

BANANA CREAM PIE

Remember that banana scandal, where a high-powered Republican lawyer advised Chiquita to go on paying right wing terrorists even though it was a felony? Where said high-powered Republican lawyer alleged that Michael Chertoff—the guy now in charge of protecting our country—told him that he could go on funding terrorists so long as he also cooperated with Administration investigations of the terrorists? And where, just last week, DOJ said the high-powered Republican lawyer would not be charged?

Now, if I told you that there were weapons and cocaine involved, would you start looking for those acid washed jeans you put away a couple of decades ago and make an appointment for a Fawn Hall doo?

I asked him about the drugs-for-weapons exchange and the Chiquita freighters. “Look, for every kilo of drugs they put in, they had to pay 500,000 pesos. If you’re a drug trafficker, and I’m in control, you’d have to pay me. You have 20 kilos of coca, or you have some other cargo, and I own that region—you understand me? You pay me 500,000 pesos for me to ship those drugs as if they were mine, in the boats. You understand? Chiquita’s boats. That’s what the Bananero Block had going on here.” Lorenzo watched the AUC load drugs onto Chiquita boats; he knew about it because he was there when it happened. “Look, there were drugs, and there were times that they sent drugs for weapons. They sent the kilos of drugs, and from out there, those *duros* said we are going to send this many kilos of drugs and I need this many rifles,” Lorenzo said.

What Lorenzo described was a successful scheme that allowed the AUC to act as a contraband-freight consolidator. The AUC could ship their own cocaine on the

company freighters or they could ship product belonging to someone else for a tax of roughly \$250 per kilo, which works out to a quarter of the Colombian value of the brick. And the smuggling scheme was a direct side effect of gaining access to the port. Lorenzo insisted more than once that Chiquita employees knew about the cocaine: everyone in the chain was paid a percentage to keep quiet, including the freighter captains.

If Lorenzo—and the two other people in this story who describe drugs being transported on banana freighters—are telling the truth, then it suggests the cooperation between Chiquita and the AUC extended far beyond payments in exchange for security. And it sure makes me wonder about the passage in the proffer that refers to additional details revealed in December 2003.

On or about December 4, 2003, Individual B and Individual C provided the Board of Directors additional details concerning defendant CHIQUITA'S payments to the AUC that had not previously been disclosed to the Board. A member of defendant CHIQUITA'S Board of Directors responded to this additional information by stating: "I reiterate my strong opinion—stronger now—to sell our operations in Colombia.

Did the Board discover their little cocaine sideline before they stopped funding the terrorists?

In any case, go read the article. It's a great background for the longer history of US banana companies in Colombia. And a testament to how little things have changed—since the 1980s or the 1890s.