Lecture 36 Horticulture, Politics, and World Affairs: Bananas and the Banana Republics Banana Banana Banana

Banana

A gigantic tropical herb consisting of a pseudostem made up of leaf sheaths with an

inflorescence pushing through the sheaths

Basically two types of fruit

Banana: Consumed mostly as fresh fruit (AA, AAA)
Plantain: Cooking banana (AB, ABB, AAB)

Staple food in the tropics

Bananas now one of most popular and cheapest fruit imports

An amazing horticultural achievement

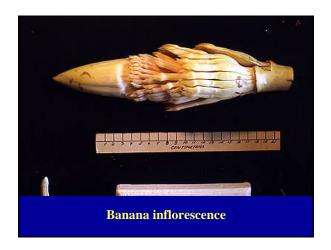
Seedy bananas used for wind breaks, Hawaii











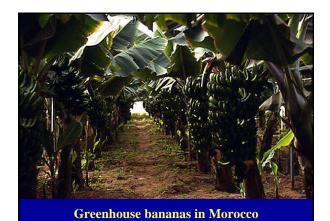












History of Banana

Cultivated in southeast Asia in antiquity Seedless types selected

Known by reputation to Theophrastus

Introduced to Mediterranean region in 650

May have moved to Africa by Arab traders in first century or from India via southern Arabia and Ethiopia

Many cultivars in Uganda suggesting long history Established early in New World

History of Banana in Latin America

In last half of 19th century, Captain Lorenzo D. Baker and Minor C. Keith introduced the first bananas to Boston and the US Northeast between 1870 and 1889

Fruit an immediate success leading to

banana bonanza

American entrepreneurs sought to control both banana production and trade

A combination of sea captains, railroad builders, and adventurers formed the Boston Freight **Company which became the United Fruit company** (1899) Company became plantation and shipping monopoly **Developed horticultural and shipping techniques** and system of plantation management Their efforts made banana one of the first fresh foods to be internationally commercialized Bananas of high quality now available the year around at moderate prices the world over A significant horticultural achievement **Bananas and Colonialism** United Fruit Company was aggressive in the unstable frontier of Central America Industry unique because no other perishable produce brought such a long distance to market or available without regard to season Industry based on the fact that fruit could be picked green and ripened off the plant However, company subject to severe, constant, and bitter criticism as "Industrial Colonialism" despite the fact that conditions on plantation probably better than in rural areas Criticism based on Monopoly exploitation **Political manipulation** Abuse of native labor Disregard for human hardships **Preemptory management tactics**

It became obvious that a single large American company was to directly interfere with the political fortunes of a number of Central American countries, admittedly corrupt and greedy

Not unlike Standard Oil in the Mideast

Persistent revolutions and coups were the result and the epithet of Banana Republics was applied to these countries, a shameful period of US-Latin American interactions

With the present World Trade Organization, the banana wars continue between European and American companies vying to divide and dominate the world market for banana

The banana wars continue

