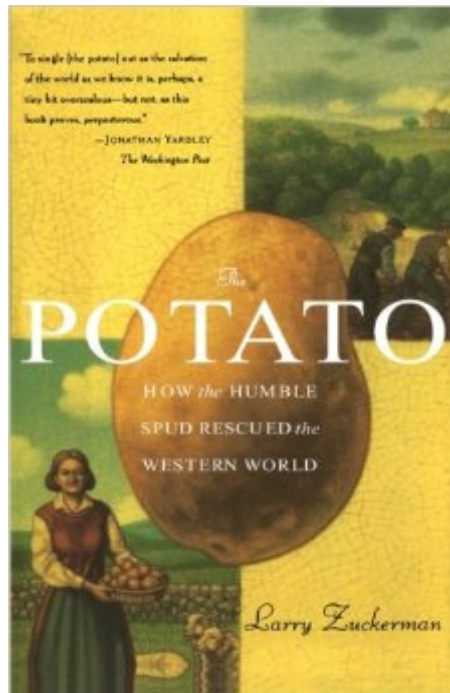


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The Potato: How The Humble Spud Rescued The Western World



Synopsis

The Potato tells the story of how a humble vegetable, once regarded as trash food, had as revolutionary an impact on Western history as the railroad or the automobile. Using Ireland, England, France, and the United States as examples, Larry Zuckerman shows how daily life from the 1770s until World War I would have been unrecognizable-perhaps impossible-without the potato, which functioned as fast food, famine insurance, fuel and labor saver, budget stretcher, and bank loan, as well as delicacy. Drawing on personal diaries, contemporaneous newspaper accounts, and other primary sources, this is popular social history at its liveliest and most illuminating.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Don't let the corny (ouch!) title put you off: this is a serious look at the historical place of the potato in England, Ireland, France and the United States. And if you are concerned that 271 pages on the "humble spud" might put you into a stupor, you might breathe easier when you know that Mr. Zuckerman uses the potato as a starting point to examine lots of other stuff: class distinctions; agricultural landlords and tenant farmers; urbanization; women and domestic drudgery; the role of bread (ouch again!) vs. the role of the potato, etc. Mr. Zuckerman even finds the time, near the end of the book, to incorporate some philosophical musings on the positive and negative aspects of "fast-food" and its relationship to our "hurry-up society." To me, one of the best things about the book was the multi-cultural approach: it was interesting to see how much more quickly the potato

caught-on in the United States than it did in France, England and Ireland (where the centuries-old custom of strict reliance on bread had to be overcome). Another interesting thing to read about was the amazement of foreign visitors concerning the variety of the American diet. We tend to forget that in Europe, in the period this book primarily deals with (1700-1900), the average person lived on bread, porridge, and soup. (One of the many interesting facts presented in this book is that up until almost 1900 most French peasants had a morning bowl of soup rather than a cup of coffee.) You were indeed fortunate if you had meat, milk, butter, eggs, coffee, etc. Even if a peasant farmer owned a cow, pig, or chicken, quite often the food products the animals supplied had to be sold, to provide some much-needed cash.

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