



Big Boys Gone Bananas!* Discussion Guide

Director: Fredrik Gertten

Year: 2011

Time: 90 min

You might know this director from:

Bananas!* (2009)

The Socialist, the Architect and the Twisted Tower (2005)

FILM SUMMARY

BIG BOYS GONE BANANAS!* chronicles the story of a filmmaker and his partners who refuse to be bullied and silenced by a corporation. Swedish filmmaker Fredrik Gertten first made a film called *Bananas!** about 12 Nicaraguan banana workers who sued Dole Food Company for pesticide use that allegedly led to sterility, birth defects and other health issues. The film was selected for competition at the 2009 Los Angeles Film Festival, but days before Gertten was set to leave, he received an infringement letter from Dole, threatening legal action if the film was shown. The festival decides to remove *Bananas!** from competition, and the Los Angeles Business published a highly-critical, misinformed article about the film.

Gertten and his partners push forward in filming the story, as Dole continues to bully the producers with threats of a defamation lawsuit, media influences, and PR-spin. A classic David versus Goliath tale, **BIG BOYS GONE BANANAS!*** depicts the struggle of a small film company bravely defending their freedom of speech as they persevere against a large corporation whose tactics are far-reaching and disturbing.

In the third act, the film takes a surprising turn when a major Swedish fast food chain, supermarket chain, journalists and even the entire Swedish Parliament rally in support of the film. Inspiring and illuminating, **BIG BOYS GONE BANANAS!*** reveals contrasting attitudes towards corporatocracy and sheds light on the extent to which corporations will go to protect their brand and reputation.

FILM THEMES

The filmmaker who sought to uncover the exploitation of Nicaraguan banana workers by Dole becomes the subject of his new film, revealing even more corporate abuse.

CORPORATE POWER

The film deftly portrays the efficiency of Dole's scare tactics, media relations, and legal power. Fredrik Gertten, his partners, producers, and the sponsors of the film receive intimidating bundles of legal documents, and U.S. newspapers publish scathing articles about the film that are misinformed. It's revealed that those at Dole who instigated the threats have not even viewed the film. Yet Dole's power is significant enough to silence the film and bar its release in the U.S.

FILM AS TRUTH-TELLING

Gertten's film *Bananas!**, about the Nicaraguan banana workers, was not allowed to be screened in the U.S., but this did not deter the filmmaker from revealing the truth. When Dole sent a cease and desist order threatening legal action, Gertten began making another film. *BIG BOYS GONE BANANAS!** captures the ensuing aftermath and the battle to get the truth out. In interviews, Gertten describes film as a powerful medium for truth-telling. Though he was hesitant to turn the camera on himself, he knew Dole's attempt to silence him was an important truth that needed to be revealed. His ultimate goal is to screen his first film *Bananas!** so that the Nicaraguan workers can share their own truth.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Gertten and his team persevere in order to defend their freedom of speech, but this cannot be achieved through the heroic efforts of just one person. As Gertten's film *Bananas!** helped the Nicaraguan workers make their mission and grievances known, Gertten was able to tell his own story and survive the ordeal through the help of his lawyer, colleagues, journalists, the Swedish Parliament, and the concerted efforts of informed Swedish citizens who boycotted Dole products. The film demonstrates how we all must honor and defend the basic human right of free speech, for ourselves and for others.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Gertten receives more support from his country, Sweden. A blogger activist discovers that Dole fruit cups are sold at Max, a major fast food chain in Sweden. He writes to the head, asking how Max, with its "green agenda" can support Dole. Soon after, the product is removed. Other journalists in Sweden write about Gertten and Dole. People begin boycotting Dole bananas at a major supermarket chain and purchase fair trade bananas instead. The film is screened at the Swedish Parliament, securing the support of all its members. In the film, an interviewee remarks that Scandinavian culture is inherently skeptical and resistant toward corporate power and influence.

“It is easier to cope with a bad conscience than a bad reputation.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

“[Being sued by Dole] was a life-changing experience and I would hate anyone to go through the trials and tribulations of such an event. We lost more money than we gained and we are still suffering from this.”

Fredrik Gertten

FILM FACTS:

- Director Fredrik Gertten has worked as a journalist for more than 10 years, working as a foreign correspondent for national radio, newspapers, and magazines. He covered stories from Chile, Nicaragua, Lebanon, South Africa, South Korea, and the Philippines. He also had a weekly column in a daily in southern Sweden. He moved into documentary filmmaking because he wanted to “focus on fewer stories with bigger impact.”
- One of the key people involved in the film is Dan Koeppel who authored the book, *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World*. Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman praised Koeppel’s book as “essential reading” for understanding the global economy.
- The shot of Gertten opening the cease and desist letter from Dole was captured in film because he’d already received an email about the contents. When he received the package in the mail, he decided to film himself opening it, not knowing how he’d use the footage or what would come of it.
- In an interview, Gertten relates how he tried to get the journalists to write about the banana workers instead of himself. But nobody went in that direction. In Sweden, journalists used the angle of “the small Swede against a big American.” This also disappointed him as it still left the banana workers out of the story.
- In May 1998, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* published an 18-page story, “Chiquita Secrets Revealed,” accusing Chiquita of several acts including exploiting its workers in Central American plantations, preventing them from unionizing, and exposing entire communities to toxic pesticides that were banned in the U.S. Furthermore, the story alleged that an entire Honduran village was forced to evict at gunpoint and that foreign officials were bribed and U.S. politicians were paid to influence trade policy.
- In response, Chiquita denied all allegations and sued the newspaper on the grounds that the journalist, Mike Gallagher had hacked into Chiquita’s voicemail system, illegally accessing more than 2,000 voice mails. The newspaper was forced to print a front-page apology and pay Chiquita a reported \$14 million. Gallagher was also fired.
- Bananas originated around Malaysia, about 4,000 years ago. After rice, wheat, and maize, bananas are the most important staple food in the world.
- In the U.S., bananas represent about 50% of all fresh fruit imports. The majority come from Latin America.
- In the world, there are 81 fair trade banana-producing organizations. 27 of these producers supply to the U.S.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others the chance to be inspired by Gertten’s resilience and commitment to freedom of speech.
2. Watch and share Gertten’s first film [BANANAS!*](#) about the Nicaraguan banana workers.
3. Consider donating to the [Bananas! campaign](#). Help the film reach a global audience by sharing the trailer and organizing screenings.
4. Support and purchase fair trade items whenever possible. Visit [WFTO](#) to learn why this is important.

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.