



Fifty Foods That Changed the Course of History

Bill Price

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Food plays a central role in our lives: it is a necessity for all of us, a pleasure for many and an obsession for a few. Throughout our history, we have shaped the foods we eat, but, in *Fifty Foods That Changed the Course of History*, we look at how it has shaped us by discussing fifty different foodstuffs which have, in one way or another, changed the world. We begin with our ancient ancestors, the hunters and gatherers who first migrated into Europe 45,000 years ago, and continue right up to the present day, to the food riots which swept through many countries in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, and then on into the future by discussing the potential of golden rice, the first genetically modified food developed for the good of humanity rather than solely for profit. In between, we look at, among others, how the trade in olive oil in Ancient Greece had a dramatic impact on its landscape, still apparent today, and how the European taste for sugar in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries drove the transatlantic slave trade. Over the course of our journey through the history of food, we also take in the Hanseatic League, a Medieval forerunner of the European Union, which first began to develop because of the salted herring, and the gin craze in Georgian London, an outbreak of public drunkenness compared by some historians to the drug addictions of today. Then we move on to discuss how an Austrian ban on the import of pork from Serbia in 1906 was involved in the outbreak of the First World War, before getting right back up to date by considering the cultural impact of the Big Mac around the world. By taking examples from across such a wide stretch of history and from numerous different cultures and societies, what emerges is a portrait of the enormous influence food has had on our history. It not only sustains us, but has played a central role in the way we live our lives, as it will no doubt continue to do in the future. If it is true to say that we are what we eat, then the examples described here, of fifty foods that changed the course of history, show us that it is equally the case that what we eat makes us who we are.

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