



The Taste of Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World

Lizzie Collingham

Download now

Read Online →

The Taste of Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World

Lizzie Collingham

The Taste of Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World Lizzie Collingham

A history of the British Empire told through twenty meals eaten around the world

In *The Taste of Empire*, acclaimed historian Lizzie Collingham tells the story of how the British Empire's quest for food shaped the modern world. Told through twenty meals over the course of 450 years, from the Far East to the New World, Collingham explains how Africans taught Americans how to grow rice, how the East India Company turned opium into tea, and how Americans became the best-fed people in the world. In *The Taste of Empire*, Collingham masterfully shows that only by examining the history of Great Britain's global food system, from sixteenth-century Newfoundland fisheries to our present-day eating habits, can we fully understand our capitalist economy and its role in making our modern diets.

The Taste of Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World Details

Date : Published October 3rd 2017 by Basic Books

ISBN :

Author : Lizzie Collingham

Format : Kindle Edition 408 pages

Genre : History, Food and Drink, Food, Nonfiction, Audiobook

 [Download The Taste of Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Taste of Empire: How Britain's Quest for Foo ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Taste of Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World Lizzie Collingham

From Reader Review The Taste of Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World for online ebook

Jackson Cyril says

An interesting, if not particularly demanding read. Collingham tells us about the role the British empire played in creating so many of the foods we so love-- and the ways in which food relations shaped political and cultural affairs.

MaryJo Hansen says

Very detailed exploration of the history of food and it's importance in shaping the British empire and also how trading and colonization within the empire are responsible for the foods we eat today. I liked the way the author started each chapter with a description of a specific person or family's meal in a certain time and place, then going on to describe how they came to eat that and where that food came from. She did this for each era, starting in 1545 and moving to the 20th century, not always in a linear fashion. Very well-researched and interesting story.

Sara says

Oof. Bit of a slog, this.

Shannon Vincent Nelson says

What a fascinating book! The Taste of Empire does so much more than just describing the food consumption of Britain but also gives really interesting information about culture, politics, and history. Organized by describing 20 different meals, the book describes the expansion of Britain from a single island to an empire that spanned the globe.

I learned many interesting things about specific food items and their origin and popularity as well as how these individual items played a role in the development of Britain throughout the centuries. Collingham does a really good job as well of explaining the consequences of colonialism without moralizing which paints a clearer (and really more horrifying) picture.

Paul says

This is exactly the kind of thing I really love, books like this, *Salt: A World History* and *Consider the Fork* are sweeping world food histories that give you a lot of information about the way humanity's diet has changed over time. As I was getting to the end of this book, I realized that the particular recipes for a dish and the things we eat over time change not unlike the way language changes. Hearing the history of a dish is not that different from hearing the etymology of a word - and i really like learning etymologies.

This book contains a lot of these "dish etymologies" fit into the grander narrative of the British empire. I suspect that even without the colonial aspects the story wouldn't be terribly difficult because it's *really* the story of the globalization that's been happening since the 16th and 17th centuries (driven in large part by colonization, true) and how it's affected the diets of those in the former British empire. Needless to say it's more than just explaining the fact that the British eat a lot of curries.

Ron says

A very readable and interesting history book that examines the way that Britain's international reach influenced its food economy, from the earliest colonial efforts in the New World to the tea and opium trade and beyond. It is another study of the long history of international trade and the globalization of the economy, which nowadays we think of as something recent and troublesome. For the Brits, international trade in sugar, for instance, and tea, provided dietary improvement and social cohesion. It also encouraged the slave trade, and then later, after abolition, the importation of indentured workers from India to continue the hard work of sugar cultivation and production. But the author claims it was rum that provided the social grease that stimulated the American colonies to join together to rebel. The desire to make every foreign posting of the Empire into little England did much to undermine local cuisine and to convert indigenous diets into choking down standard British grub--although curry (eventually in a rather diluted form) became almost a British national dish.

A well organized, and always interesting discussion, each chapter starting with a narrative of a typical meal somewhere in the world that related to various food imports into the British diet, at home and abroad. I will remember the long discussion of sugar, slavery and the way that sugar energy fueled the working classes (bread and treacle) for decades. I will remember the importance of the U.S. to British wheat imports. I will remember how British food tastes undermined native diets in Africa and Asia. I will remember how the spread of the Empire, with its dependence on shipping, fueled the growth of the canned and processed food industries.

John Newton says

All those books out there that attempt to tell the history of the world through one commodity—be it cod, sugar, salt, etc.—can feel forced and exhausting at moments. My energy sometimes flags about 80 percent of the way through them, when I feel like I have read all I ever want to read about, say, cotton. This book's structure is an appealingly different approach, as Collingham jumps among the ingredients of the British table: cod and sugar are represented, but so are tea, maize, lamb, wheat. Her book is structured around a number of particular meals in history, but then she uses them as jumping off points to reflect on particular aspects of the histories of both the British empire and the foods we eat.

Each chapter includes a recipe for one of the dishes served in the meal that she uses as the jumping off point for each chapter. It's a cute conceit, though it didn't especially work for me. The recipes are not detailed enough to be recreated at home nor interesting as artifacts of their periods. I found myself soon skipping over the recipes without a glance.

I wasn't reading this book with a pencil in hand, pad of paper nearby, and wasn't fact-checking it as I went along, but two mistakes struck me—Maryland being described (along with Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and the colony of New Haven) as a neighbor of Massachusetts; ships departing from San Francisco in the 1880s being described as sailing "under" the Golden Gate. These are minor details, but it does make me wonder what Collingham got wrong in other sections. (If I caught errors when she was writing about

America, there could be similar ones in her sections about Australia, Ireland, Africa, that I wouldn't catch.) Perhaps it would be worth double-checking her work before citing it somewhere, but as an enjoyable read that explains how the British empire shaped our eating habits (even those of Americans, one degree removed from Collingham's subject), it's an enjoyable and engaging read.

Abhishek Kona says

A very detailed book about how food shaped the British empire and in turn the modern world. The book is refreshingly critical of the blatant profit mongering of individuals in the British empire.

The book is nicely organized into individual meals.

The recipes provided in the chapters are useless, perhaps even annoying.

The book left me seething with anger about the British empire and how Britain got a free pass for all its sins.

Ritu says

I had trouble finishing this book as it read closer to text book. I wanted to scan the book more than actually reading it. Some of the spelled out recipes were interesting and worth trying

Natasha says

I've always been interested in the exchange of new and old world foods and how they became ingrained in different cultures cuisines and this book covers so much of that and more! Reading this really drove home how little people know about this history of food and how it shaped our world, for instance how globalization of food supply has been in practice for nearly 400 years. I also appreciate that she does not hold back in describing the atrocities that occurred to make this happen. First half of the book was more exciting for me than the second half for me, but in terms of non-fiction I appreciated that she was able to keep things relatively concise without being too much of a repeat. Definitely recommend for anyone who's interested in food systems.

Kelsey Shankle says

If you enjoy history and food, you'll enjoy this book. It was very interesting to read details on how Britain's years of empire shaped the palates of both it's colonies and itself. There is some very honest discussions as well on how these empirical leanings led to malnutrition in many countries, racist ideology of the time regarding "acceptable" agricultural practices, and even Britain's failure to care for it's own poor beyond providing cheap calories for hard labor rather than nourishment (unexpectedly leading to the modern British essential of tea and sugar.)

The examples of recipes contemporary with the time sprinkled throughout also provide insight into the habits described (but no, most are not actually practical to cook now.)

Bookworm says

The book sounded very intriguing: how food relates to the British Empire and how that has affected our eating habits and diet to this very day. Stuff like tea was already a topic I knew about but fish? How food from the colonies affected the diets of the residents of the Empire?

Unfortunately, it's not so much. Each chapter looks at a food stuff or concept and the time period where it was discovered or became popular or highly used for some purpose, etc. It's fairly formulaic in its approach, which is fine. But the writing is tough to get through. As a concept it's fascinating: the food, the history, the ramifications (good and bad), etc. But it reads like a thesis and it's sad because it definitely made me think of these foods/concepts differently.

Definitely a good read if you're into the politics of food, general food history, the British Empire, etc. I would recommend borrowing it from the library, though.

There are recipes and some pictures, but it's not a cookbook.

Laura McNeal says

Sometimes (or really every single minute) when I'm reading the news I think, "Why is the world like this?" This question may also occur to you when you're staring at bags of cherries in the grocery store, and all of them have a sticker on them that says, "Grown in Chile." Or when you're at the Korean grocery store in suburban San Diego looking at shrimp caught in Thailand and you mentally count the miles and hours (inaccurately, in my case, but with vague unease). Basically this book, each chapter of which begins with the description of an actual meal served somewhere on earth to people who had, in most cases, left their home continents for far off places, tells you in the most vivid terms why we eat and drink the way we do, and what's more, makes you see that it was not greed, always, that motivated global trade. It was hunger and the desire for small, familiar comforts. The titles of the chapters set the tone: "In which it is fish day on the Mary Rose, anchored in Portsmouth harbour (Saturday 18 July 1545): How the trade in Newfoundland salt cod laid the foundations of Empire." Collingham's breadth and depth is truly astonishing, with subsequent chapters set in Ireland (1698), New England (1647), Barbados (1640), the west coast of Africa (1686), and Covent Garden (1667). And that's just part one. The other chapters feed and sail you through the centuries, meal after meal, tea cup after tea cup, turning huge trade swings into the stories of people just like us who had dinner to make and work to finish and who--like us--turned to sugar and wheat all too often.

Bev says

So much information about the impact of foods from various parts of the world coming to be part of Britain's common experience, creating economic and social bonds between widely separated countries. Some were already familiar, but many were a surprise and illustrated how centuries of trading has created the world we now live in. A thoroughly researched and footnoted study.

Sue says

What a delightful and original way to sidle into history, with stories of food, entertaining on the surface and revealing in the depths.

Lizzie Collingham has written a deeply-researched and lively account of the role of food, and the pursuit of new foods, in changing the global economy, beginning in the sixteenth century with salt cod, which was produced on the shores of Newfoundland as a portable food for British sailors. Salt cod soon became part of a trade route, traveling from Newfoundland in British merchant ships to the Mediterranean, traded for wine, olive oil, and currants to take back to England.

From there Collingham moves forward through twenty such stories (West Indian sugar, Carolina rice, China tea) toward a concluding section that soberly examines the ways in which the colonial empire fed the mother country, especially during World War II, often to the sacrifice of the colony. (Churchill does not come off well.) Though her conclusions are indeed serious, Collingham relishes the joy in food and in the pursuit of pleasure over four centuries.

The stories are often fun, and each of the twenty chapters begins with the story of a meal. We learn from a 17th-century New England cottage that has no table but serves a satisfying meal; from a tea party in a Manchester slum that illustrates a diet lacking in nutrients; from a British soldier's meal in North Africa during World War II, its mostly tinned components from all over the Empire.

And we thought mangoes from Chile were a new phenomenon?

The revered Christmas pudding is a child's geography lesson, with spices and fruits from every continent, and it becomes a touchstone for this story. We may cringe at the cruelties of the often rapacious trade, but we can enjoy the cast of characters who prepare and eat the meals. Such is Collingham's skill that I will remember both.
