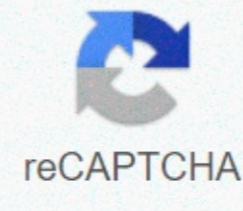




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## Us history unit 5 study guide

You're listening to one of the most famous commercial songs of all time performed by singer Patti Clayton in 1944. Patti gave voice to the animated Miss Chiquita Banana, a curvy comic in a bright red dress that balanced a fruit bowl on her head while dancing Salsa. At its peak, the Chiquita banana song was played up to 346 times a day on radio stations across America, making Ms. Chiquita a household name long before she danced to living rooms on TVs in the 1950s. In the coming decades, he would help make bananas the most popular fruit in the United States, but what Americans didn't know about happy-looking fruit with the iconic blue sticker was the upheaval it left in its wake. Today we hear from Professor Geoff Jones about his case Octopus and The Generals: The United Fruit Company in Guatemala. I'm your host, Brian Kenny, and you're listening to Cold Call, which will be recorded live at Klarman Hall Studio at Harvard Business School. Geoff Jones is a historian who studies the development, impact and responsibility of global business. He has written extensively about the business history of emerging markets in Latin America and elsewhere, but we will remain in Latin America today because that is where this case is happening. Thank you for joining me today, Geoff. It's my pleasure. It's good to have you back on the show. We've brought you here a few times before, so we'll continue to expose these cases from corporate history because there are so many lessons we can learn today about what happened in the past, so I think people really enjoy hearing about the United Fruit Company, now known as Chiquita. Many of us have bananas every day. I read a statistic that Americans eat up to 10 kilos of bananas a year. Does that sound right to you? I'm afraid it is. That's a lot of bananas. I have one a day, so I'll be a part of it. Maybe you can start, as always, by helping us open the case. How does the case start? This case starts in a very dramatic way. It is June 1954, and President Jacobo Arbenz, who was the first democratically elected president in Guatemalan history, hears news that rebel forces have attacked to oust him. Later, we hear that he is giving a speech in which he says that the United States will help overthrow his government in favour of the banana company. As a business historian, I'm curious how do you decide to write about this case? As you mentioned, my course, which I am currently teaching, deals with the rise, fall and rise and fall of globalisation, so I am always looking for key turning points and key moments. The ousting of Arbenz from cia rule was a key moment. The tortured relationship between the United States and Latin America. It symbolised and crystallized Latin America's heartburn against the orderly power of the United States. The event leads fairly directly to the Cuban Revolution five years later and decades of anti-American populism in Latin America, so it is a really important moment in the history of globalisation. Let's go back to the end of the 19th century and tell us about the origins of the United Fruit Company. It's a Boston story. United Fruit was founded in 1899 with the merger of two banana companies in Boston. Bananas are tropical fruits, so they are not grown in the continental United States, so since the mid-19th century you have these Boston guys looking for a regular supply of bananas from Central America and the Caribbean. It is a rather difficult task and they end up setting up plantations, building railways and creating shipping lines, all designed to find the source of bananas they are building in Boston and the rest of the United States. Was there a market for bananas at the time? If you go back to 1850, almost no one in the United States had even seen a banana. What were the economic conditions in Central America like at this hour? The state of Central America and Guatemala is terrible. Historically, it was home to ancient Mayan civilization, so it had once been one of the most advanced civilizations in the world. It regressed, and then, when the Spaniards seized the territory in the 16th century, they created a society in which a small white elite ruled society and the economy and ruled the descendants of the Mayans, who were in terrible conditions of poverty and illiteracy that were practically slaves. The situation worsened further at the beginning of the 19th century when the Spanish colonial regime was overthrown, and this white elite was fully established in the country's power. In the 19th century, we see a group of autoperated, corrupt dictators who rule and exploit the country. When United Fruit arrives, the dictator in question will be named Manuel Estrada. He's murderous, corrupt, brutal and crazy. He is the follower of the ancient Roman minerva cult, so in this desperately poor country he builds all these as Roman temples everywhere. He's giving the first banana concessions to United Fruit. They're already starting to overshadow it. What were the challenges they faced early on when they started starting their business? The easiest challenge is politics because there were governments in these states, but they were easily bribed and corrupt. You could get concessions if you gave them enough money, so that's okay. The much bigger challenge was logistical. Bananas are harvested when they are green, but as soon as they are picked, they begin to turn yellow when starch turns into sugar. You wait too long, and the banana is ruined, so the business depended on creating a supply chain that worked perfectly from picking bananas to delivering bananas to the United States to put it in the hands of consumers. If anything goes wrong, you'll get a lot of rotten bananas. Shipping was quite crucial, which is why United Fruit created a giant fleet of ships, the Great White Fleet, which at one point was the world's largest shipping line. The third problem was when we started talking, people didn't know what banana was, so the company has to start persuading people to eat these bananas if they can get them into it. They invest heavily in educational materials in schools, in all kinds of ways to bring bananas to people. One of the most interesting things they did is join forces with cereal company Kellogg, and they persuaded Kellogg to put pictures of bananas in their cornflakes to show people they went very well together. The message was that bananas are very healthy fruits. Just like drinking milk, eating bananas, you'd be much healthier. It works very well. It's a great marketing campaign that makes Americans eat bananas. The song we played at the top of the show is actually an educational song. He tells listeners when bananas should be eaten. Definitely. Eating bananas is not natural. People are convinced that eating bananas is a healthy, very sophisticated marketing campaign. What were the conditions at the plantation factories? Did United Fruit take care of its employees? Conditions were terrible for Guatemala's indigenous peoples even before United Fruit arrived, so United Fruit improved their conditions. They offered me an apartment. They offered me elementary school. They provided basic medical services, which was quite important because bananas are grown in malaria-infected areas. However, they did this under very restrictive conditions. For example, no money was given to employees. They were paid for in coupons, which you then had to use in the plantation. In the inter-war years, you have an increasingly militant labour movement trying to protest against such conditions. How did they do? Did they make any progress? In the postwar period, it was extremely difficult to make progress because you have brutal governments that have made all sorts of movements, especially all kinds of movements that even hint. with the Communist Party that has now emerged, so the regimes in the region fully support the United Fruit. What was the competitive environment in the banana industry? United Fruit wasn't the only player in this game. No, no, no, no. For a while, it's pretty much the only player when you get this merger between two companies in Boston, but it's an attractive business, so you get new entrances. The most important newcomer was Sam Zemurray. He's an immigrant from Russia. He sees a banana and sees the vision that it's the foundation of an incredible empire, so he starts selling bananas on a train track in New Orleans. By the 1920s, he will have made it to Honduras and founded a large plantation, becoming a huge competitor to United Fruit. The case is concentrated in Guatemala, so I was curious to read it, the banana industry sort of spread to Central America at this time, so they were in Honduras, as you mentioned, and Guatemala and other places. Why did you focus on Guatemala? It's absolutely true. United Fruit is very versatile. Some countries have legal or other restrictions that stop the ownership of United Fruit's plantations. In these countries, as in Costa Rica, for example, it buys bananas from farmers and then does everything else, all transportation. In Guatemala, its participation is much deeper. It has huge plantations. It's going to be the biggest company in the country. It owns all the infrastructure, such as trains, but also radios, communications infrastructure and shipping, accounting for 75% of the country's banana exports. Almost the only thing the country took was bananas, with the exception of small coffee, so it is a hugely dominant effect, although elsewhere it was also dominant. There's a central figure in this case. Jacobo Arbenz. I'd love it if you could talk about what led to his rise and his role in the case. Jacobo Arbenz is not one of the descended elites. His father was a Swiss immigrant who eventually commits suicide in his youth. His mother was Guatemalan, but not one of the top allies, so he does what many people do in many places. He joins the army as a way of social mobility. By the 1930s ... You could call them the urban middle class how the top-tier elite completely dominates the place. In the early 1940s, as a young captain, he participates in a military coup to oust the previous dictator. The coup was successful, and he's part of a new generation of armies trying to start Guatemala's reform process. They're making racial discrimination a crime. They legitimise trade unions and establish free and fair elections. The first is 1951, when he is a candidate and wins the vote. This is where the United States begins to interfere in ways they may not have been before in the company's history. You mentioned that the CIA is involved in a significant way. Can you talk about why the U.S. government was so concerned about political issues in Guatemala? Arbenz's central concern is to move away from the feudal nature of Guatemalan society. He wants to address land reform, so he copies the land reform imposed on Japan by the U.S., which includes expropriating unused land and giving it to peasants. It's pretty controversial. GEOFF JONES: ... a fairer society. It is unfortunate from an American perspective, because United Fruit is a leading company, but it is more regrettable that it is influenced by the Communist Party. This is at the height of the Cold War. The newly elected Eisenhower regime is at the forefront of the Cold War. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who sees the fight between the U.S. and communism as a battle between good and evil, so the United States is gradually worried that we're going to see the Communists take over the country here. On the other hand, it has to be said that Sam Zemurray and United Fruit have a strong influence on the formulation of this concern. Zemurray hires a guy named Edward Bernays, known as a public relations father, who is very important for persuading women to smoke in inter-war America, for example. He's a brilliant guy, and he's trying to use every public relations authority to convince policymakers in Washington that there's a communist takeover in the country. It was to start a fire in the minds of President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles. Did they play this in the media? These days it is clear that if something like this were to happen with the Internet and social media, it would be difficult to keep it a secret, but was this ... Was the media believed in this story at the time, or were they really trying to dig in and report on what really happened there? Bernays is a smart person. He's taking journalists on tours in Guatemala. He's a master at working with the media, so he built a very compelling case. Remember, this is the McCarthy era. This is the era of a huge era of communism. When we come to modern times, United Fruit still works. They're chiquita. What kind of legacy did they leave behind in Central America? The overthrow of Arbenz destroyed Guatemalan society. The next 50 years have been a terrible civil war. Civil society will never be recovered. Now it is one of the poorest countries in the region. 23% of people live Extreme poverty, and it is a major source of immigrants trying to get north, and it is a major source of drug trafficking. The country has been devastated by the 1954 coup and will also have a greater impact on broader Latin American perceptions of the United States. The United States is seen as a country that overthrows democratic governments in the interests of banana companies. This shapes how generations of Hispanics have viewed the United States and American business. The United Fruit Company came to represent what American companies do. It is a devastating effect on the legitimacy of American capitalism. As you explore emerging markets today, could something like this happen in today's society? Is there a place in the world where there could be the same level of corruption and open the door for this to happen again? There are large parts of the world where there is corruption and foreign interference. Many of them can actually be found in Africa, places like Congo, where there is the same story of foreign companies looking for resources, corrupt governments, a very bad legal framework, very limited international governance that controls what is happening. Would the United States be involved in overthrowing the governments that are now supporting American business? No, not at all. At the same time as the coup d'état in Guatemala, the CIA is overthrowing the government in Iran, which will also have very bad consequences in future American relations. That era, when governments were more or less defeated, ends in the 1970s and has been replaced, in particular, by sanctions aimed at punishing governments that are seen as hostile to us or US business. We are now living in an era of sanctions rather than covert operations. For the most part, sanctions, such as undercover operations, have not worked very well and threaten legitimacy. Have you discussed this case in class before? Yes, thank you. I have been discussing this case for many years. I'm curious what kind of reaction you're going to get, and especially if there are students in the class who are from this world coin. I think there's a lot of reactions. The first is shock. For the most part, students have no idea about the story of United Fruit or the overthrow of Guatemala or where bananas come from, so it's a huge shock. What to do with the shock, I've had different reactions. Central American students are almost in tears that this is being discussed in classrooms at Harvard Business School. Cuban-Americans have said this is a very good thing, or else the ousting of Arbenz, or else Guatemala would have become like Cuba under an unpleasant Communist regime. It very strong tensions among students and is worrying. Then some of the biggest debates are actually about Sam Zemurray himself, the guy who triggered this coup because, as the case says, he's also an amazing philanthropist. He almost built Tulane University. She is funding the first permanent women's chair at Harvard University, which is still in use. It's all done with money from sponsoring the United Fruit wars and the Guatemalan episode, so I think it creates an important and meaningful debate about business charity and whether it matters where the money comes from to make good things happen. It's a whole other story, I guess. You're going to have to write a story about it so we can discuss it. Geoff, thank you for joining us today. It's my pleasure. If you enjoy Cold Call, check out our other podcasts from Harvard Business School, including After Hours, Skydeck, and Managing the Future of Work. Find them on Apple Podcasts or wherever you're listening. Thank you again for joining us. I'm your host, Brian Kenny, and you've been listening to Cold Call, the official podcast from Harvard Business School brought to you by the HBR Presents Network. Chiquita Banana (lyrics and music by Garth Montgomery, Leonard Mackenzie, William Wirges) Chiquita Brands L.L.C. © 1945 under license of Shawnee Press Inc. Inc.

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