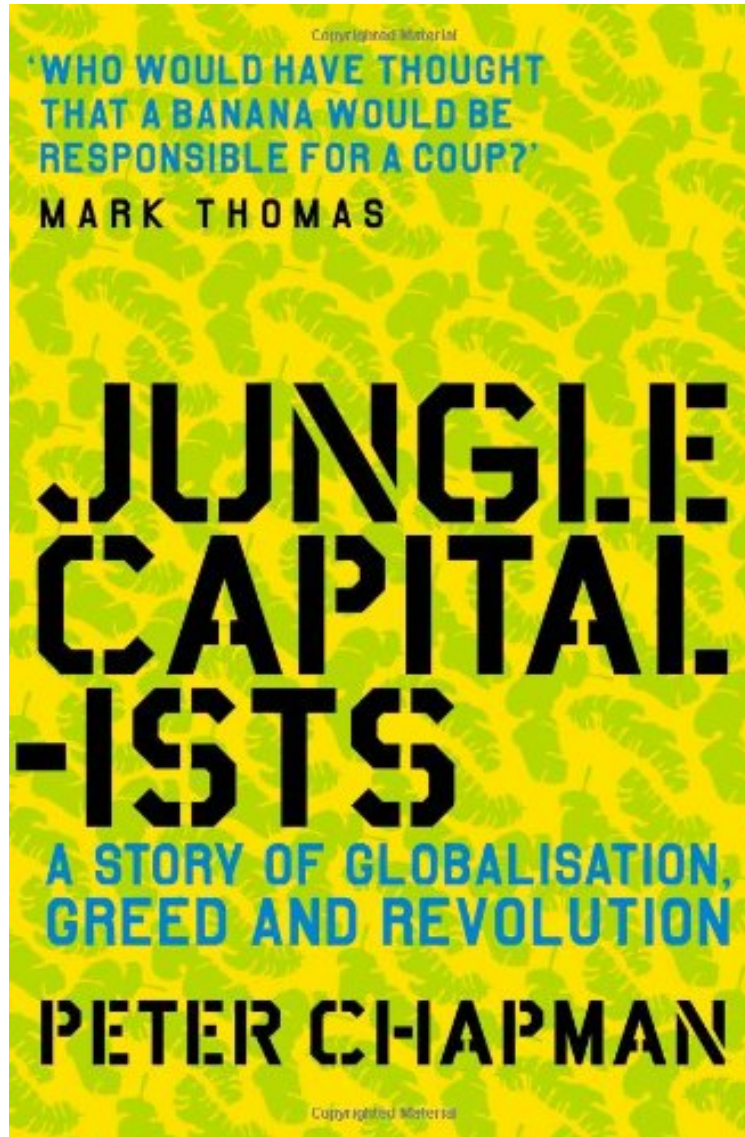


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Jungle Capitalists: A Story of Globalisation, Greed and Revolution

Peter Chapman

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Peter Chapman : Jungle Capitalists: A Story of Globalisation, Greed and Revolution before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Jungle Capitalists: A Story of Globalisation, Greed and Revolution:

4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. el pulpo - the octopus that was united fruitBy Les FearnIf you have ever wondered why support inside Cuba for Fidel Castro has been maintained despite domestic hardship and international isolation you could do far worse than reading this book by Financial Times writer Peter Chapman, Jungle

Capitalists. Chapman charts the economic rise and the pervasive political influence of the first globalised company - the US United Fruit Company, producer and controller of the central American banana which served as the precursor for the activities of today's multinationals. He shows the 19th century emergence of "el Pulpo" (the octopus, as its detractors named it) through building railways and the acquisition of land rights from central American states both of which it then used to create monopoly banana plantation production and determine the politics of the region. By the 1930's the company had created a "vast feudal state" of plantations, worker settlements and governments in the pocket of United Fruit scattered across central America. Pay was low, conditions hard, company law ruled. Even to the extent of doing business with Nazi Germany in preference (and to the detriment) of its native, depressed USA. Image problems were spun, as is the norm today. Madman father Bernays ran the PR side - even to the extent of rebranding Central America as Middle America to improve the image of the banana's origin to the US housewife.... The simple Banana may have been the product, but to ensure its continued profitability (ie keeping production costs low and free from native involvement) United Fruit was not averse to heavy involvement in aggressive politics. Support for coups was common, most clearly seen in the 1929 Santa Marta massacre of 1000+ demonstrators in Colombia and the Guatemalan coup of 1954 on which much is written. Chapman shows though that Guatemala was a turning point that backfired - it frightened the US government into starting anti trust procedures that would see United Fruit shrink into "Chiquita" in the 1980's. But it had wider repercussions: Ernesto Guevara witnessed the coup and it helped convince him of the need to use force to gain national freedom. Also, the US press had been heavily manipulated by United Fruit which it soon realised and decided to pursue more personally investigative styles. Herbert Matthews went off in search of Castro on a personal quest for "truth" which was to give such positive press for Castro in the US. However the author has one note of warning for today: United Fruit may have gone and been replaced by modern multinationals claiming commitment to social responsibility, but these multinationals behave no differently to the old United Fruit who also trumpeted its philanthropy (reclaiming Mayan temples; endowments for women at universities) whilst ruthlessly exploiting its workers to produce far more cheaply than in the more regulated markets of the developed world. Under the guise of the "free market" modern multinationals are proving more ruthless than even United Fruit. Chapman cites the example of Costa Rica, (the only central American country to escape United Fruit and create a more welfare-orientated state) where modern multinationals working within a free-market economy are causing severe problems of social inequality.

In this powerful and gripping book, Peter Chapman shows how the pioneering example of the importer United Fruit set the precedent for the institutionalized greed of today's multinational companies. The story has its source in United Fruit's 19th Century beginnings in the jungles of Costa Rica. It moves via the mass-marketing of the banana as the original fast food, United Fruit's involvement in an invasion of Honduras, a massacre in Columbia and a bloody coup in Guatemala, and the very public suicide on Park Avenue of the company's chairman, Eli Black, in the 1970s. From its bullying business practices to its covert links to the US government, United Fruit blazed the trail of global capitalism through the 20th Century. Chapman weaves a dramatic tale of big business, lies and power to show how one company pioneered the growth of globalization.