

The first fruit to exist originated in Malaysian jungles, later discovered to thrive in other Southeast Asian countries and Latin America. They take nine months to fully blossom and after their stem is chopped down, a new plant grows from its rhizome, or root clump. Not quite a tree, the herb towers over 15 feet and produces around 200 harvestables. It's a key factor to the economies of many countries worldwide, including Ecuador, Guatemala, and the Philippines. Hard to believe that fruit could have such a hold on so many lives - providing 500 million jobs, proving vital to many.

It's hard to believe that one thing, one food has so much power. There's some hilarity to saying that bananas have power. Though they do have a radioactive amount of potassium - most things have a level of radioactivity, including people. Back when there was one global banana company, United Fruit, they were known for funding coups in other countries.

United Fruit, now known as Chiquita, shorthanded here as UF, began in Boston in 1899. This was before bananas were introduced to America, so they teamed up with Kellogg and PR Superstar Edward Bernays to show Americans that bananas are healthy and go perfectly with Corn Flakes. Later, Sam Zemurray immigrated to America from Russia and sought to create a banana empire by selling the fruit on train lines in New Orleans. He later became a competitor to UF, but was crucial in the instigation of a CIA-led coup on Guatemala's government in 1954. The country's first democratically elected president Jacobo Arbenz had plans of transforming his homeland economically and socially. Arbenz intended to legalize trade unions, implement fair and free elections, and establish land reform that would grant unused land to Guatemala's lower-income population. The latter plan, however, did not bode well for UF - they were the ones that owned the unoccupied land. Here I'd like to point out that UF also owned all of Guatemala's infrastructure, including things like trains and radios, and contributed to 75% of the country's banana exports. They did not pay their plantation workers in wages but rather in vouchers which could only be used on the plantation. After the CIA overthrew President Jacobo Arbenz, the following 50 years in Guatemala were filled with civil war, narcotics, and residents hoping to immigrate north. Their population is over 20% impoverished, something that could have been avoided if there were proper housing and jobs available about 50 years ago. After the coup, Latin America despised UF and conflated their practices with all American companies' practices.

Despite the conflict between most of Central America and large banana corporations, bananas remain an incredibly popular export throughout the region. Near the beginning of the twentieth century bananas were Jamaica's primary export and bananas continue to be a highly exported crop globally. The Banana Boat Song specifically describes the

work ethic and underlying desires of banana farmers in Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean. This call-and-response work song was recorded in a variety of ways from musicians Edric Connor, Louise Bennett, and Harry Belafonte. Most recognizable of these 3 would be Harry Belafonte's, rewritten to include the "day-o" we love to sing. The work song caters to Jamaican farmers, explaining that sunrise indicated it was time to return home because working at night meant avoiding the heat. The introduction of this song to the U.S. worked in Belafonte's favor, with his rendition of the 60 year old tune charting at number 5 on the Billboard Chart in 1957. We don't hear about work songs much anymore, but surely they must exist. The Jamaican farmers, other Caribbean farmers, Brazilian, Filipino farmers all have their own song to get them through the day, though is it enough? One can't help but to think about Chiquita's history and banishment from certain countries.

From a different perspective, 2008 Youtube series Charlie the Unicorn features the song Put A Banana In Your Ear. The song, presented alongside communist symbols and dancing bananas, posits that the popular fruit is effective in blocking out nonsense when used to plug your "favorite ear." This is also claimed to improve one's mood year round, which incidentally parallels the banana's growing season. In addition to communist symbols in the visual component, we also see a golden pyramid with a banner that reads "Ex Oriente Lux" meaning "from east, light." This refers to Eastern culture inspiring or influencing the West. Bananas originated in the East and made their way to the West.

While both banana-forward songs intend to uplift and inspire, one key difference is the underlying message. For Charlie the Unicorn's song, bananas symbolize rebellion and individualism. There's a reference to their eastern roots and health benefits. Belafonte's Day-O, however, is meant to be sung while working, a source of motivation, and speaks of the bananas more literally. It also immerses the listener into the fruit's Western/South American form and its relation to working conditions for farmers. People who may not get to enjoy the amazing fruit they work so hard to grow and harvest. To compare and contrast banana songs is to explore how multifaceted bananas truly are.

The term banana comes from the Arabic word for finger. This has carried over into farming habits, referring to each individual banana as fingers and a single clump of the fruit as hands. Each banana hand has 14 to 20 fingers, and the stalks carry from 9 to 12 hands. Such an excessive amount of hands may lend itself to bananas as synonymous with chaos or a wild reaction. Gwen Stefani famously uses this idiom exclaiming, "This shit is bananas! B-A-N-A-N-A-S!" Stefani adopts a cheerleader persona in her song Hollaback Girl after Courtney Love compares her style to that of a highschool

cheerleader. Referring to the conflict as “bananas” drives home the fact that Gwen couldn’t give a care about Courtney’s weird accusations. It’s also a common colloquialism to hear in reference to something being absurd, out of the ordinary, excessive. Are bananas excessive?

One can be top, or second, banana. One can go bananas. One can claim to not buy green bananas. One may also use the word as a slur towards an American of East or Southeast Asian background. We embody bananas in many ways, through our actions and beliefs. We may also equate going bananas to going ape, an animal which enjoys eating bananas! Apes certainly embody the traits of a banana - unpredictable, radioactive, many fingers. However, apes hardly impact the global economy in the same way.

Bananas are the beginning and the end. They’re global icons, evoking emotion and inspiration. They have influenced so many of us and our day to day lives. There’s no living without bananas.