

150 YEARS OF BANANAS AND PEOPLE:
PARALLEL TIMELINES

NATALIE NYE
ARTDES 499: INTEGRATIVE PROJECT
APRIL 23, 2020

INTRODUCTION

I've never crossed paths with a person who hasn't tasted a banana. No baby, no kid, no teen, no adult or elderly person I know is *not* familiar with the yellow peel, the blue sticker, the soft consistency and sweet-ish taste of a Chiquita banana.

Before this year, I didn't think much about bananas. My thoughts about bananas extended not far beyond: they're always here, always will be, and that's that. They were nothing more than a background object in my life, but one I could always count on and predict the presence of. I never thought about why or how they're always here. Where and how exactly are they grown, to whom do the hands cultivating them belong, and how in the heck do they consistently, without fail, whenever I please, end up in *my* hands, all the way up here in Michigan? I certainly never considered the possibility that their presence in my hands might not always be guaranteed.

It turns out, there are answers to these thoughts, and they're not quite as pleasant as the happy-looking, smile-shaped fruit suggests.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

My life isn't as heavily impacted by bananas as some people's lives are. Some people depend on bananas for money, to support their families, and to sustain their lives. Some countries depend on them to maintain active economies. Banana Republics, as we call them now, are countries that rely on growing bananas and rely even more on selling them to grocery stores in the USA. This dependence wasn't really a choice; it was created for them when a few men from the United States discovered that the soil in Central and South America is perfect for growing bananas, and growing bananas is perfect for making a bunch of money.

The operation started as a pursuit for power, and it grew as a pursuit for power, but it wasn't always powerful. The banana industry as we know it today was born in the year 1871 as a small, modestly successful railroad operation in Costa Rica, owned by one man from the United States, Minor Keith.

He stumbled into the banana exportation thing by accident actually, having planted them along the railroad as a cheap way to feed his workers on the job, and, after the completion of the railroad, having discovered that it was way more suited to export bananas than carry passengers, as originally intended.

When the Costa Rican government failed to be able to pay Keith for the work he had done on the railroad, he also happened on a deal that involved 99 years of official jurisdiction over the railroad's operations and control of 3,200 km of Costa Rican land, amounting to almost 8% of the land in the entire country- a perfect recipe for controlled banana production and exportation. At this point, though, he couldn't yet see the perfection of his setup; the project appeared doomed. Keith could never have predicted the huge turn that it was going to take and the trail of dominoes that would topple over throughout the next century and a half for the industry he had unintentionally created.

In a pursuit to save his project and himself from financial defeat, he decided to combine with another small USA-owned banana operation, the Boston Fruit Company, and the operations together became officially known as the United Fruit Company in the year 1899. The combined resources and management allowed the United Fruit Company to grow so large and powerful that it became easy for it to absorb almost every other small, USA-owned or locally-owned banana business in Latin America.

United Fruit grew so large that perhaps the individual lives of Latin American banana workers were no longer visible to the men in charge as individual lives, but only as a massive workforce, and perhaps this made it easier for The Company to disregard, stomp on, and destroy them without blinking an eye. The United Fruit Company demolished homes and ordered the owners of those homes to plant thousands of bananas in their place, take care of them, treat them with deadly chemicals, process them, export them, and do all of the physical work involved in the process; the Company profited from afar while the hands actually touching and carrying the weight of the bananas suffered insurmountably- physically, financially, emotionally, in every sense of the word.

Throughout the first three decades of the 20th century, The United States army, backed by the United Fruit Company, invaded almost every country in Central America and Colombia, an era which is now known as the *Banana Wars*. They demanded land from these countries, and where their demands were met, they were met in exchange for

the USA radically modernizing the countries' infrastructures...to better meet the needs of proper banana industrialization (installing telephone wires, radio towers, roads, railroads, ship routes, and in some places even the US dollar), creating a precedent and dynamic of dependence on the USA for all these things; where their demands were *not* met, however, the people in those countries were met with force, and gallons of their blood were shed.

Where there was disagreement over whether they should let in the influence of the United Fruit Company willingly or not, there was civil war and government corruption, and the consequences of this can still be seen today in some cases. In all reality, it was a win-win situation for the Fruit Company and a lose-lose situation for the Banana Republics.

The people who lived and still live through the chilling influence of the United Fruit Company refer to its ominous presence in their lives as "El Pulpo", meaning "The Octopus", relentlessly reaching its strong and many tentacles everywhere it doesn't have a natural right to, and regardless, shifting everything around and dictating the lives of thousands of people from so far away. But for some reason, these people seem to be the only people reminded of the truth about the disturbing history.

Here in the United States, the invasive, eerie, deadly roots of Chiquita bananas are buried so far underground, beneath layers and layers of blue stickers, seemingly-happy media coverage, propaganda, distractions, and name changes that many of us have no idea about the grim truth. Like most consumers, I was ignorant of all that happens behind the closed doors of productions until recently.

MY OWN EXPERIENCE

This time last year, I was studying abroad in Costa Rica, a country known by the rest of the world for many things, among those its incredible biodiversity, its lack of military, its peaceful customs, and its banana exportation. It was in Costa Rica that I first saw out of a little round bus window the huge blue shipping containers that read "Chiquita" and the miles and miles of rows and rows of identical banana plants, and it was then that my just-barely-more-naïve self thought "wow, how cool". It was also in Costa Rica, a couple months later, that I first learned about the United Fruit Company, Chiquita's ghost of a past identity, and I wished I could retract that remark.

It was a beautiful, sunny day, and I was swimming in the ocean with a friend who was on the same study abroad program as I; we were talking about life and the surreality of our realities at the time, living in such a beautiful country for a while, and whatever else, when she, Ahna, introduced me to the concept of “yeah, this reality is really great for me here basking in my bathing suit, coconut in hand, but here are some other perspectives that I could really stand to think about”. She told me everything she knew about the history of the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica. I was blown away and appalled, for good reason, and I felt incredibly humbled as I wondered about the infinite other realities I have never experienced, and all the things in the world that my eyes have been and most likely will remain blind to until proven not.



This is me and my friend, Jose, full of adrenaline from standing on the part of the tracks that elevates above water like a bridge.

The picture on the right was taken the day Jose's uncle took us to see the plantation where he works. He let me take a glide on the apparatus used to transport bananas!

A few months later, I found myself in a few places historically relevant to banana production, and I didn't even know it at the time. It was only recently that I realized I stood on the very train tracks where Minor Keith enslaved thousands of men, and bananas were first exported from Limón.

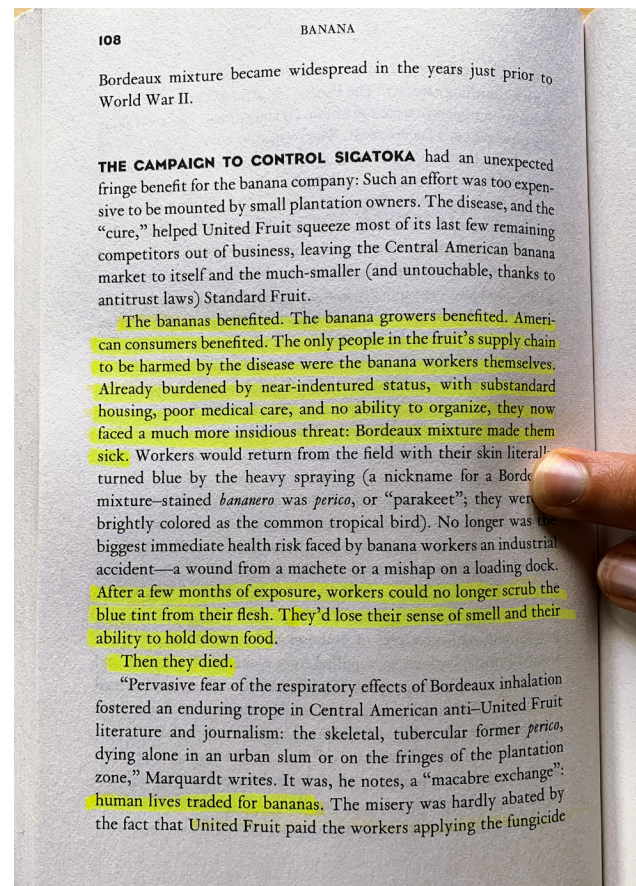


I was totally immersed in the history of bananas in Latin America while I lived in Costa Rica for six months, but I didn't truly begin researching it until I returned to the United States and started working on this project. Picking up and reading *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World*, written by master banana-researcher, Dan Koeppel, was my first deep-dive into banana research. It has been a journey to engage with this book, and I have traveled in time to learn about the interesting chronology of banana-human relationships, from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden all the way to the threatened Cavendish banana, the one most of us can find at any time in a nearby grocery store, at risk of extinction in the near future.

I learned all about monocultures, the agricultural method of cultivation that relies on there being only one crop in a designated plot of land, and why it is so dangerous to depend on this method (Koeppel 2007, 108). I learned about banana monocultures specifically, created essentially by cloning one banana over and over again, meaning that each banana then contains the same genetic information as the next and the same ability or lack of ability to defend itself against disease.

This book filled my brain with tons of information about bananas among which I then began to draw connections and sift out the pieces I find most important to hold onto and retell.

Dan Koeppel is a lot like me; he is somebody who happened upon this interesting history, got lost investigating it, and produced a work of art out of it. He is just as distanced from the actual history as I am, knowing about it only secondarily, but caring a lot about sharing what he learned with as many people as possible.



I carried this book around with me for months, highlighting all the details I found most interesting.

One of the biggest lessons I learned from my banana research is that a person has to go out of their way to find out about truths like this one. There is so much to learn about this history alone, though, that I spent a great part of my IP process overwhelmed with research, facts, and the task of narrowing down exactly what it is I want to share about bananas. I am interested in their biology, their variety, their ancient presence on this planet, but I find most compelling the ways in which humans have interacted with bananas, domesticated them over centuries, and shaped them into something so powerful yet so generally unrecognized in some areas by their power.

I knew I wanted to tell a story about bananas and people, but I didn't know how to frame it. I didn't know if I wanted to make an animation or an illustrated book; I didn't know if I wanted to make it interview-based or fictional. At this point, I think it's safe to say the majority of my brain was occupied by banana facts, and I just didn't know what to do with all of them or in which specific direction to take the project, so naturally, I just kept researching.



This is what the wall of my IP studio looked like for a long time. We were encouraged to begin making as soon as possible, so, inspired by reading that there are thousands of varieties of banana on the planet, I began hanging up my own varieties.

I watched several documentaries about the Banana Wars, and the one that influenced this project the most is called *Banana Land: Blood, Bullets, and Poison Documentary*. The parts of this documentary I found most compelling were the segments that involved explanatory animation or detailed anecdotes from people directly involved in the history. I remember a specific interview of a woman outlining a vivid memory she has of United States troops forcefully entering her home, threatening to kill her husband and children if she did not allow them to rape her oldest daughter, and after they proceeded to do so, killing her husband and son anyway (Watch Me Grow, 2018).



This is a screenshot from *Banana Land: Blood, Bullets, and Poison Documentary*. It's super informative, and you can find it on YouTube.

Engaging with the content in this history has been really difficult, and I'm sure you can see why. The line I wanted this project to walk on is between the areas of "this art / information is too difficult / horrifying for me to understand / commit to engaging with" and "this art / information is too meaningless / naive for me to understand / commit to engaging with".

I wanted to provide an avenue for people to really understand this history, care about it, think about it in an interesting way, and process it visually, securing it to their memories. I didn't want to scare them away with the harshness or explicitness of reality, but at the same time, I wanted people to be aware of it.

SO, WHAT NOW?

My experience in IP has been far from a total breeze; it came with its fair set of challenges, from beginning to end. At the beginning of the year, I was so overwhelmed by the opportunity of spending a year's worth of energy on one project. Before I even knew what the subject of my IP was going to be, though, I had this inclination that I wanted to provide my audience an interactive experience that examined one concept from many perspectives; I was fascinated by the idea of zooming in and out through a metaphorical microscope and looking at something from multiple angles.

When I settled on bananas as a subject, I discovered I wanted my project to be both an emotional and informative experience, detached and zoomed out enough that the history could be synthesized effectively, while at the same time focused and zoomed in enough that real evidence could be seen and felt.

There's a fascinating Youtube channel called *Deep Look* that, hence its name, I looked to for inspiration about the presentation of magnified informational content. Each episode of *Deep Look* features a short, easy-to-understand, simple-but-not-too-simple exposition of one particular species on the planet, outlining its amazing evolutionary features with exciting footage and impressively playful, colloquial dialogue. Although it's an educational experience, it's not at all challenging to engage with *Deep Look*. It's interesting and totally accessible.

In an episode about fleas, the miniscule, blood-sucking creature is described as "small and narrow - like a little sesame seed with legs" (*Deep Look*, 2020). I was never fascinated by fleas until *Deep Look* taught me that their legs are equipped with a spring system that allows them to launch their bodies at incredibly high speeds, doing flips in the air until they land on their targets! I could have read that fact in some academic text written in some wordy, humdrum way, but I probably wouldn't have gone out of my way to do so, and it probably wouldn't have stuck in my memory as much as it did after watching this video.



Here is a glimpse of *Deep Look*'s flea episode. It's less than five minutes long, but there's enough information in there to fill a whole chapter in a textbook.

To learn is one of my favorite things to do, but sometimes I have a hard time staying focused while reading or watching academic texts or documentaries. As a visual person, for me the line between learning and not learning is completely in the presentation of the information. I engage with unique content, and I remember information only if my mind identifies it as memorable.

So I had in my hands this huge history, loaded with biological and sociological facts about bananas, from all kinds of perspectives, and my job was to condense it all into one digestible, interesting piece of tangible work that people want to interact with. How do I do that? How do I tell a story that people will listen to? How do I make it engaging and memorable?

FINDING MY LANGUAGE

During my banana research, I stumbled upon another YouTube channel. The owner goes by the name Sam O'Nella, and he makes super condensed, fast-paced, animated retellings of historical narratives using stick-figures that look like they were drawn using Microsoft Paint and images downloaded off of Google. The specific video that led me to *Sam O'Nella Academy*, his channel, is called "The Banana Republics", and in it, he offers a brief explanation of what a banana republic is and why they exist.

His retelling of the history maintains an objective tone, but it is seasoned with so much personality and unique explanation that I find it difficult to not be totally enthralled in it. In all of his videos, Sam simplifies really big concepts, spinning them in completely new ways and making it a really fun experience to learn about them. He has developed his own language of storytelling, visually and linguistically. He doesn't worry about grammar or beautifully rendered graphics; he relies on his knowledge and personality to communicate the information in his own compelling way.

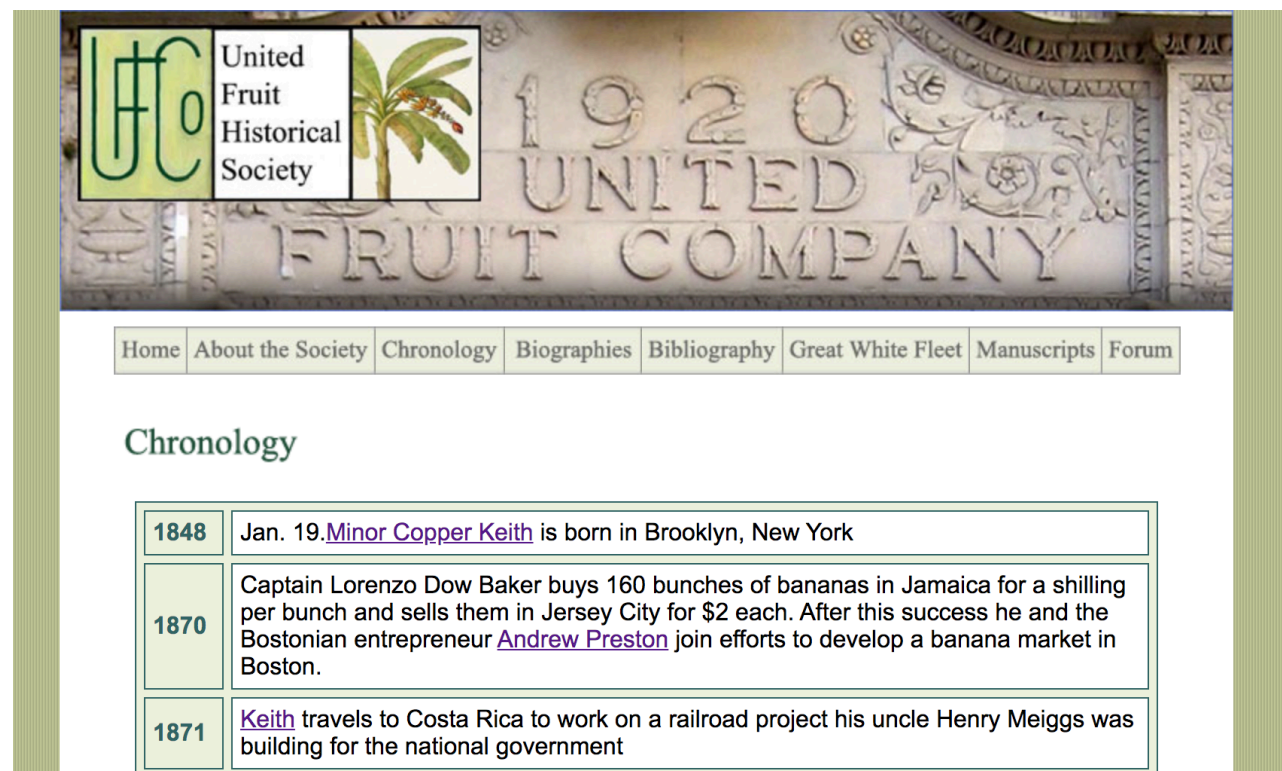


You can see Sam O’Nella’s uniquely uncomplicated language at this point in the video when he’s describing how the USA-owned fruit companies were able to gain control of the economies in Central and South American countries.

When I began researching bananas, it didn’t take long for me to learn that tons of people have already told this complicated story in some way. I needed to find my own visual language, and I needed to make it original and exciting. So I began thinking about the facts. I came across the United Fruit Historical Society’s official website and found a complete chronology of events in the United Fruit Company’s history that extended so far down the page that the scroll bar on the right was so tiny, it barely moved as I descended the text.

This was a jackpot! It was all the information I had read in Dan Koeppel’s book, but condensed into a less-than-novel size. The information is organized in a table with two columns, one with dates and the other with corresponding events; for example, “1848” on the left and “Jan. 19. Minor Cooper Keith is born in Brooklyn, New York” on the right (Bucheli, 2001). This well of information inspired me to consider creating an

illustrated timeline about the history of bananas and people. But I couldn't just copy word-for-word the entries on this already-existing timeline. It had to be more complicated than that.



The screenshot shows the website for the United Fruit Historical Society. At the top, there is a header with the society's logo (a stylized 'UFC' in a green box), the text 'United Fruit Historical Society', and an image of a banana plant. Below the header is a navigation menu with links: Home, About the Society, Chronology, Biographies, Bibliography, Great White Fleet, Manuscripts, and Forum. The 'Chronology' section is highlighted, and it contains a table with three entries:

1848	Jan. 19. Minor Copper Keith is born in Brooklyn, New York
1870	Captain Lorenzo Dow Baker buys 160 bunches of bananas in Jamaica for a shilling per bunch and sells them in Jersey City for \$2 each. After this success he and the Bostonian entrepreneur Andrew Preston join efforts to develop a banana market in Boston.
1871	Keith travels to Costa Rica to work on a railroad project his uncle Henry Meiggs was building for the national government

The whole chronology goes up to 2005. I gathered specific events from this collection and from other sources too.

So I started thinking about storytelling and data, brainstorming about ways each could enhance and compliment the other in one project. How do I represent data in a non-intimidating (inviting even), accessible, and original manner? One of the artists I looked to for inspiration is Giorgia Lupi. Lupi is a data visualist, and as much as that title may give the impression that what she does is boring and painfully statistical, her work is some of the most beautifully captivating and emotionally-driven I have ever experienced.

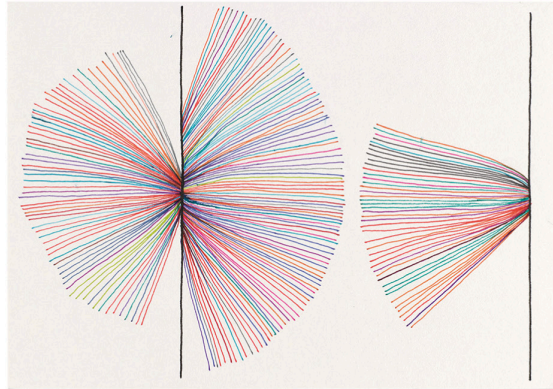
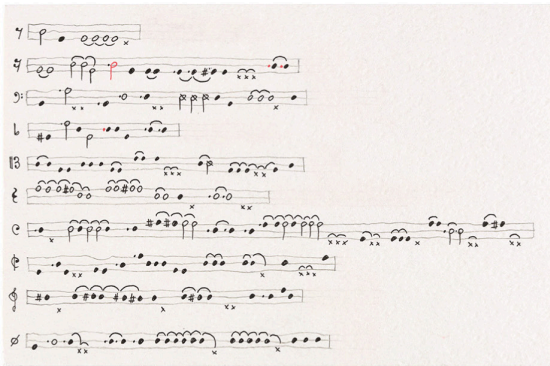
She absorbs numerical and factual data from her own life, runs it through an intuitive filter, and regurgitates it in the form of charming patterns, charts, and webs, coded by color and shape in such an interesting way that I find myself inclined to be fluent in her expressive visual language. Lupi's book, *Dear Data*, is a collection of postcards exchanged by mail between her and another data visualist friend over the course of a year. They settled on 52 topics to keep track of and collect data about, one per week, and each artist would synthesize their personal data in a unique way for the other to read and interpret.

GIORGIA

week seven

a week of complaints

Stefanie



DEAR DATA
WEEK 07: MUSICAL COMPLAINTS

HOW TO READ IT: Each "note" is a single complaint I said. (i.e. every single time I expressed dissatisfaction or annoyance about a situation or particular thing.) Each "scale" represents a category of things I complained about, including complaints in chronological order.

SCALES:

- 1 - ME AS A PERSON (e.g. "I am... ugly/obsessive...")
- 2 - ME AT WORK (e.g. "I should've done...")
- 3 - WORK (e.g. "This project isn't going well!")
- 4 - TECHNOLOGY (e.g. "The printer is not working!")
- 5 - SERVICE/IDIO (e.g. "The waiter is so slow!")
- 6 - SOMEONE (e.g. "He's really a jerk...")
- 7 - CUP (e.g. "I am drinking the A.C. oscaay!")
- 8 - HOW I FEEL (e.g. "So tired!", "So bored!")
- 9 - BOYFRIEND (e.g. "You're cooking, you haven't...")
- 10 - OTHER (e.g. "I spent a hour waiting dev...")

POSITIONS OF NOTES:

- 1 - Actual need to complain
- 2 - Overdue
- 3 - Neutral
- 4 - Missed complaints: thought of complaining, but didn't do!

ATTRIBUTES:

- o to boyfriend
- o to friends
- o to stranger
- o to myself
- o to others
- o via text/email
- o close on time
- o close on location
- o to Stefanie
- o about sthng related to DEAR DATA

FROM: GIORGIA LUPI
100 BROOKLYN
NY - USA

SEND TO:
STEFANIE POSAVEC
LONDON
ENGLAND

DELIVERED BY HAND (SPECIAL NYC DELIVERY!)

DEAR DATA - WEEK 07
A WEEK OF COMPLAINTS* AND GENERAL GRUMPINESS

HOW TO READ IT: (EACH LINE REPRESENTS ONE COMPLAINT) THESE THREW DOWN MY FEELS WHEN I FINISHED BECAUSE (COMPLAINT #5) I HATED UP THE ORDER BY THAT TIME I HAD ALREADY SPENT 15 HOURS ON THIS... ABSURD! AND (COMPLAINT #2) THIS PART OF THE DRAWING IS THE STRANGEST PART WHICH STRUCK ME!

TYPE OF COMPLAINT:

- WEATHER
- HUSBANDS
- ANIMALS
- FAMILY
- SOCIETY!
- THE WORLD TODAY
- ACQUAINTANCES!
- STRANGERS!
- MY APPEARANCE
- FRIENDS
- WORK
- HEALTH
- HUNGER
- MYSELF
- TECHNOLOGY!
- MEDIA
- MONEY
- INANIMATE OBJECTS
- TRANSPORT

MAIN STATS:

- PRIVATE COMPLAINTS: 67
- OUTWARD COMPLAINTS: 100
- COMPLAINTS TO ME: 43
- # OF PEOPLE WHO COMPLAINED TO ME: 15
- COMPLAINTS TO MY HUSBAND: 17
- COMPLAINTS TO MY BOYFRIEND: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY FRIENDS: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY OTHERS: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MYSELF: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY TECHNOLOGY: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY MEDIA: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY MONEY: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY TRANSPORT: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY INANIMATE OBJECTS: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY STRANGERS: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY ACQUAINTANCES: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY WORLD TODAY: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY SOCIETY: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY FAMILY: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY ANIMALS: 10
- COMPLAINTS TO MY WEATHER: 10

FROM: S. POSAVEC
LONDON
UK

TO: GIORGIA LUPI
BROOKLYN, NY
USA

DELIVERED BY HAND (SPECIAL NYC DELIVERY!)

What better visual reference than a musical score to show the repetitiveness of Georgia's protests and the "level" of complaint: whether they are justified or totally out of place.

Note the hand-drawn stamps: these postcards were delivered in person in New York!

Above are both Georgia's and Stefanie's interpretations for week 7's prompt - a week of complaints. They each provide a unique key for understanding the language they individually developed, to unlock the personal information the visualizations represent.

It takes a long time to fully understand one visualization, and the whole book contains 52, so the entire journey of reading *Dear Data* is not for the unengaged mind. I find it very satisfying to reach the point of understanding one of these seemingly abstract plots. Even though that which is communicated has nothing to do with my own emotional experience, I find the interactivity of this work so captivating that I still want to understand it, and I end up learning a lot about the artists by engaging with it. I think the most successful element of this work is the visual comparison of the two artists' unique approaches to the same prompt. Inspired by Georgia's and Stefanie's work, I continued my banana research and discovered that everything I was learning about followed a similar pattern.

I realized I was learning about two distinct social narratives throughout time, both equally true to a different group of people. I was learning about the frenzy of banana consumption in the USA, the public fascination of the strange food when it was first seen here, the media's glorifying representation of it, the subsequent embrace and normalization of the banana, its success on grocery store shelves, and its constant habitation in almost

every kitchen cabinet in the states. I've always been familiar with this perspective, having never questioned the consistent presence of bananas in my own kitchen and diet, but this particular story shifted completely for me when I was introduced to its counterpart- the narrative of banana production in Latin America and the USA's invasive role in it.

While bananas were basking in the USA spotlight, banana consumers were ignorant of the conditions of the lives of the people growing them in Central and South America. Simultaneously while The United Fruit Company was making loads of money and gaining power exponentially, people were dying, pleas for better conditions were being ignored, lands were being destroyed, and all of this was left out of the media.

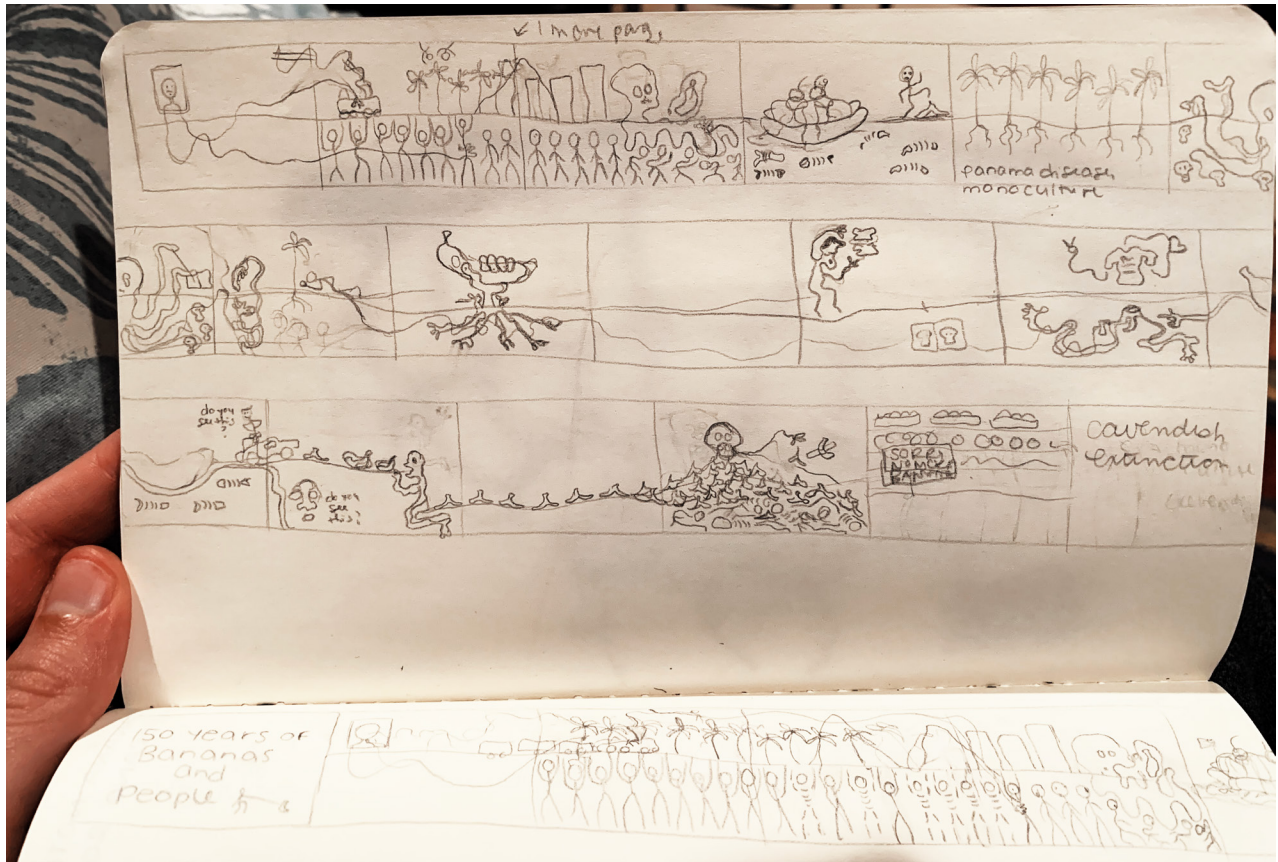
The tones of the two perspectives, of banana production and banana consumption, are so starkly opposing; I couldn't shake the disturbing juxtaposition from my mind. This is what led me to the final format of my project- two distinct parallel narratives illustrated on one timeline, one of banana production and one of banana consumption, interpreted using extreme visual and contextual contrast.

METHODOLOGY

Something important clicked for me when I began thinking about the history of bananas and people from two distinct angles. I was reminded of my fascination between night and day, summer and winter, black and white. Black and white. Now there's something I'm super comfortable with. My illustration style relies heavily on the contrast between the two, and now I had the opportunity to assign meaning to that, a visual language I could play with and hide subliminal messages within. I knew I wanted to create one continuous illustrated timeline, and a little lightbulb showed up above my head when I realized I had two axes to work with- the x-axis of time and the y-axis of place.

I began to think about my project in terms of juxtaposition and math. I drew a horizontal line from one end of an 8.5x11" sheet of paper to the other and thought of it as 150 years, 1870 - 2020. I filled in the whole line with events that I considered important enough to summarize the whole complicated history to-date, drawing from all of my sources, the United Fruit chronology and everything I had discovered in my research elsewhere.

I started thinking about my own firsthand familiarity with bananas and popular culture in the USA and wondered about when, for example, the department store, Banana Republic, was founded (1978). I wrote the events that took place in North America in the upper half of the page and the ones that took place in Central and South America in the lower half. From there, I began noticing all kinds of connections between the two narratives and visualizing all of it outlined in one continuous folded page of an accordion book.

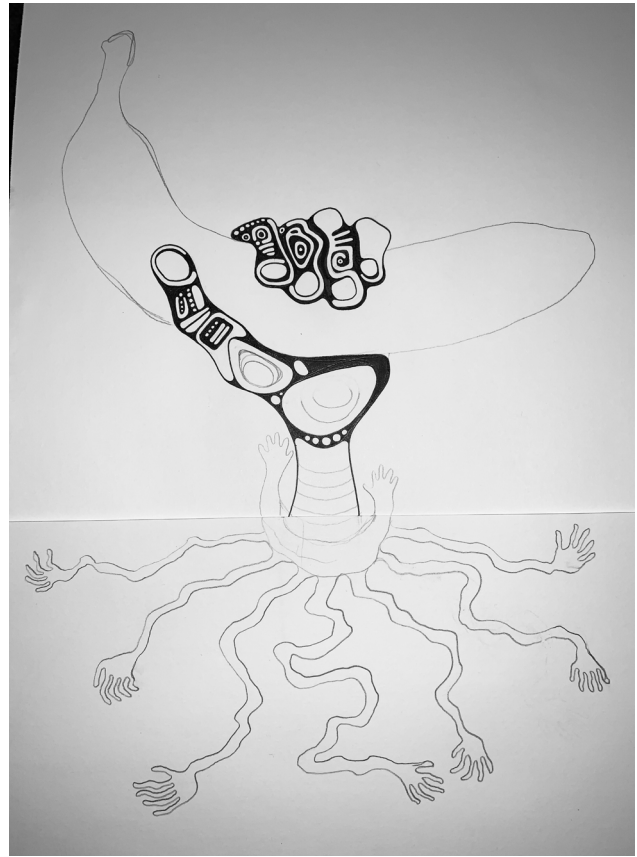


This is my rough storyboard for the entire timeline of 150 years.

I separated the pages into decades and the decades into inverted imagery in my head. The consumption story would be told using white illustration over a black background, and the production story would be told using black illustration over white; the two would have totally contrasting tones, one of excitement and relaxation and the other of horror and devastation. It was suddenly all making sense in my head, and I finally had a plan.

So I went full steam ahead and committed to doing what I love most- getting lost in my mind with a pen in my hand.

This is one of the first illustrations I worked on. It began as a photo of my own hand, then as a graphite gesture, an ink illustration, and finally it became a digital file on my computer. I wasn't sure where in the book to put it for a long time until it occurred to me months later to place Miss Chiquita on the banana.



This is how the illustration ultimately ended up after scanning the ink drawing, touching it up in Photoshop, adding Miss Chiquita, and integrating it into the book format.

CREATIVE WORK

The bones of this project came together slowly, but towards the end, everything came into focus really fast. Things started making a bunch of sense in my head, and I was connecting so many logistical dots. There was so much information I wanted to include in the book, a lot that I couldn't, and a lot that I still would like to add, but this project gave me a unique opportunity to say with my illustrations what I could not with text.



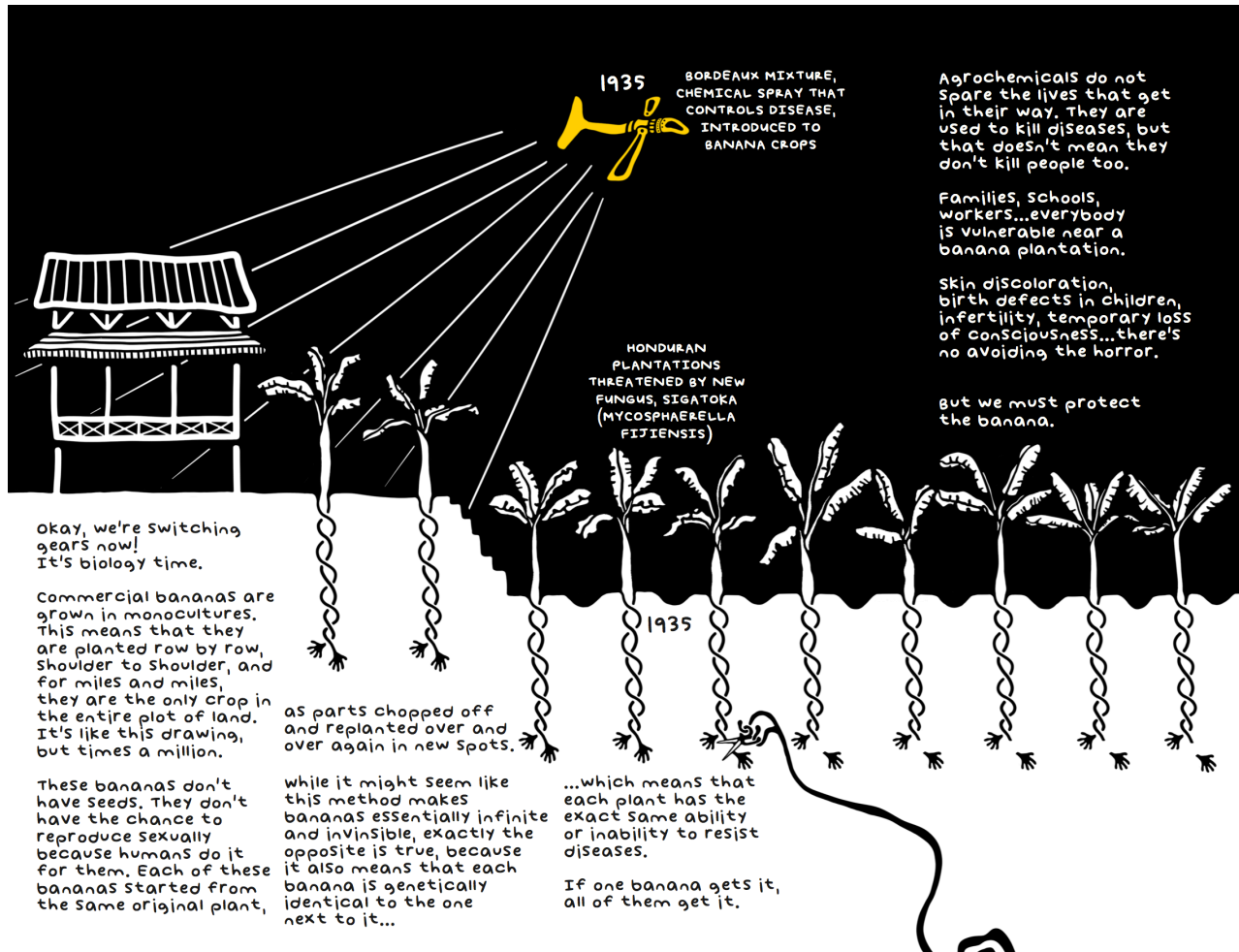
This is how the two-page spread with Miss Chiquita ended up looking in the final book.

I learned in my banana research that in some Latin American countries, it was common for United Fruit men to invade the land, tear down houses, and build luxury estates for themselves. They would build golf courses and brothels, filling them with underage girls. Even though it may not be explicitly clear, the two-page spread above visually represents that element of the history.

The man from the USA lounges comfortably on his pool chair atop the banana boxes, which contain the bodies of banana workers, as evident by the hands clutching the legs of the chair, and he watches the woman on the other page, Miss Chiquita, sexualized figure and icon of banana marketing, sit on the giant, phallic-shaped banana.

When Guatemalan leader, Jacobo Árbenz, stands up and gets in the way of his comfortable view, the man simply presses a button that bulldozes him right off the platform.

I want people to read *150 Years of Bananas and People* and decipher the visual language on their own. It was never my intention to spell out exactly how to interpret the story. I think it's an important part of interacting with this book to come to those conclusions independently.

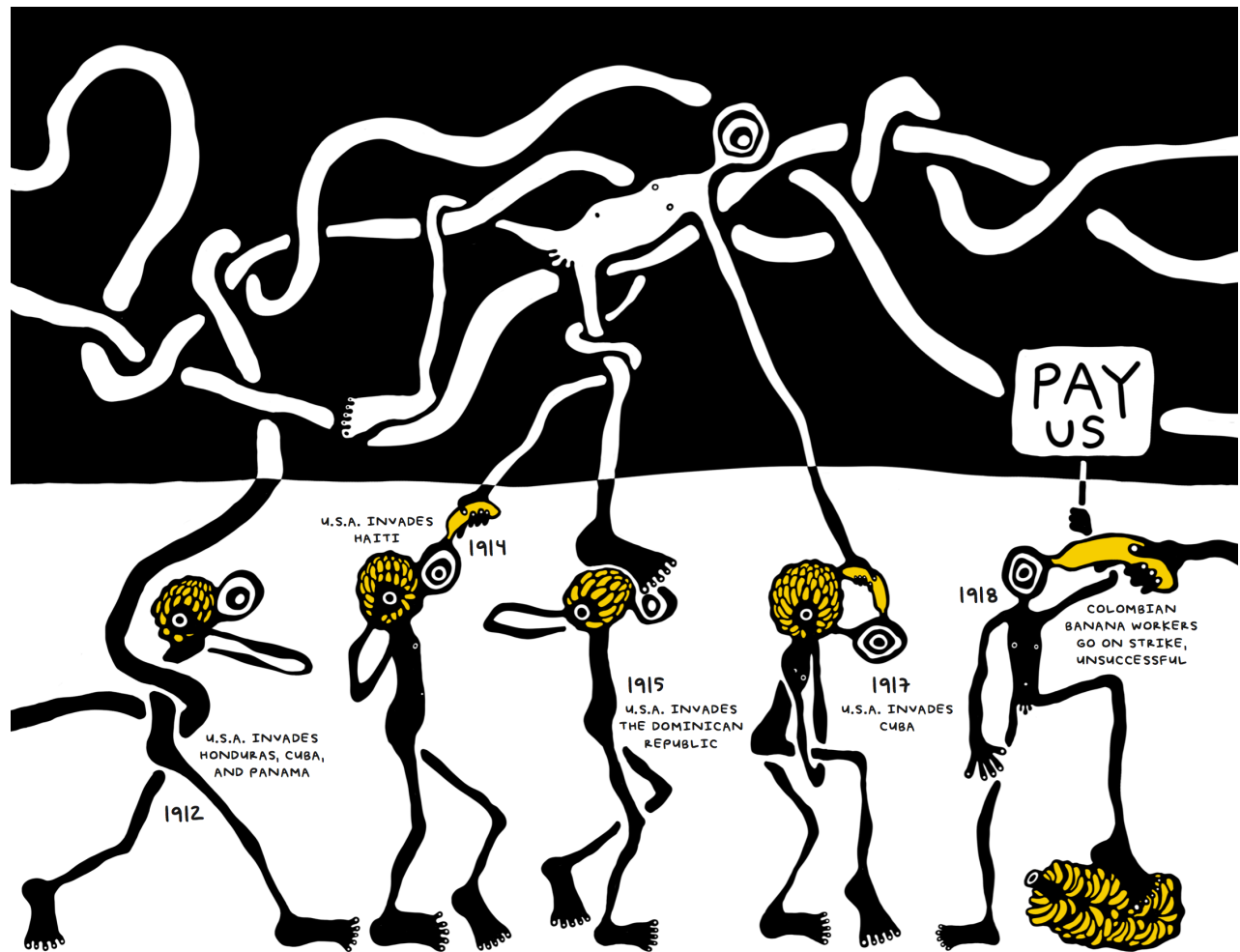


In one of my later drafts of the book, on this page, I had placed an arrow pointing to the helix-shaped roots of the trees, labeling them as “identical banana DNA”. I decided to remove that, because including it felt like underestimating the minds of my readers or taking away the opportunity for them to realize independently that I had made that illustration choice intentionally.

I discovered a beautiful harmony between the text and the illustrations and some sort of magical space of implication between the two. I could speak for hours about each of the decisions I made and my thoughts behind them, and I would be happy to if you'd ever like, but I will address just one more now.

You might be wondering why I chose to represent naked figures in the illustrations. Part of that decision was to emphasize the masculinity of the history and draw attention to where women actually became involved and how (mostly as wives, family members, and sexual objects). My bigger intention, though, was to just emphasize the humanness of all these characters.

Throughout this history, the people on top fair way better than the people on bottom, but their naked little bodies demonstrate that their superiority is no natural phenomenon. There is no difference between these people other than their positions on the pages. In this story, if you happen to be born on the top page, you are privileged, and if you happen to be born on the bottom page, you carry the weight of the privileged on top of you.



This is page 8 of the timeline. There is a clear dynamic of authority on top and servant on bottom, yet, the bodies look practically no different by nature, besides inverted.

CONCLUSION

I created so many drafts of this book, making both large and tiny revisions between each draft. I will probably continue to update the content, because the opportunity to include information in this project is just so wide, but my final step after reaching a satisfying temporary finish line was to put together a Spanish translation. Jose, my friend from Costa Rica, the boy in the earlier photo standing with me on the railroad bridge, helped me translate the full text, as well as many of the illustrations that include text.

150 Years of Bananas and People became *150 Años de Bananos y la Gente*, and the words in the book se convirtió en español.

This book was born out of the idea of telling the same story from two different perspectives, and I created it for two specific groups of people. Making the truth accessible is at the heart of this work, and I want everybody to be able to know the truth about bananas.



This is the final title page for the English version of *150 Years of Bananas and People*, and the image you saw on the previous page is the final title page for *150 Años de Bananos y la Gente*.



But why do I want everybody to know the truth about bananas? Is it so everybody boycotts them in the grocery stores, and the countries that produce them, and their people, like Jose's family, who operate large plantations, are left without money or support?

No; I just want people to expand their perspectives, be aware of their history, and ultimately, the histories of other things that they might not be aware of. I mean, how many other food products, even fruits alone, have a corrupt history? I don't know! I haven't yet done the research, but I'm sure the majority of them have something a little alarming to learn about and consider.

There are two sides to every story, and sometimes even more. A lot of things are complicated and difficult, but sometimes it just takes thinking about them in a different way to understand them a little bit more.

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