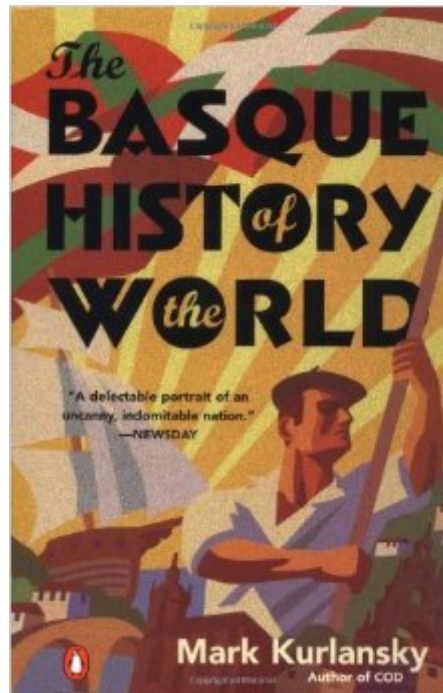


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The Basque History Of The World: The Story Of A Nation



Synopsis

From Mark Kurlansky, the bestselling author of *Cod*, *Salt*, *Birdseye*, and *Paper*—the illuminating story of an ancient and enigmatic people straddling a small corner of Spain and France in a land that is marked on no maps except their own, the Basques are a puzzling contradiction—they are Europe’s oldest nation without ever having been a country. No one has ever been able to determine their origins, and even the Basques’ language, Euskera—the most ancient in Europe—is related to none other on earth. For centuries, their influence has been felt in nearly every realm, from religion to sports to commerce. Even today, the Basques are enjoying what may be the most important cultural renaissance in their long existence, as displayed by new cookbooks like chefs Alexandra Raj and Eder Montero’s *The Basque Book* and restaurateur Jose Pizarro’s *Basque*. Mark Kurlansky’s passion for the Basque people and his exuberant eye for detail shine throughout this fascinating book. Like *Cod*, *The Basque History of the World*, blends human stories with economic, political, literary, and culinary history into a rich and heroic tale. Among the Basques’ greatest accomplishments: Exploration—the first man to circumnavigate the globe, Juan Sebastian de Elcano, was a Basque and the Basques were the second Europeans, after the Vikings, in North America; Gastronomy and agriculture—they were the first Europeans to eat corn and chili peppers and cultivate tobacco, and were among the first to use chocolate; Religion—Ignatius Loyola, a Basque, founded the Jesuit religious order; Business and politics—they introduced capitalism and modern commercial banking to southern Europe; Recreation—they invented beach resorts, jai alai, and racing regattas, and were the first Europeans to play sports with balls—a delectable portrait of an uncanny, indomitable nation. • “Newsday” Exciting, illuminating, and thought provoking. • “The Boston Globe” Entertaining and instructive | [Kurlansky’s] approach is unorthodox, mixing history with anecdotes, poems with recipes. • “The New York Times Book Review

Book Information

Paperback: 400 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (February 1, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140298517

ISBN-13: 978-0140298512

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.7 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (170 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #36,262 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #43 in [Books > History > Europe > France](#) #48 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Europe](#) #461 in [Books > Textbooks > Reference](#)

Customer Reviews

I've always been interested in basque culture and language, have even tried to learn euskera on my own. That said, I also am very interested in spanish culture (castilian, galician, catalan etc.) as such and have lived in Madrid for a while. I found this book very readable and hard to put down, Kurlansky has a knack for presenting the material in an entertaining and readable fashion without getting stylistically bland. Despite that, I have some gripes with it. Kurlansky is obviously a journalist and writes the book as such, but I for one would have wanted more of a historians account. His choice of not using footnotes or endnotes, but just supplying a general bibliography at the end, is very annoying, because that way he is able to put down statements without backing them up. I even found one wrong statement, that basque ships had been sighted in Iceland in 1412. That's wrong, these ships were english, ushering in what is called the English Age in icelandic history (basques didn't arrive in Iceland until the end of the 16th. century, there are at least no accounts available of earlier encounters). Kurlansky is not the only one guilty of making this mistake, but if he would have dug a bit further he would have found out the truth. So it goes to show, if he trusted his sources so blindly in this case, what else is inaccurate there? Again, the use of footnotes/endnotes would have solved this, as one would have been able to verify each statement. Kurlansky is also quite romantic, and even if he tries to criticize when criticism is due, it's quite obvious that his sympathy lies with the basques. This mix works quite well in the earlier chapters on prehistory, but not as well when he talks about the political situation today.

Kurlansky has written a brilliant introduction to a mysterious people. It is also a timely one, although not universally popular considering its rather lax treatment of ETA violence. Kurlansky does perhaps harbour sympathies for the Basque people and even for the most extreme of their nationalist tendencies, but he does not let this completely cloud his judgment, and it is not entirely clear that Kurlansky "takes sides" or endorses one course of action or another. I can see why it would be easy to become so attached to the Basques and their culture, their language, and the ongoing fight they have pursued in order to keep these fundamentals of who they are intact. People deserve to keep their history, heritage, language, and cuisine, and the Basques have a long, rich, and

misunderstood history which deserves the kind of recognition Kurlansky's book brings to their cause, wherever Kurlansky's personal sympathies lie. I felt that Kurlansky presented basically unbiased information, particularly about the history of the Basques in centuries past. The book is filled with revelations about this formidable and fascinating culture, and I feel that these kinds of explorations in Kurlansky's research and writing dominated this work much more so than current political issues or separatist violence. Sure, it is easy enough for me to say this, completely isolated from the violence and the everyday problems these tense relations may create, but I can say that there are groups in the world who are routinely terrorized by other groups without provocation. (Perhaps "terrorized" is not the ideal word choice because I do not see a reign of terror in the making. I do see that some people may perceive the unrest as such depending on their vantage point).

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