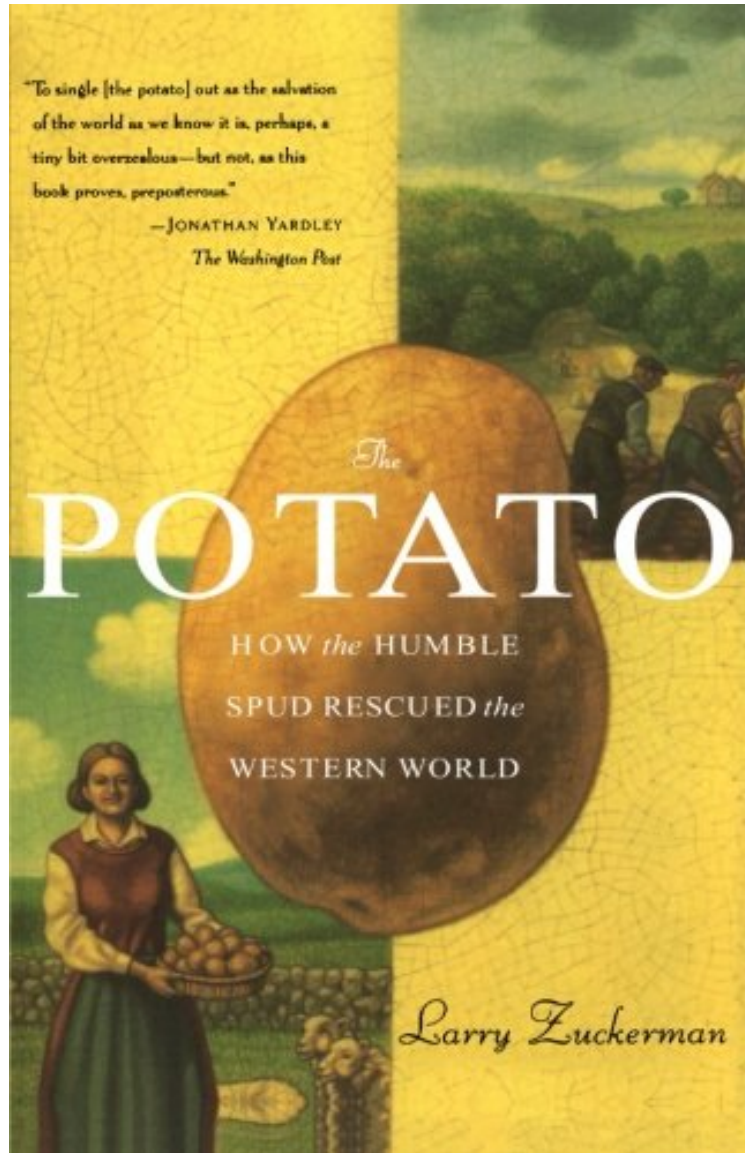


(Download) The Potato: How the Humble Spud Rescued the Western World

## The Potato: How the Humble Spud Rescued the Western World

Larry Zuckerman

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**Larry Zuckerman : The Potato: How the Humble Spud Rescued the Western World** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Potato: How the Humble Spud Rescued the Western World:

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Interesting but spotty in coverage. Not comprehensive. By Paul Eckler "Potato: How the Humble Spud Rescued the Western World," by Larry Zuckerman, North Point Press, NY, 1998. This 320 p. paperback tells the story of the potato, but the focus is the Irish potato famine of the late 1840s. The

potato was discovered by the Spanish in South America in 1537, but was not adopted in Europe until the late 18th Century. The book contrasts the spread of potato cultivation in Ireland, Britain, France and the USA. The potato was especially well adapted to the Irish climate, where the poor often farmed a typical 5 acre plot. High productivity favored potato growing. Six tons of potatoes would support a family of six for a year. High rents and absentee landlords squeezed the poor. Population growth, large families, and early marriage contributed to the problem. The population was dependent on potatoes. When potato blight struck (1845-49), millions starved. A simultaneous cholera epidemic added to the disaster. The population in Ireland fell by half. In 1883, a mixture of copper sulfate and lime proved an effective fungicide that controlled potato blight. The Penalty Laws which blocked land ownership are mentioned, but the book does not mention the suspension of the laws of primogenitor, which caused farms to be divided into ever smaller plots. Zuckerman dismisses the Corn Laws, supporting high grain prices, as symbolic. These laws suggest the British intended to starve Irish Catholics. (Meanwhile, high spirited American colonists went to war over taxes on their tea.) In England, class differentials labeled root crops, including the potato, as food for animals or the poor. Along with the tomato, also of the nightshade family, both were thought to be poisonous. Meat was the traditional food, and meat sauces made with animal fats were popular. The "meat and potato" diet came about only slowly, but potatoes appear in some reports in mid-18th Century. That seemed to correlate with the construction of canals making wider distribution of bulky products practical. Potatoes were generally accepted by all classes by 1795, as an important auxiliary to bread. Baked potatoes were sold on the streets of London beginning in the 1820s. They were sometimes purchased as hand warmers in winter. In France, the potato was initially regarded with disgust. Grain was preferred. Parmentier promoted growing potatoes. He had been a prisoner of the Prussians during the Seven Years War (1756-63), and survived on a diet of potatoes. After failure of the French grain crop in 1788, Louis XIV had a pamphlet on potato cultivation distributed. After more resistance, potato cultivation finally took hold in the time of Napoleon (early 1800s). In the US, Irish potatoes were known by the 1760s, but reports easily confuse them with Spanish potatoes, i.e., sweet potatoes and yams. Although some were reported earlier, they may have been popularized by the Irish who fled the potato famine. Other immigrants such as the Scots may have contributed to their acceptance. The book includes an extensive discussion of American rural diet focusing on corn and salt pork or bacon, but with no mention of the kitchen garden. There is no mention of Burpees (from 1876) or Gurney's, traditional purveyors of garden seeds. Eventually the Burbank potato became the Russet. The potato chip was invented in Saratoga Springs, NY, in 1850. It was supplied commercially in barrels beginning in 1895, and in wax paper bags beginning in the 1930s. French fries (or pommes frites) originated in France around 1870. The story of their importation to the US is omitted. (World War I GI's brought them back from Belgium where they were served with mayonnaise.) The story of J.R. Simplot, developer of dehydrated potatoes, instant mashed potatoes, and frozen French fries, is omitted. Fish and chips began in England in about 1900. Their popularity signified the acceptance of fresh fish in the working class diet. Zuckerman tells parts of the story of the potato quite well, but coverage is spotty. Much of the story of the discovery, transportation to Europe, and gradual acceptance is missing. The book seems to jump to the middle of the story--its acceptance in Ireland contrasted with other parts of Northern Europe. Yet, the potato first arrived in Southern Europe. The book tells a compelling story, but the depth of the research seems inconsistent. One suspects other books are more complete. Notes, bibliography, index.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.  
Five Stars  
By Peter G  
Easy read, good book.  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.  
Potato Diaries  
By Sathari Singh  
Cool book on history of the potato--a different way to look at history worth a read. Relaxing and full of keen info.

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.

.com During the 17th and 18th centuries, the potato was berated, feared, and loathed. It was blamed for everything from population explosions to population implosions, not to mention social upheaval and financial despair. Yet now, with the luxury of hindsight, Larry Zuckerman regards the potato as a saving grace for Western civilization, a crop that protected populations from starvation, encouraged self-sufficiency, and improved the lives of ordinary people. The potato's roller-coaster journey from dreary boiled peasant food into the most widely consumed vegetable on the planet is chronicled in this refreshing history lesson. The Potato goes way beyond the usual scope of spud history, which commonly focuses on the Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s. Although this disaster is a key event in the book, the potato's broader influence in the Western world was far more complex--changing the shape of agrarian societies, triggering world emigration, and even influencing social-welfare reforms. Snippets from journals, newspaper editorials, and government documents make this a convincing and fascinating glimpse of four centuries' worth of a vegetable to which we normally wouldn't give a second thought. --Naomi Gesinger Thorough and lively....Zuckerman

is an excellent storyteller, both conscientious and colloquial....The book stimulates and illuminates. Emily Gordon, Newsday  
The story of the potato in Western civilization is part of the history of the table, of living conditions, of social attitudes, and even of views of heredity and degeneration. Zuckerman's exploration of these areas without losing his grip on the tuber is masterful, executed with economy and wit. Katherine A. Powers, The Boston Sunday Globe  
From the Back Cover  
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.