protein count made it a valuable source of protein in the centuries when it was hard to find.), and created a fishing lifestyle for millions. This book is also a story of environmental hubris; the legend is that if every fish egg reached its full maturity, one could have walked across the Atlantic on the backs of cod! Cod has virtually disappeared, leaving many fishing villages as ghost towns. While I was reading Cod, I kept thinking, will the blue fin tuna be the next fish species to disappear from our oceans?

Kurlansky weaves a fascinating fish tale in Cod, and I'm not exaggerating!

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## **Richard Derus says**

Rating: 3.75\* of five

Victorian scientists said that cod was the fish in the miracle of the loaves and fishes because there were so darn many of them....

Yeah, late to the party yet again...13 years late. I read this book, I would swear, when it came out; I recognized a few of the anecdotes, and I remember the jacket design very clearly. But a lot had slipped from my memory, and I now wonder if I actually read it, or had enough conversations about it to think I had.

Well, whatever, if it was a re-read it was a fun one. I like Kurlansky's informative-yet-chatty style, and I love the angle of view in the book...what's cod done for us as a species? So what? What's cod made possible in the world? The rise of an independent America. The agrarian horrors of African chattel slavery. The Industrial Revolution. Little stuff like that was built on the white-fleshed back of a formerly abundant fish.

I like cod. Salted, dried, fresh-frozen, the tongues, the cheeks...it's all good, as my daughter's generation says with monotonous regularity (and questionable factual basis). I never once thought about Cod, the deliverer from hunger, until the Cod Wars of the early 1970s. I remember the world reaction to Iceland going to a 200-mile fishing limit with a teenager's detached bemusement: "So? Little teeny place like that, let 'em have it, big whoop." For rhetorical effect, let's assume I was sitting in front of the TV eating Gorton's fish sticks at the time I said this, though I spent little time with the TV and less eating fish sticks as a kid.

It caused such trouble because of cod's enormous significance even now as an agribusiness output. Iceland's post-colonial economy was built on cod; Canada's Maritime provinces relied on it in those days (and on unemployment payments from the rest of Canada now that cod's commercially extinct); Norway and the UK want all there is to have so their fisheries industries don't wither away and leave them hungry as well as sailor-less.

Kurlansky wrote a very enjoyable read about a very important food-source and industrial product. I recommend it to anyone even marginally interested in the world around them, to science browsers, and to policy wonks of a scientific bent. You won't regret it.

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## **Danceswithwords says**

A much more focused narrative than Salt, about Atlantic cod fisheries and the ways that inexpensive, salt-preserved fish changed diets and economies in Europe from the middle ages to the present. The central story of the book, though, is the way what was once regarded as a limitless resource has been fished to the edge of collapse, and the affect that has had on the communities that depend on it, and the difficulty of harnessing competing economic entities to work to restore the populations.

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## **David says**

In 2001, I was on vacation with my wife in Sydney, Australia. I decided that I was entitled to buy a new book to read while travelling. We went into one of Sydney's best book stores, and after much thought, I

chose this book. My wife looked at it and remarked, "You chose the most boring book in the store." After that, I read her all the interesting parts of the book until she was finally forced to admit that maybe it was not the most boring book in the store after all. That's faint praise, of course. It's a great book.

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### **Jessica says**

I read this book after visiting Fort Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, N.S. and being impressed by stories of oceans of cod ("one could just reach in and pull out codfish"). I'd had no idea how important cod was for the island and for trade in general (I'd never really given it much thought at all). Kurlansky offers a lively, historical and very entertaining "biography of the fish that changed the world." And with the advent of this book, the publishing industry has churned out schools, nay, oceans of books about single theme histories...[that last part for David-you-know-who-you-are!].

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### **Dennison Berwick says**

Those who argue that economic exploitation of natural "resources" can go on for ever because it always has gone on, should read Mark Kurlansky's book "Cod, A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World". The book is not primarily about the collapse of stocks in the early 1990s but rather a fascinating investigation of all aspects of this fish - cultural, economic and political - without which the American Revolution might never have taken place or at least have been delayed many decades. How so? You may ask. Simply put, it was cod that turned the struggling, half-starving settlers in the New England colonies of into an international commercial power. The colonists took poor quality salted cod, the cod that could not be sold in Europe, to the slave islands of the Caribbean where the high-protein food was fed to the African slaves. for the return, the ships loaded with molasses from which rum was produced back in New England. "The West Indies presented a growing market for the rejects, for anything that was cheap. In fact, West India was the commercial name for the lowest-quality salt cod," write Mark Kurlansky.

In addition, though New England ships were not slave carriers they did supply salt cod to slave merchants who used the fish to buy slaves. At the time when New Englanders were increasingly preoccupied with "freedom", they were noticeably selective about whose freedom they were championing.

"The French politician Alexis de Tocqueville, in his 1835 study...wrote about an inherent contradiction in the New England character....New England was the great champion of individual liberty and even openly denouncing slavery, all the while growing ever more affluent by providing Caribbean planters with barrels of cheap food to keep enslaved people working 16 hours a day. By the first decade of the eighteenth century, more than 300 ships left Boston in a good year for the West Indies."

The great danger with single subject books, such as this one, is that - as the little girl observed, "This book tells me more about dolphins than I wanted to know." Fortunately Kurlansky avoids this pitfall. The book is a great mixture of history, recipes, curious trivia and useful analysis. A good read for anyone curious about this fish that was once cheap and ubiquitous but which, despite warnings for decades about overfishing, is now next to impossible to obtain. What does this tell us about the future of global commercial fish stocks which, according to the UN's FAO are 60% fully exploited, overexploited or depleted. And the situation has only deteriorated in the last decade.

For more reviews and other writings, please visit my website:  
Serendipities of a Writer's Life [www.dennisonberwick.info](http://www.dennisonberwick.info)

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### **Alisa says**

I enjoyed this lively little book about the history of cod. What could seem like an obscure topic for a history book turned out to be an entertaining and very informative narrative about a species of fish that has sparked war, shaped international political discourse, impacted diverse cultures, markets, and the environment. The author did a good job of weaving in odd little facts within the larger discussion. Seems a bit ironic that he would lament the near extinction of the fish while simultaneously offering up cod recipes. The book really focuses on the North Atlantic cod, and he gives only brief mention to Pacific cod toward the end of the book. The relative history focuses on the Nordic waters so it makes sense, but I expected a little more about the Pacific fishing dynamic. In contrast with Salt: A World History by the same author, which I read last year, the flow in Cod was much more organized and overall I found it to be a better book. Both books the author has a tendency to follow a tangent in the middle of a story, but he gets back to his point, you have to wander with him from time to time to get there. Overall well written and enjoyable. Pictures and drawings are few but very helpful.

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### **Jim says**

Looking at the world from the point of view of a species of food fish can lead to fascinating results. For instance, it is quite possible that Basque fishermen discovered the New World decades before Columbus, and that Columbus may have known this. So much of American history (and wealth) is connected with cod fishing that it is quite sobering to see us come to the possible end of a species of whom Alexandre Dumas wrote, "It has been calculated that if no accident prevented the hatching of the eggs and each egg reached maturity, it would take only three years to fill the sea so that you could walk across the Atlantic dryshod on the backs of the cod."

An accident, however, has happened. The cod has fallen prey to the most greedy and insatiable predator ever known: Man. Like the passenger pigeons whose flocks took days to pass a stationary viewer, the cod has fallen victim to man's determined and ingenious predations.

Kurlansky's book is a labor of love interspersed with anecdotes and recipes that make me yearn for some good chowder or dried cod or ... Oh, I do hope the cod can make a comeback. They are so very delicious.

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### **Ana says**

Great book! I wondered if I would like it, but I was surprised to really enjoy it. Kurlansky does a great and fascinating job in telling the story of Atlantic Cod fishing over the past 1000 years, tying it to world history and politics in general.

It definitely makes me worried about over-fishing and has made me reconsider my fish-eating unless I can be assured that the fish I eat were either farmed or fished in sustainable conditions-- I think a difficult task! As a

Portuguese gal now living near Cape Cod, was great to read about this fish that is a mainstay of the Azorean diet & which used to be central to the Massachusetts economy. Sad bottom line: our Atlantic cod is disappearing due to political mismanagement & overfishing.

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### **Deborah Ideosepius says**

A fascinating review of the history of the Atlantic cod fisheries. While I knew of the stories of the Grand banks and Georges banks from my University days (I doubt there is a Marine Biologist in the world who has not studied this classic case of overfishing), I had never thought about the wider social implications of the collapse of this fishery and I certainly had never wondered too much about the sociological role of the animal. It turns out that *Gadus morhua*, the Atlantic cod was a major player in a whole heap of human history. The Vikings cold dried it and used it to cross the ocean, the Spanish discovered the New world but kept it secret because they did not want to have to share the fishing grounds, in the 1500's cod was already changing trade routes and ports were gaining prominence based on its affect. All quite fascinating.

The book starts with a modern day (or at least, 1990's) peek at the state of the fisheries in Newfoundland and then continues on from there. It is well written, easy to read and thoroughly enjoyable. While it tells a very polarised aspect of history it is a side that would not often be thought of; how many people have thought about Cod when they were examining the American Slave history?

Interspersed through the text are recipes and historical titbits. As I do not eat fish it is very unlikely I will ever try them but reading them is an added view of the historical time in which they were written and for most of the book I quite enjoyed them. At the end however one encounter about forty pages worth of recipes and I might take those slowly.

Aside from the overdose of Cod recipes at the end I would thoroughly endorse this book, I was delighted to read such an expanded story to the basic overexploitation story of the Grand banks.

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### **Mark Mortensen says**

With the onset of another summer I sought a nonfiction book rather than a novel to set the mood. I enjoy biographies, but truly how much can be said through "A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World: Cod"?

Since birth I spent many days in Harwich Port on Cape Cod with my grandparents. As an angler the term "cod" was ingrained in my brain at an early age. At times in the 1950's and 60's the highlight of my day was watching the vibrant colorful commercial fishing vessels, riding low in the water, approach the Chatham Pier Fish Market. Upon delivery the iced cod and haddock were stabbed with a hay rake or shoveled into a large metal bins and hoisted into the fish house for preparation and sale on the on the premises. Additionally I worked every college summer in Harwich Port on the grounds of Thompson's Clam Bar the #1 volume family restaurant on the Cape and largest seasonal restaurant east of the Mississippi where many fish (cod) & chips were served, along with the adjacent Wychmere Harbor Club, one of the most photographed private clubs in Massachusetts, also owned by Frank Thompson, where quality broiled cod were often presented on a white and blue china plate. Later I worked in downtown Boston known as the city of "beans and cod". My

grandmother believed in the healing effects of cod liver oil and my doctor has always encouraged me to eat cold water fish twice a week. It was with this background that I opened the book's cover.

For centuries the simple cod fish did have a major impact upon world societies. The book had a good flow and I was intrigued by the numerous historical facts. Salt certainly provided preservation for sales of cod. I noted that my grandfather, who was born in Denmark, resided in Harwich Port on Cape Cod. I found it interesting that the word "wich" is an Anglo-Saxon term for "a place that has salt".

Mark Kurbansky received high praise and awards for this release in 1997 and his recognition is justified. It's a unique biography complete with cultural recipes and an index.

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## **Jimmy says**

*Cod* begins with two quotes:

1. Thomas Henry Huxley says that "the question of questions for mankind . . . is the ascertainment of the place which man occupies in nature and of his relations to the universe of things."

I love that quote because humans, at least the "civilized" ones, think of themselves as somewhat separated from nature.

2. Will and Ariel Durant in *The Lessons of History* say "the first biological lesson of history is that life is competition. . . . peaceful when food abounds, violent when the mouths overrun the food. Animals eat one another without qualm; civilized men consume one another by due process of law."

The fight for fish is for food and control of the oceans.

This book was copyrighted 1997. I am curious about the situation then, and I wonder if any progress has been made.

In July 1992, the Canadian government closed down the Newfoundland waters, the Grand Banks, and most of the Gulf of St. Lawrence to groundfishing. Fishermen had been demanding this for years. Their catch in numbers and size had been declining for years. Cod are bottom dwelling fish, and trawlers had been taking every last cod. Fishermen were helping scientists by gathering statistics. Part of the problem, it seems to me, is that science must prove its conclusions. They can't just say, we better slow down here because the situation "looks" pretty bad.

It is not only the cod that are gone, but the whales, herring, capelin, and squid. Fishermen used to catch cod on shore with traps.

Petty Harbour banned mass fishing techniques such as longlining and gillnetting since the 1940s. But it was not done for conservation, it was done to make room for all the boats.

The people of Petty Harbour are "at the wrong end of a 1,000-year fishing spree."

Cod are omnivorous. They eat everything. They swim with their mouths open and swallow everything that fits, including young cod. So fishermen just use a cod jigger made of lead. I wondered why the author failed to mention what a deadly poison lead is.

Cod are thus easy to catch but not much fun for sportsmen. Bluefish fight but they are oily. People prefer the white flesh of cod. We must change some of our eating habits and eat other fish.

A forty inch female cod can produce three million eggs. A fish ten inches longer can produce nine million eggs. A good reason to let the fish grow. In all nature, lots of eggs means lots of deaths. Here is an incredible statement: "If each female cod in a lifetime of millions of eggs produces two juveniles that live to be sexually mature adults, the population is stable."

The first reports of cod off the Maine coast were incredible. "Codfish as big as a man." John Cabot reported people catching them with baskets there were so many. In 1895, a codfish weighing 211 pounds was reported. In 1649, there was also a report of six-foot lobsters.

What have we done. Large animals cannot survive alongside humans.

From the middle of the 1500s to the middle of the 1700s, 60% of all fish eaten in Europe was cod.

The turning point comes on Page 75: "New Englanders were growing rich on free-trade capitalism. . . . Adam Smith, the eighteenth-century economist, singled out the New England fishery for praise in his singular work on capitalism, *The Wealth of Nations*. To Smith, the fishery was an exciting example of how an economy could flourish if individuals were given an unrestricted commercial environment."

That type of thinking still goes on today. Eliminate regulations and we will flourish. Get rid of those dastardly government agencies like the EPA and the money flows.

Everyone thought such a free-wheeling system could work forever.

People became rich on cod. Carvings of the fish were everywhere.

There is the unpleasantness of selling cheap fish for slaves.

Slaves could be picked up by cod merchants in West Africa. And more cod could be sold there. To this day there is still a West African market for cod sales.

There was often a moral contradiction between freedom loving New Englanders and social injustices.

Cod has to be fished out of water that is 34 to 50 degrees. Fishermen used to wear thick rubber gloves with cotton linings. Now there are new synthetic materials. They lost fingers from frostbite, line snags, and machinery. There is a sense of camaraderie, brotherhood. They are like combat veterans who feel only understood by their comrades who have survived the same battles. Any fisherman who can't keep up is out. Very few are over 50. Fog was one of the biggest enemies. Dorymen used to drown or starve to death or die of thirst while being lost in the fog. Too much fish could sink a dory. One reason is that they worked with little sleep. One doryman called it "a terrifying death without witness in the cottony fog that stifles all sound. Like a nightmare from which there is no awakening."

I point out the difficulties of fishermen in order to understand them. They are independent. They don't like government officials and land lovers trying to tell them how to do their job, even if it is for their own good. I have been to Gloucester many times. I have seen the memorial to dead fishermen. It is both prominent and powerful. There are always random tourists reading off random names. Between 1830 and 1900, about 3,800 Gloucester fishermen were "lost at sea." In a 1985 Canadian government report, 212 out of every 100,000 Canadian fishermen die on the job. That's far more than miners, foresters, and construction workers. In Britain, the rate of death for fishermen is 20 times higher than manufacturing.

Longlines with hooks can be as short as half a mile or can extend for four or five miles. They catch many fish, all of which now are noticeably smaller. This caused improving catches which fooled people into believing the stocks were not being depleted.

Freezing fish made a big difference. It meant more fish could be taken.

Bottom nets left the ocean floor a desert. Mesh size could help, but once the back wall is filled with cod, the small fish are trapped. "Millions of unwanted fish--undesirable species, fish that are undersized or over quota, even fish with a low market price this week--are tossed overboard, usually dead."

Now schools of fish are detected by sonar or spotter aircraft. A trawler can move in and clean out the area. They take the target fish and the by-catch.

"There is only one known calculation: 'When you get to zero, it will produce zero.' How much above zero still produces zero is not known." In the big ocean, how can you tell when it's too late to rebuild the stock?

"Overfishing is a growing global problem. About 60% of the fish types tracked by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) are categorized as fully exploited, overexploited, or depleted." I wonder what the percent is now?

Ninety percent of the world's fishing grounds are now closed off by 200-mile exclusion zones. Fishermen switched to fishing at greater depths. Little is known about the ecology there.

Some countries are just not known for their international cooperation.

Seals are our competitors for fish.

Cod seemed to have stopped migrating. One theory is that bigger, older fish are no longer there to lead the way.

Gorton's is still in Gloucester, the largest plant with the biggest sign, but the company hasn't bought a fish from a Gloucester fisherman in years.

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### **Ruthie Jones says**

Okay, so I shed a tear at the end. I couldn't help it. The cod's tale is quite tragic. I love history and anthropology; therefore, I love this book. Cod by Mark Kurlansky is interesting and fact filled, and I find that presenting recipes and fun information related to the cod throughout and at the end is a nice touch and a welcome respite from the narrative.

I am appalled (but not surprised) at the lengths to which humans will go to discover, hunt, exploit, manipulate, and wipe out a food source, in this case, the cod. We have proven over and over that we can be exterminators, and we have yet to practice moderation when it comes to commodities and satiating our desires. Additionally, we are tenacious in the face of change and adaptive when change is inevitable.

Cod gives us a glimpse into the fish that continues to impact our lives in North America, Europe, Britain, Iceland, and many other lands. This fish really gets around.

This book shows us the path the cod has taken throughout history, with the help of human hands, ingenuity, greed, and death: from salting/curing/drying for consumption during long voyages to doling out a cheap, nutritious meal to slaves to freezing breaded fish fillets and fish sticks. The cod has been through it all, and we have had the audacity to try and gobble every last one.

With my close ties to Britain, I have enjoyed the traditional fish and chips many times without ever questioning the type of fish (often cod or haddock) or its harrowing journey to my newspaper cone. As a consumer, perhaps I need to become more mindful.

This biography is well written and, based on the bibliography, well researched.

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“But technology never reverses itself. It creates new technology to confront new sets of problems.”

“Nature remains focused on survival.”

\*\*\*

It looks like Costco purchases wild Alaskan cod and wild Icelandic cod.

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## Miranda Reads says

### A bit fishy...

(I couldn't resist)

**Figure 1.** The majestic seafaring cod.

**Figure 2.** The majestic cod as us landlubbers know it.

Cod - one of the most common fish in the sea - **provided food for millions**. What started as simple fishing boats has ballooned into enormous trawlers that were capable of draining the sea of a once limitless population. **Invention and innovation led to decimation of the natural cod population.**

**Figure 3.** A fishing trawler - capable of obtaining thousands of fish in a single swoop.

Overall, a **very interesting book (if not a riveting one)**. I enjoyed following the history of cod - who knew such a common fish held such a deep and dark history. We traveled from **cod's humble origins to the**

**multi-million dollar** startups that so successfully destroyed their population.

Ironically, nearly every chapter there was a **recipe for cod**. *They all sounded delicious.*

*If cod and haddock and other species cannot survive because man kills them, something more adaptable will take their place. Nature, the ultimate pragmatist, doggedly searches for something that works. But as the cockroach demonstrates, what works best in nature does not always appeal to us.*

*The 2018 PopSugar Reading Challenge - A microhistory*

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### **Eric\_W says**

There is no way you could ever get me to eat cod, despite my partial Norwegian background where they eat a variety of disgusting fish dishes, the most famous being lutefisk, a kind of rotten, spoiled gelatinous mess. But I loved this book. Kurlansky is another John McPhee, supplying all sorts of interesting details. Turns out cod has been extremely important to civilization and almost as essential as bread. It was easy to fish and preserve and probably made discovery of North America by the Vikings possible. Fascinating.

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### **Andrea says**

Fish Are Boring and I Don't Really Like Them

Cod

Rating: 1.5/5

Summary: This is the history and almost everything else you could want to know (or not know) about cod. I mean cod as in fish not Call of Duty (sorry). Kurlansky explores the start of fishing cod and how the fleets fishing them evolved over time. Narratives of struggling fishermen and successful businessmen are woven into this fact filled book. There's not much about the science of fish or genetics so I was sad.

Cod is beautifully written and thoroughly researched. Truly Kurlansky has done an amazing job with this book. He manages to weave in narratives through most of the book; however, it wasn't enough for me. I read this for a class and a lot of my classmates liked this. They enjoyed the subtle humor and random tidbits of information about cod.

I was occasionally amused by this book, but mostly because of present day connections. At one point Kurlansky explains how sterling became a term for the British and that it means of assured value. I laughed since the British sterling has stupendously dropped after the UK left the European Union. Other things I found interesting were the origins of certain words and how cod means different things all across the globe.

There is a wealth of information in this book and I know some people will like it or completely love it. That being said, I am not one of those people. I don't even like to eat plain fish. The only seafood I eat is fish

sticks and I hardly eat those. This book comes with a bunch of traditional fish recipes and they are cool, but I can't bring myself to look at them because it turns my stomach too much.

Overall, I was extremely bored by this book and I really tried to keep an open mind since it's my second time reading it. It didn't work, I was still bored. However, I don't hate the book like I did in high school and I can appreciate the work Kurlansky put into this. So if you like fish or want to learn about fish and economies, you'll probably like this book way more than I did.

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### **Samantha says**

I got stuck with this book for AP European History book report #2. I got to chose last in the class from the book list, and so... Cod.

I actually kinda liked it at the time. It was short, humorous at times, but went a little above and beyond with the fish so that the world turned and society advanced all thanks to Cod. Kinda made Cod look like God. I actually suggested this book to the school librarian who was a family friend, for her to read on the way to her vacation. She came back and told me that it was the worst book she has ever read. "It was soooo boring.... ugh... I can't believe them made you read this...."

She retired the next year. probably not because of the cod... or ....?!

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### **Ngolana says**

While one would think a book entirely devoted to codfish would enervate, if not actually annoy, in fact this work is a fascinating examination of the human tendency to greed as played out on a global scale. This is easily equal in quality and complexity, to my mind, with a novel by Dostoevsky, for instance. It follows the trail of guilt and rapacity from early times to today's sad, inadequate harvest and is witty in to the bargain. A great read.

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