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## **In the Shadows of State and Capital: The United Fruit Company, Popular Struggle, and Agrarian Restructuring in Ecuador, 1900ndash;1995 (American Encounters/Global Interactions)**

*Steve Striffler*

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Steve Striffler : *In the Shadows of State and Capital: The United Fruit Company, Popular Struggle, and Agrarian Restructuring in Ecuador, 1900ndash;1995* (American Encounters/Global Interactions) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In the Shadows of State and

Capital: The United Fruit Company, Popular Struggle, and Agrarian Restructuring in Ecuador, 1900–1995 (American Encounters/Global Interactions):

14 of 22 people found the following review helpful. Incomplete Analysis of Ecuador's Banana Industry By A Customer Steve Striffler has analyzed an important chapter in the history of Ecuador's banana industry and the country's relations with foreign investors. He documents quite well how peasant workers defeated the United Fruit Company at Tenguel Hacienda on Ecuador's southern coast and forced a large multinational to abandon direct production in that country. Such action, however, condemned workers to deeper poverty and limited access to new investment and improved living standards. Hopefully research like Striffler's will encourage scholars and Latin American intellectuals to reexamine how they have demonized the United Fruit Company. They have misinformed an entire generation about the positive impacts U.S. multinationals have had on Latin America as described in the best seller "Guide to the Perfect Latin American Idiot". For fifty years the United Fruit Company has been portrayed by leftist ideologues and most academics as the symbol of U.S. imperialism and hegemony in the Americas. Yet we see in the 1940s and 1950s at Tenguel what a positive force this company was in introducing new technologies, increasing banana production and exports, paying taxes, contributing to Ecuadorian development, and dramatically improving worker salaries and living conditions. Indeed, it was United Fruit's pioneering investments that saved Ecuador from collapse of the cacao boom and produced one of its most important exports. If a small band of peasant workers defeated the United Fruit Company in Ecuador, scholars must now explain how this "demonic force" came to play such a significant role in Central America. Striffler's book unfortunately provides little analysis of United Fruit and its executives, except by pejoratively characterizing them as "the banana boys". The company is shown as a faceless actor with little or no examination of its views of Ecuador and local workers. A more complete analysis would have shown that United Fruit was led by a missionary capitalist, Samuel Zemurray, who saw his company as helping countries overcome poverty and improve living conditions. Many of his executives had the same commitment to local development as did their contemporary Point Four technicians and later Peace Corps volunteers. As described in Lawrence Harrison's "The Pan American Dream" (chapter four), Zemurray was a strong supporter of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. Tenguel Hacienda was an example of how he saw his company and modern capitalism bringing New Deal progress to countries like Ecuador. In addition, Striffler fails to examine the role of domestic businesses in encouraging peasant unions and the Ecuadorian state to harass United Fruit because they were threatened by its large size and progressive labor standards. They whipped-up Ecuador's deep xenophobia and nationalistic suspicions against United Fruit to pursue their own business interests. This follows a similar pattern in Central America where local mercantilists used weak States and labor/peasant unions to run out competitors and take over their investments and markets either directly, or as at Tenguel, through government expropriation. An important part of the Tenguel story that Striffler does not address is the rise of the Ecuadorian Noboa Group, and other domestic banana producers, who replaced United Fruit and paid workers lower wages and provided few social services. Indeed, the development of the Noboa Group as one of Latin America's first multinationals filled the vacuum left by the withdrawal of United Fruit. Its Guayaquil founder, Luis Noboa, prided himself on how his company came to dominate the Ecuadorian banana industry in the 1960s and 1970s and regularly beat out United Fruit and Standard Fruit in business ventures. In effect, the Noboa Group used its mercantilist penetration of the Ecuadorian State, government subsidies, alliances with populist movements, and threats of labor problems (like those at Tenguel) to limit foreign competition and become the dominant force in producing and exporting Ecuadorian bananas. Because of the myopic view of many scholars, and their irrelevant Marxist paradigms, they have focused mainly on foreign multinationals while ignoring how domestic companies exploited the weak and fragmented Ecuadorian State and labor/peasant unions to maintain a corrupt mercantilist system. As described by Hernando DeSoto in "The Other Path", countries like Ecuador are locked into mercantilist economies that allow domestic businessmen to pursue protectionist measures through public-private alliances and payoffs to government officials. Defeat of United Fruit at Tenguel was not just the defeat of a multinational, but the destruction of an important initiative to bring to Ecuador the benefits of progressive democratic capitalism and greater development. Throughout the 20th century, Ecuadorian mercantilism kept the country largely closed to foreign investment (except limited areas in the petroleum sector) and condemned it to greater poverty and increasing dominance and corruption from local business groups. This has been re-enforced by right wing mercantilists in Guayaquil, allied with left wing mercantilists in Sierra-based military, labor unions and populist movements. It explains why Ecuador, with its rich natural resources, remains one of the poorest and most corrupt countries in the region. Reviewer is an international consultant who has lived and worked many years in Ecuador and other Latin American countries. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Micro and macro in anthropology and history By Antonio Outstanding ability to move back and forth in scales of analysis. From ethnographic detail to larger historical and political processes. 3 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Great Book By A Customer This is a wonderful book. Not sure what first () reviewer was thinking. He is an international aid worker so it's no surprise he misses the point.

Winner of the 2001 President's Award of the Social Science History Association *In the Shadows of State and Capital* tells the story of how Ecuadorian peasants gained, and then lost, control of the banana industry. Providing an ethnographic history of the emergence of subcontracting within Latin American agriculture and of the central role played by class conflict in this process, Steve Striffler looks at the quintessential form of twentieth-century U.S. imperialism in the region—the banana industry and, in particular, the United Fruit Company (Chiquita). He argues that, even within this highly stratified industry, popular struggle has contributed greatly to processes of capitalist transformation and historical change. Striffler traces the entrance of United Fruit into Ecuador during the 1930s, its worker-induced departure in the 1960s, the troubled process through which contract farming emerged during the last half of the twentieth century, and the continuing struggles of those involved. To explore the influence of both peasant activism and state power on the withdrawal of multinational corporations from banana production, Striffler draws on state and popular archives, United Fruit documents, and extensive oral testimony from workers, peasants, political activists, plantation owners, United Fruit administrators, and state bureaucrats. Through an innovative melding of history and anthropology, he demonstrates that, although peasant-workers helped dismantle the foreign-owned plantation, they were unable to determine the broad contours through which the subsequent system of production—contract farming—emerged and transformed agrarian landscapes throughout Latin America. By revealing the banana industry's impact on processes of state formation in Latin America, *In the Shadows of State and Capital* will interest historians, anthropologists, and political scientists, as well as scholars of globalization and agrarian studies.

“An innovative contribution to the study of the relationships between popular groups, state agents, and a series of capitalists. Striffler uses a fascinating array of sources such as life histories, local archives and newspapers, and even the internal correspondence between United Fruit officials.”—Carlos de la Torre, author of *Populist Seduction in Latin America: The Ecuadorian Experience*