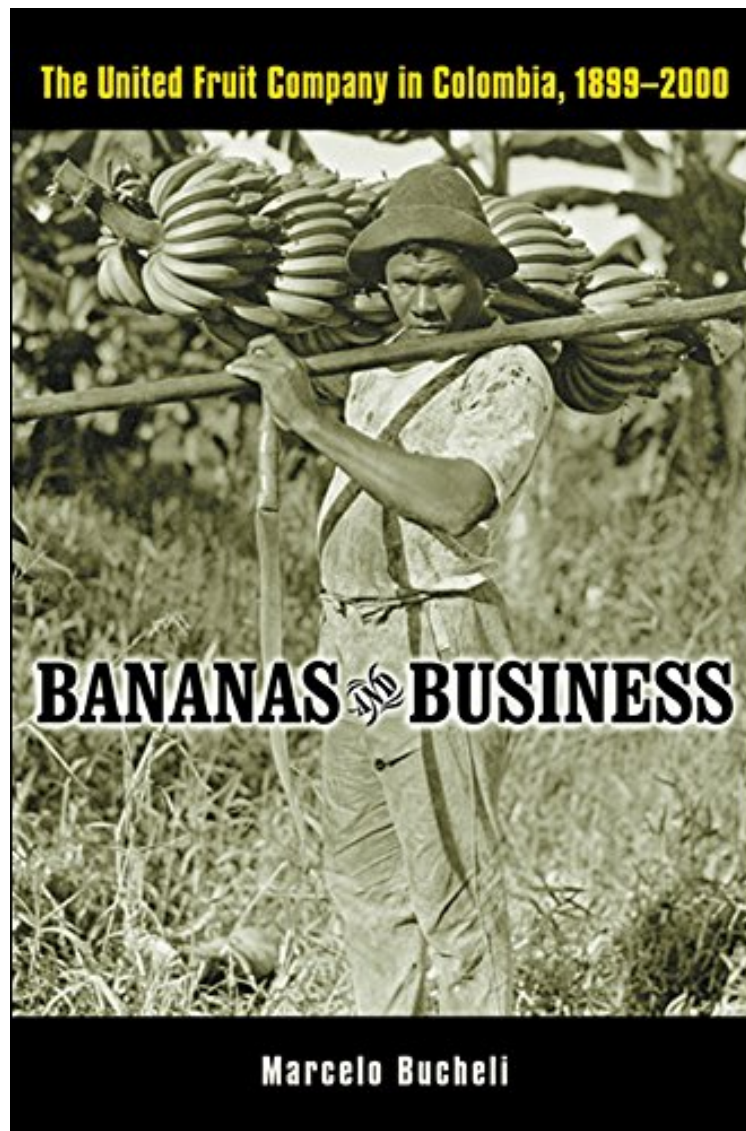


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## Bananas and Business: The United Fruit Company in Colombia, 1899-2000

*Marcelo Bucheli*

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**Marcelo Bucheli : Bananas and Business: The United Fruit Company in Colombia, 1899-2000** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bananas and Business: The United Fruit Company in Colombia, 1899-2000:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. More than bananasBy David J. WallaceExcellent history of how fruit producers discovered a product, encouraged a reluctant public to eat it, and exerted an enormous amount of control in US foreign policy in Central / South America. Explains a lot about why the Central / South American

governments and people were controlled by a few fruit producers by way of the US government, to include the US military. Good foundation reading for anyone interested in the history and / or political science of the area. 11 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Gerber kills El Pulpo (the octopus) and more banana history By Ian W. Read This book tracks the operations of United Fruit in Colombia over the century but does so within a framework of changing American market demand for bananas. Because the author pays so much attention to the actions of United Fruit's stockholders, this book sets a precedent in the historiography of the company in Latin America. For this reason, the book should interest anyone attentive of the role of American direct investment over the 20th century. The United Fruit Company has long been maligned as an imperial bastion of American business interests, quick to exploit its workers and slow to return profits to where it extracts its commodity. This view has been more tenuous in Colombia than in other Latin American countries, especially in light of the 1928 massacre of striking United Fruit workers by the Colombian troops. This massacre appeared in Gabriel Garcia's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, but Garcia exaggerated the details of its violence. The author works hard to complicate this negative picture by showing that many workers today feel nostalgia for the days gone by when the company ran schools and hospitals and sold cheap luxury goods in its store. In the 1960s, the company divested of many of its operations of its Magdalena plantation and switched over to the Uruba plantation, but used a system of contracting to buy bananas from independent growers. The company did not have to provide social and health services nor did it have to negotiate as much with workers and the government. But the big blow against El Pulpo [the octopus, a common nickname for UFCo] came when processed food (ie., Gerber's baby food) diminished demand for bananas. The ways that UFCo transformed itself to cope with the new market landscape is laid out in detail. This book is certain to stir controversy with those who believe that the Dollar Banana companies like Chiquita (United Fruit renamed) continue a very long tradition of giving their workers a bad bargain. Since unprofitable worker demands were part of the reason why United Fruit divested and switched to contracting, the author implies that the company had no other choice. But the race for the cheapest bananas by the three most powerful multinational banana corporations have created little incentive to offer improvements in living and working conditions for its producers. Most American consumers prefer to pay a few cents less per banana rather than buying from a more expensive product whose company offers livable wages and a clean environment where bananas are produced. This has long been the case and I believe Chiquita knows it. With these criticisms aside, this book will be of interest to business historians and college classrooms considering the role of American business in Latin American lives. Workers continue to strike in Colombia and the company continues to threaten to leave Colombia entirely. To those interested in these current struggles, this book will provide an excellent backdrop and reminder that none of it is new. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Bananarama By Javier Cardoso This is a comprehensive review of the troubled relationship between United Fruit, bananas, and Colombia. Putting aside preconceived notions, Bucheli convincingly shows a more complex relationship than what the conventional wisdom usually holds. The book accurately captures the political and economic environment in Colombia's 20th Century and makes a persuasive case to avoid falling into the "blame the evil corporation" trap. This book is an enlightening reading on this controversial chapter of 20th century Latin American history.

For well over a century, the United Fruit Company (UFCO) has been the most vilified multinational corporation operating in Latin America. Criticism of the UFCO has been widespread, ranging from politicians to consumer activists, and from labor leaders to historians, all portraying it as an overwhelmingly powerful corporation that shaped and often exploited its host countries. In this first history of the UFCO in Colombia, Marcelo Bucheli argues that the UFCO's image as an all-powerful force in determining national politics needs to be reconsidered. Using a previously unexplored source—the internal archives of Colombia's UFCO operation—Bucheli reveals that before 1930, the UFCO worked alongside a business-friendly government that granted it generous concessions and repressed labor unionism. After 1930, however, the country experienced dramatic transformations including growing nationalism, a stronger labor movement, and increasing demands by local elites for higher stakes in the banana export business. In response to these circumstances, the company abandoned production, selling its plantations (and labor conflicts) to local growers, while transforming itself into a marketing company. The shift was endorsed by the company's shareholders and financial analysts, who preferred lower profits with lower risks, and came at a time in which the demand for bananas was decreasing in America. Importantly, Bucheli shows that the effect of foreign direct investment was not unidirectional. Instead, the agency of local actors affected corporate strategy, just as the UFCO also transformed local politics and society.

Of interest not only to students of Latin American history, but also to those concerned with how large US companies function when they invest heavily in developing countries. A clearly written analysis that takes into account the international context in which the company operated, its characteristics as a business enterprise, and its relationship with banana workers, local entrepreneurs, and regional governments in two key banana zones. The *Journal of American History*: A significant contribution to a growing body of scholarship. *Journal of Latin American Studies*: Bananas and Business covers such new ground, both in its

postwar history of Columbia and in its analysis of UFCr's managerial decision making, that Bucheli does not need the straw man he laboriously dismantles." -Ian William Read,Stanford University" Buchelir's narrative is theoretically informed . . . This book deserves consideration by groups of specialists who do not necessarily overlap: business historians, Latin America specialists, and international business scholars."-Economic History Society

About the Author Marcelo Bucheli is Newcomen Fellow in business history at Harvard Business School.