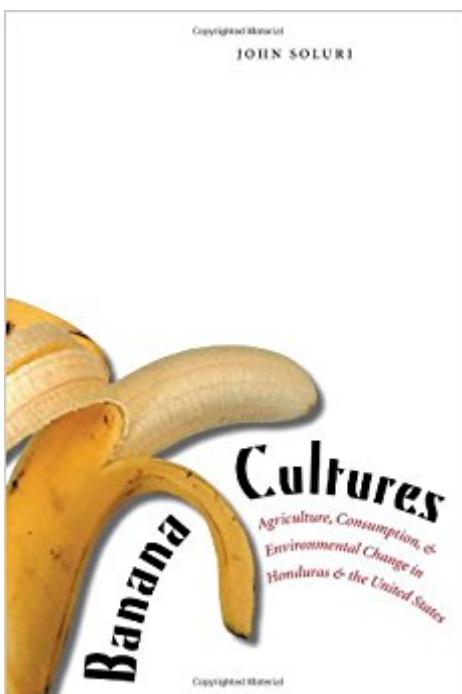


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# **Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, And Environmental Change In Honduras And The United States**



## Synopsis

Winner, George Perkins Marsh Award for Best Book in Environmental History, American Society for Environmental History, 2007

Bananas, the most frequently consumed fresh fruit in the United States, have been linked to Miss Chiquita and Carmen Miranda, "banana republics," and Banana Republic clothing stores—everything from exotic kitsch, to Third World dictatorships, to middle-class fashion. But how did the rise in banana consumption in the United States affect the banana-growing regions of Central America? In this lively, interdisciplinary study, John Soluri integrates agroecology, anthropology, political economy, and history to trace the symbiotic growth of the export banana industry in Honduras and the consumer mass market in the United States. Beginning in the 1870s when bananas first appeared in the U.S. marketplace, Soluri examines the tensions between the small-scale growers, who dominated the trade in the early years, and the shippers. He then shows how rising demand led to changes in production that resulted in the formation of major agribusinesses, spawned international migrations, and transformed great swaths of the Honduran environment into monocultures susceptible to plant disease epidemics that in turn changed Central American livelihoods. Soluri also looks at labor practices and workers' lives, changing gender roles on the banana plantations, the effects of pesticides on the Honduran environment and people, and the mass marketing of bananas to consumers in the United States. His multifaceted account of a century of banana production and consumption adds an important chapter to the history of Honduras, as well as to the larger history of globalization and its effects on rural peoples, local economies, and biodiversity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This is an elegant book, well suited for classroom use, that weaves together environmental, labour and consumer histories...Soluri deftly shows that our national blinders and existing typologies have obscured as much as they have revealed. This excellent book deserves a wide readership."-Cindy Forster, Bulletin of Latin American Research, Vol. 28, No. 2, April 2009

JOHN SOLURI is Associate Professor of History at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

Wonderful. An educational work that doesn't preach or proselytize on a subject that could easily become political and divisive.

I very much enjoyed this book! It offers some interesting insights into the history of banana production in Honduras from an agro-ecological perspective. The impact of pathogens on patterns of production is not often highlighted, and this book does just that. However, this work also attempts to do too much and in the end (in this case, quite literally -- in the Conclusion), it doesn't do enough of all that it sets out to do. A tighter analysis on the role of the state in banana production would have improved the overall analysis. A sharper historical perspective would have also served this purpose. Furthermore, a wider discussion of the issue of memory in the Chapter on Prision Verde would have made a discussion of collective memory add a new and interesting dimension to the overall project. In sum, the book is very interesting and the moves the author makes (including the literary analysis, as well as his highlighting the trials of producers in the face of plant diseases, etc.) result in making this work a very interesting read! This book is worth having in any collection of works on Central America!

This book is more about Honduras bananas than the whole banana culture and banana republics. I enjoyed it, as part of three books on bananas and politics.

I will never take bananas for granted now! A very good description of how banana production evolved and how it affected Latin America.

Not sure I could have been more bored. Thanks school, for wasting hours of my life.

John Soluri's Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in

Honduras and the United States examines the impact of introducing bananas in Central America and the economic issues that followed. Professor of history at Carnegie Mellon University, John Soluri has created a work that seamlessly blends various fields of study into one comprehension examination of a very complex topic. *Banana Cultures* provides a strong and compelling argument, while avoiding sounding like a pedestal for a personal agenda. This study uses a variety of information and evidence to tell the story of the banana and its connection to the people of Honduras. Soluri blends agroecology, anthropology, political economy, and history to analyze the growth of the banana industry. *Banana Cultures* also examines the role of the United States in the evolution of the banana export industry. The United States provided a consumer mass market for bananas, thus increasing the demand for bananas from Honduras. With the greatly increased demand for bananas in the United States, the production method in Honduras had to adapt. This is where the shift from small famers to big business owned plantations occurred. As the demand increased, the small farmer was quickly put out of business. Banana production was a primary source of income for many Honduran farmers. The increased demand for bananas should have resulted in increased wealth for banana farmers, but it did just the opposite. Ignoring the apparent economic issues that arose from the centralization of banana production, the transformation of large portions of the Honduran environment presented an all new set of problems. A large portion of the country was being made ready to produce bananas and this left them open to a substantial problem. That problem was disease epidemics. If a disease wiped out most of the banana trees for a season, then the country is going to face tremendous economic problems. In order to combat diseases and fungi, pesticides were used to protect the prized fruit. This presented a problem for the workers because they were being constantly exposed to this toxic compounds. These pesticides may have killed the various diseases that threatened the trees, but they also seriously harmed the Honduran workers. Aside from the negative impact on the human population, the pesticides also presented a problem to the Honduran environment. *Banana Cultures* provides an interesting history of Honduras. It views Honduran history through a unique lens that allows for the readers to view their history from a different perspective. This topic is something that is often overlooked and largely ignored by the general public and some scholars. Soluri brings this issue to the forefront to ensure that people do not forget how a nation was transformed by the rising demand of a fruit. This is a fascinating topic because it illustrates how the demand for one item can drastically change a nation and its environment. Soluri does an excellent job maintaining a professional objectivity which makes the book far more convincing. When a book becomes weighed down with personal bias, it makes it difficult to be convinced by the author's argument. This book certainly fills a gap in the

historiography of Honduran and Central American history. Banana Cultures is very well-written and extremely readable. Soluri's narrative flows quite well and keeps the reader's attention. A comparison with another banana producing country could have been beneficial to the work.

This book contains much valuable information for anyone interested in the business/corporate culture of Honduras, and the way that American government and business interests have negatively affected the lives and well-being of the Honduran people. The author does an excellent job of explaining the problems with banana fungus and how the wonder treatment from the West - pesticides sprayed through high-powered hoses, the bananas then dipped into acid baths to take off the residue of the pesticide, had a long-term impact on the Honduran agricultural workers. Some of them claim that they sweated blue dye from their pores, ruining mattresses, sheets and clothing - the health problems were far more dire, including early death from respiratory illnesses.

To us they are just bananas, but to Honduras they were a major source of income until big business got involved. If you want to see how big business can destroy a source of income for many small farmers and destroy the local environment, then this is the book for you. Read about how promises were made but not kept by big business. See how business "leaders" were doing just fine but local workers were struggling to make a living. Healthcare or benefits, for the local worker, why? The struggle goes on for the local Honduran people while the banana business just moved on.

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