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## The Cola Conquest

September 23, 2012 · by [The Thorn](#) · in [Film](#) ·



**Synopsis:** *THE COLA CONQUEST* tells the story of Coca-Cola – the ‘sublimated essence’ of all that America stands for – and the century-long competition with its rival, Pepsi-Cola. Shot in the U.S., Canada, Russia, England, France, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, the Sahara Desert and China, *THE COLA CONQUEST* takes us from Coke’s invention by a morphine-addicted Civil War vet to the brink of the 21st century. Challenging, fast-paced, irreverent, serious and funny by turns, it explores the delicious paradox at the heart of Coke: How did a soft drink, more than 99% sweetened water, come to wield such enormous power and assume such significance in so many people’s lives? What does it tell us about who we are and what we are becoming?

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‘The Cola Conquest’ may not seem like an interesting documentary, but I assure you that it’s engrossing. In fact, despite its overall length of almost three hours (it consists of three

parts of under an hour each), I have watched it in full, in one sitting, three or four times already – and would snatch that up quickly if I saw it for a decent price somewhere. 🤩

This time, we gathered as a group to watch the documentary – even though some of us had already seen it (yes, it really is that good! 🤩). But, to make things more interesting, we also had a blind cola taste-test, featuring 8 products that are available locally: Coca Cola, Coke Zero, Pepsi, Pepsi Max, PC Cola, PC Cola-New Wave, RC Cola and Cott Cola.

I took the time to transfer each one in clear glass bottles (remember those? Ah... the good old days!), and colour-coded them with stickers. Then we took turns tasting each one and comparing them over and over again, taking notes. Even I had no idea which ones were which while doing the taste-test – I only knew that the blue and red bottle was not Pepsi (I consciously had made that decision while labelling them 😞).

And *then* we watched the feature. 😊

Considering the ubiquitous presence of soft drinks (and, in particular Coca-Cola and Pepsi products) in our daily lives, it's nothing less than fascinating to find out how it all started and how these giants got their grip on the public and maintained it over the years – heck, not even maintained it, but actually managed to expand their operations by conquering cultures around the globe.

It pretty much confirms that corporations are waging wars. And I don't mean this in a cynical way. Objectively, this is what marketing their products is: war. They're trying to conquer the hearts and minds of a buying public, all the while doing everything they can to crush any opposition – whether it be competing products or various other forces. (Sigh... it all sounds *so* terribly tiring to me. 😞)

And all this for a product. All this to push it or sell it. All for money – the more the better. Weird, when you think about it... 🤔

Anyway 'The Cola Conquest' not only gives a history of cola, albeit primarily of Coca-Cola, but it gives a context and perspective as well.

It's broken down in three parts:

1. The Big Sell: in which the origins of cola is explained, its legacy, as well as how it made its way in to the hearts and minds of the American public through the years.
2. Cola War and Peace: in which the Cold War is discussed in respect to the infiltration of cola in Soviet Russia and how it sunk its teeth in, post-Glasnot. I couldn't help but think of the cola industry-related 'One,Two,Three' during this bit.

**3. Coca-colonization:** in which we see how the big cola corporations spread their word worldwide to an unsuspectingly thirsty public and how this has impacted their societies.

Watching a documentary such as this one really changes the way you look at those gigantic soda vending machines that are just about everywhere. It has a very different meaning afterwards. Before that, it already felt invasive, being quite literally omnipresent. But, after seeing just how brutal (in a political and moral sense) the cola wars can be, you can't help but wonder if we're paying too high a price for our sweetened-water beverages. 😞

*Post scriptum: for those of you who are curious to know what the end result of the blind cola taste-test were, you'll be surprised to know the result. Heck, we sure were.*

*While Coca-Cola was the most easily identifiable of the lot, and everyone had varying opinions and preferences, the most popular was Coke Zero due to its extremely offbeat spice – distinguishing it from the rest. But, for a more traditional cola taste, PC Cola was the oft-mentioned favourite.*

*And, trust me, we didn't hold back on the cola that day: we tasted and re-tasted and re-re-tasted them all. So you could regard us as real pros. PLUS there were all those leftovers...*

*Gosh, I don't think I'll be drinking cola again anytime soon!* 😱