

# UNLIKELY HEROES

## OF THE ARAB SPRING

With Hernando de Soto

### **UNLIKELY HEROES OF THE ARAB SPRING, PRESENTED BY HERNANDO DE SOTO**

*New Documentary Explores the Economic Roots and Promise of the Arab Spring*



*Hernando de Soto.*

Presented by award-winning author and economic activist Hernando de Soto, host of the acclaimed 2009 PBS special *The Power of the Poor*, ***Unlikely Heroes of the Arab Spring*** is an eye-opening exploration of the volatile economic conditions that led to the 2010 uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa known as “the Arab Spring.” Through the stories of business people and citizens across the region, the program shows that the events of the Arab Spring and the turmoil that continues today are less

about politics than economics: over 90% of the population of the Arab world is still forced to live and work outside the rule of law, denying the vast majority of citizens the ability to earn a living free of government corruption and repressive regulations. ***Unlikely Heroes of the Arab Spring*** offers a first time, fascinating, and human look at the issues and people behind the headlines.

Amid provocative images of the Arab uprisings of 2010 and 2011, de Soto visits the family of Tarek Mohammed Bouazizi, the 26-year-old Tunisian street vendor whose self-immolation made headlines worldwide and sparked the self-immolation of 63 other frustrated entrepreneurs across the region, leading to “the Arab Spring.” Over the next two years, four governments would fall and the entire region would be plunged into an era of painful change. It was not the \$225 expropriated by the police from his fruit cart that transformed Bouazizi into a martyr and a symbol of the revolution, but rather his similarity to the 180 million informal Arab entrepreneurs who struggle to make a living in a system where only the elite and well-connected can get the tools needed to operate a business.

Produced by



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Travelling throughout the region, de Soto notes that one of the factors leading to the Arab Spring and the continuing turmoil in the region is the proliferation of modern technology — the internet, cell phones, and social media — which has brought images of modernity and prosperity to millions who have been excluded from the global economy. Says de Soto, “the Arab Spring is a huge shout for inclusion.”

*Unlikely Heroes of the Arab Spring* explores the complex extra-legal way of business under which many in the Arab world must function: an “all cash, no credit” system in which most people have no official titles to their businesses or property. De Soto presents the centuries-old history of business in the Arab world in sequences from Fes, Morocco, once the center of Islamic business, learning and culture. The program also demonstrates that business is thriving along with Arab culture in the international business center of Istanbul, Turkey. Timur Kuran of Duke University says, “One of the lessons of the Turkish experience is that allowing modern economic institutions to develop ultimately brings prosperity.” The story of a young Turkish entrepreneur who runs a franchise of a chain of health clubs owned by women shows that, despite the country’s political conflicts, Turkey has found a way for modern economic institutions to exist within the culture. “You need political stability and economic stability to go hand in hand,” says Nakiye Boyacigiller, of Turkey’s Sabanci University. “When you have those together, fairly implemented across society, then you can really have vibrant economic growth.”

De Soto summarizes: “Hundreds of millions of Arabs identified with Bouazizi’s message that people have rights and among those rights are economic rights.” Although some view the recent Arab Spring as just the beginning of more conflict, others are optimistic that the voices of the region’s hard-working poor will finally be heard, bringing a future of prosperity out of a past of hardship and oppression.

*Unlikely Heroes of the Arab Spring* is produced by Free To Choose Network and presented by WTTW National Productions.

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### **About the Host**

**Hernando de Soto** is a renowned Peruvian economist, author, and property rights advocate. He is President of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy (ILD), considered by *The Economist* as one of the two most important think tanks in the world. The ILD works to create a world where

the majority of people can fully participate in a national and global economy by having access to property and business rights. *Time Magazine* chose him as one of the five leading Latin American innovators of the century in 1999 and included him among the 100 most influential people in the world in 2004. In its 85th anniversary edition, *Forbes* named de Soto as one of 15 innovators “who will reinvent your future.” In October 2005, *Foreign Policy* ranked him among the top 13 public intellectuals in the world.

De Soto has served as an economist for the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, as President of the Executive Committee of the Copper Exporting Countries Organization (CIPEC), as CEO of Universal Engineering Corporation (Continental Europe’s largest consulting engineering firm), as a principal of the Swiss Bank Corporation Consultant Group, and as a governor of Peru’s Central Reserve Bank.

In recent years, de Soto and his colleagues at the ILD have been involved in designing and implementing capital formation programs to legally empower the poor in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and former Soviet nations. More than 30 heads of state have invited him to discuss carrying out ILD institutional reform programs to fight poverty and legal exclusion in their countries.

De Soto has published two books about economic and political development: *The Other Path* and *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*. Both books have been international bestsellers and translated into some 20 languages. He has been previously seen on public television with *The Power of the Poor with Hernando De Soto*, which premiered on PBS (or public television?) in 2009, and 2011’s *Globalization at the Crossroads*, both produced by Free To Choose.

### **About Free To Choose Network**

[Free To Choose Network](#) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) public foundation whose mission is to explain and promote personal, economic and political freedom. For more than 30 years, FTCN has produced programs for public television stations and now also distributes educational teaching units to over 300,000 schoolteachers across the United States. These educational teaching units are also being distributed in European schools, with efforts underway to reach Asia, Africa, South America, and Australia.

### **About WTTW National Productions**

WTTW National Productions is a premier producer and presenter of original, high-quality television programs for both public and commercial television broadcast. WTTW National Productions is a division of Window to the World Communications, Inc., the parent company of WTTW11 Chicago. For more than 50 years, WTTW11 and WTTW National Productions have introduced a wide array of groundbreaking television programming – reflecting the world’s rich and diverse arts and entertainment scene as well as education, politics, public affairs, business, and religion – to a national audience. Its landmark innovative series and original productions include the critically-acclaimed performance showcases *Soundstage*, *Legends of Jazz with Ramsey Lewis*; *Proclamation of Hope*, and *David Broza at Masada: The Sunrise Concert*;

cultural series, *MEXICO—One Plate at a Time with Rick Bayless*, *Grannies on Safari*, *Ebert Presents At the Movies* and *The Artist Toolbox*; the business series *CEO Exchange*; the documentary series *Retirement Revolution*; the transmedia online educational children's properties *Mission to Planet 429* and *UMIGO*, and the award-winning animated children's series *WordWorld*. For more information, please visit [www.wttw.com/national](http://www.wttw.com/national).

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