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Posted on 17 January 2019 By Peter Chapman

READ BOOK ? Bananas!: How The United Fruit Company Shaped the World

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This is a must read for those interested in the history of Central America, because it traces The company s history from start to finish and in the process profiles the entire course of US government intervention in the area during the 20th century, revealing details and interconnections you won t find when reading the histories of the individual affected countries Where else would you find out the the same Howard Hunt who in the 1970 s masterminded the Watergate break in that caused President Nixon to declare I am not a crook was the much younger man who in 1954 masterminded for the CIA the overthrow of Guatemala s President Arbenz That episode is deliciously told Having said that, I can t say I feel the same enthusiasm for this book as the reviewers quoted on the back cover What turns one off is the snarky way in which the tale is told, the derisive way in which he describes the events and the people involved The reader can easily skip the Epilogue, which takes up than 15 pages to point out the similarity that the interests and ideologies that supported the United FruitCo are very much the ones that now support globalization In both cases we the people are being led to believe that our prosperity and well being depends on giving free rein to these these monopolistic powerful multinationals whereas in fact, they feed corruption while exploring and pillaging everything around them which as you ll get to see, is pretty much the story of the United Fruit Company. Bananas How The United Fruit Company Shaped The World follows from inauspicious birth to heyday a corporation so powerful it orchestrated coups against unfriendly governments It invented Seniorita Chiquita Banana The book overreaches in saying it s a United Fruit World , though UF had huge impact in the early 20th Century, introducing the banana to the world, standardizing bananas, and transforming huge swaths of Central American jungle to plantations via its banana boats , railroads, ports and company towns The term Banana Republic specifically refers to the tiny, corrupt Central American nations on the UF payroll. This book has an understandably strong anti UF tilt, but the author makes attempts at even handedness, allowing for the corporation s technological advances, the fact it was the largest employer in Central America because it paid better than the workers could earn elsewhere, and it did some charitable works, especially in locating and restoring Mayan ruins Some of its company towns still exist and it brought electricity and communications Though bananas are cheap and plentiful today, the United States and Europe had hardly seen the exotic fruit, which rots quickly, before the unlikely pairing of small time but audacious businessmen, expat Minor Keith and a New Orleans banana trader, the Russian born Jew Samuel Zemurray Tiny Costa Rica, with barely 100,000 residents, wanted a railroad and after several failed attempts, President Guardia approached the trader Minor Keith about government money in exchange for a completed railroad from the capital to the sea Keith agreed with the caveat that, like US land grant railroads, he be given jungle lands along the

tracks The railroad was built and after a few tries at different uses, Keith settled upon banana production in the adjacent lands He also married President Guardia s daughter, cementing a United Fruit Costa Rican alliance that would last for decades. Bananas grew wild in small numbers in malarial jungle swamps United Fruit settled on a specific breed of banana the Big Mike , grew fantastic quantities through modern agriculture, and revolutionized distribution with faster boats and refrigerated rail cars Ever larger plantations were developed and workers were shipped in from Jamaica, Italy and even China The banana caught the fancy of the burgeoning American consumer and today, the banana is the world s fourth most popular staple. That said, by no means is this a banal corporate history The tone is highly critical The UF tolerated no dissent and stifled unionization attempts The company successfully dodged taxes and worked sweetheart deals by taking advantage of the Latin American tradition of the mordida , the bribe to a public official At its most nefarious, a democratically elected government like Guatemala s in 1954, which was confiscating some UFW land, could be brought down by funding and supplying rebels or even arming company employees At Santa Marta, the UF leaned on the Colombian government to break a strike, which its Army did via the machine gun Author Peter Chapman notes this incident is the inspiration for the fictionalized account in the Maconda of Gabriel Garcia Marquez s One Hundred Years of Solitude. This book is brief at 208 pages, which makes it a quick read, though it leaves information out I d have appreciated Chapman mentions death squads but has no details, leaving the reader to surmise UF probably encouraged, if not directly ordered, some of the military dictatorships vile deeds I understand some artifacts of the population and cultural transfers e.g American baseball, Afro Caribbean music were left in UF s wake, although this book s brevity means these were omitted The focus is on the Central American Banana Republics and Cuba with UF operations in the rest of the Caribbean, Colombia and Ecuador receiving only passing mention UF was one of Castro s revolutionary justifications and it responded by supplying two of the seven ships used in the ill fated Bay of Pigs invasion The author writes in a sarcastic, almost whimsical way Sometimes this is quite funny At times, it s inappropriate I had to read pg 159 160 twice because Chapman speculates UF might have been involved in JFK s assassination, going into a paragraph of hypothetical reasons why and a few coincidences that d make any Grassy Knoll conspiracy theorist proud I assume it is a tongue in cheek joke, but it s irresponsible because these Dallas conspiracy musings were printed in a history book. I enjoyed the read, even if Chapman goes overboard at times 3.5 stars.

READ BOOK ? Bananas!: How The United Fruit Company Shaped the World ? If You Only Read A Handful Of Nonfiction Books This Year, Bananas is Among Your Recommended Five Portions The Observer In This Gripping Exploration Of Corporate Manuevering And Subterfuge, Peter Chapman Shows How The Importer United Fruit Set The Precedent For The Institutionalized Power And Influence Of Today S Multinational Companies Bananas is A Sharp And Lively Account Of The Rise And Fall Of This Infamous

Company, Arguably The Most Controversial Global Corporation Ever From The Jungles Of Costa Rica To The Dramatic Suicide Of Its CEO, Who Leapt From An Office On The Forty Fourth Floor Of The Pan Am Building In New York City From The Marketing Of The Banana As The First Fast Food, To The Company S Involvement In An Invasion Of Honduras, The Bay Of Pigs Crisis, And A Bloody Coup In Guatemala, Chapman Weaves A Dramatic Tale Of Big Business, Political Deceit, And Outright Violence To Show How One Company Wreaked Havoc In The Banana Republics Of Central America, And How Terrifyingly Similar The Age Of United Fruit Is To Our Age Of Rapid Globalization Disturbing history of the United Fruit Company from slave traders to CIA collusion in creating many of our modern crises arguably a prime contributor to the illegal immigration problem we face now Worth reading thought provoking. didn t know anything about the united fruit company the prototype for the modern multinational corporation, or about the history of bananas for that matter, but it made for pretty interesting reading Moved quickly, taught me a lot in training for jeopardy, gave a really good understanding of some of the central american dynamics under Big Banana, etc. As other reviewers have suggested, the book is fairly short and Chapman is not the world s most enthralling narrative writer But I really enjoyed the fairly crazy way that the united fruit company dominated several countries for a century and then, basically, blew up I particularly liked the history of the banana trade, and how UFC was an anachronistic holdover from the early periods of modern imperialism in latin america by the end of its period of dominance In particular, I appreciated how we have, as a culture, embraced the erasure of the role of american capitalism in destroying latin america by using the term banana republic to mock the countries, when it was an extremely serious problem for them that the US made sure they could not overcome Chapman gets a bit preachy at times, but this is one of those stories where both sides, told clearly, show some sides of imperial capitalism that are extremely uncomfortable. I learned a lot I didn t know about the history of US involvement in Central America at the beginning of the last century But I thought the overall treatment was unsatisfyingly superficial Would have liked intellectual rigor. The book I read was called Bananas How The United Fruit Company Shaped the World, it was written by Peter Chapman The book was published January 21st, 2008 The book s main idea is about the empire CEO, Eli M Black had created when he purchased the United Brands Fruit company The book mentions how the simple importation of the, banana, can set the market on fire and how his business just boomed It mentions how he started and how his company had started, later in the book it focused on economics and business later in the book which I found very boring In my opinion the first half of the book was alright but the other half had just gotten so boring to read, I was expecting something a bit exciting but all I got was numbers, business, economics, and government Also, just the statistical part of the running a company, unless you re interested in books about the same topic I suggest you read it, but this wasn t a good book for me This book has a lot of decent examples, one I remember is near the beginning where it foreshadows the fall of the CEO

and his company. The story details him going into the 44th story of the Pan Am building and him jumping. When I read this I thought about, what had to have happened for his business to fail completely and what had to happen for him to jump. Another word that I kept seeing repeatedly is Banana Republic, near the first couple of new paragraphs the author mentions Banana Republic, for the actual definition it was made for and not what it was modernized too. When they mentioned this name I did my own research and found that it's when a nation or small state specializes in growing and exporting Bananas. The book also loves to mention how simple the Banana can completely change the way the US market can change in a good way. Overall, this book isn't for me. I didn't necessarily enjoy it, but at the same time it was alright, in the sense that it teaches a lesson on the inside of running a company. Eli M. Black basically introduced the banana to the US market and how big of a payout he can make from it. From a rating standpoint, I'd give it a 2.5/5, it wasn't the greatest, at times I was bored of the book, but it was an eye opener to say the least. I'd give it a thumbs down, like I said wasn't the book for me, wouldn't read again, to recommend, I'd say I would recommend to people who are interested in the business aspect or wanting to start some type of company business or people who want to know about the earlier decades of economics in US and how something of a simple idea can change the market entirely. Closing thoughts, I'd say nothing else, as the book wasn't a good one in my opinion. This is a quick read and good overview of a company that had outsized influence in Central America. In a depressingly familiar scenario, it recounts how US capitalist interests lead to interference in, manipulation, and control of the affairs of weaker nations. This is not an in-depth history, but rather a breezy summary that may not be well nuanced. But Chapman makes a strong case that the practices of United Fruit, and its government connections, served as the model and precedent for international corporate interests and practices today. The book reads like a novel and includes shadowy events and characters including Howard Hunt, John Foster and Allen Dulles who were early United Fruit employees, Joseph McCarthy, Carmen Miranda, the overthrow of the liberal Guatemalan government in 1954, Che Guevara who became radicalized in the Guatemala fight, and the Bay of Pigs invasion which United Fruit supported with ships. United Fruit prevailed over a capitalist focused disease-ridden banana monoculture which decimated Central American plantations, until its last leader leaped from the Pan Am Building in 1975. It's quite a story. The author has been a correspondent for the BBC and The Guardian in Central America. I really enjoyed the earlier chapters that dealt with the swashbuckling beginnings of the banana industry and the United Fruit Company. He is at his best when he sticks to bananas. The book goes bad when he strays into politics and economics, which are clearly not his strength and he simply drops blanket statements with no nuance or explanation. He comes down pretty clearly in the side of free market big business, which is irritating, especially when his politics shouldn't be prominent in a nonfiction history book at all. The later chapters are much less interesting and tend to jump around a lot. He will make absurdly supportable opinions like, the stodgy

welfare society, in all its mediocrity, would be replaced by the opportunity state. It's pretty annoying that he makes huge blanket statements about really complicated economic matters in a single breezy sentence. Nuanced writers, it seems, don't use words like capitalism at all, but rather market economy. Chapman lacks this nuance. Also he drops into first person at times which is annoying. Overall, the banana parts are good, the rest is a stretch at best.



HOW THE UNITED FRUIT COMPANY
SHAPED THE WORLD



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Sloppy Firsts
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