

The College and *La United Fruit*:
Victor Cutter and the Business of Latin America

Alejandra María Sequeira Argüello
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Introduction

Colleges frequently derive their public reputation from their alumni, as reflected in the “Notable Alumni” sections that appear in most Google search results. Dartmouth College is no exception. Not included in Dartmouth’s search result, however, is Victor M. Cutter, who, according to Alumni Magazine, is the most “devoted” son that Dartmouth has ever graduated¹. So renowned was Cutter that during his lifetime, he was Alumni Trustee,² Life Trustee,³ and Trustee Emeritus.⁴ However, beyond being an important figure within the Dartmouth community, Cutter was also a key actor in the United Fruit Company (UFCo) and was responsible for its abusive, extractive, and monopolistic practices in Latin America.

While at the time, Cutter was recognized and lauded for his expertise on Latin America and business with it, by today's standards, his actions in relation to it can be criticized for what they truly were: acts of economic imperialism. Cutter himself is responsible for upholding the company's disreputable operations, and it is through him and his close ties with his *Alma Mater* that Dartmouth ultimately benefited from the exploitation of Latin American nations.

Victor M. Cutter

Victor Macomber Cutter was born and brought up in 1881 in Dracut, Massachusetts. He completed his undergraduate studies at Dartmouth College, from where he graduated in 1903

¹ “Victor Cutter ’03, Trustee Emeritus, Dies in Washington as Result of Fall: Dartmouth Alumni Magazine: February 1953,” Dartmouth Alumni Magazine | The Complete Archive, February 1953, <https://archive.dartmouthalumnimagazine.com/article/1953/2/1/victor-cutter-03-trustee-emeritus-dies-in-washington-as-result-of-fall>.

² June 17, 1933. Bound meeting minutes, October 1930 - August 1943 VOL 8 [Dartmouth College, Board of Trustees records; DA-1, Box 2122, Pg 76] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

³ April 9, 1937. Bound meeting minutes, October 1930 - August 1943 VOL 8 [Dartmouth College, Board of Trustees records; DA-1, Box 2122, Pg 218] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁴ Bound meeting minutes, November 1943 - May 1952 VOL. 9 [Dartmouth College, Board of Trustees records; DA-1, Box 2123, Pg 44] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

with a Bachelor's degree in Commercial Sciences. In 1904, he graduated from the Tuck School of Business and, within the same year, began to work for the United Fruit Company, initially stationed as a timekeeper in Costa Rica—considered the “lowest paying job” available to a white man.⁵ He began to climb up the ranks quickly, getting promoted to superintendent of the Zent Section, the biggest division within Costa Rica, in 1906. In 1907, he took the job of Manager of the Guatemala Division, where he met and married Florence de Jongh, daughter of the Dutch Consul in Guatemala, John J. de Jongh. The couple then lived throughout the Americas, going to Honduras for the management of the Tela and Truxillo Railroad in 1914; back to Costa Rica in 1915, as Cutter was promoted to General Manager of the Central and South American department; briefly to Jamaica, as Cutter was transferred to the office of General Manager of the Tropical Banana Division; and then back to Boston in 1917, after Cutter was selected as the Vice President of the company. Later, he settled in a farmhouse in New England, near Hanover, New Hampshire. In 1924, he was chosen as President of the United Fruit Company, a position he held until 1933, when he retired.

Through all this time, he remained very engaged with Dartmouth, maintained constant correspondence with figures such as Dartmouth Presidents Ernest Hopkins and John Sloan Dickey, and Tuck School Dean H.S. Person; worked as a Trustee; regularly visited the college as a guest speaker for the Tuck School of Business; invited Dartmouth leadership to annual blueberry pickings at his house; and generally participated in college-related activities. In recognition of his contributions, a residential building was named after him: Cutter Hall. Eventually, that building was renamed to “Shabazz Center for Intellectual Inquiry.”⁶ However,

⁵ Scrapbook, 1924-1926 [Victor Cutter Papers; MS-63; Box 3; Folder 3; Pg 101] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁶ March 25, 1970. Bound meeting minutes, June 1969 - May 1972 VOL 15 [Dartmouth College, Board of Trustees records; DA-1, Box 2129, Pg 111-112] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

as of September 2025, Dartmouth's page for the building within the Living Learning Communities page still recognizes the previous name, by quoting, "The Shabazz Center for Intellectual Inquiry is located in Cutter Hall at 32 North Main Street, near the intersection of Choate Road."⁷ Furthermore, Victor M. Cutter's personal collection of papers is currently housed at the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College.

Historical Context

The period of time Victor Cutter worked for the UFCo is very significant in terms of the relationship between the United States and Latin America. Through policies such as the Monroe Doctrine, the United States had been expressing its perception of Latin America as its backyard, where it could act and intervene to its liking. The US was responsible for multiple interventions in Latin America under the reasoning of promoting peace and stopping communism. In contrast, the reasoning behind their actions was more directly connected with maintaining an ideal political and commercial climate in the rest of the Americas for their own benefit. Relevant among these interventions is the Banana Wars (1898-1934), a series of conflicts involving US intervention or military presence aimed at protecting US commercial interests, maintaining political stability favorable to the US, and controlling strategic regions. Even after the Banana Wars, the United States continued to have interventions in the Latin American region. Other notable conflicts include the U.S. military occupation of Nicaragua in 1926-1932, the 1989 Invasion of Panamá, the Nicaraguan Contra War 1979-1999, and the 1980s civil wars in both Guatemala and El Salvador. Simultaneously, the construction of the Panama Canal began in

⁷ "Shabazz Center for Intellectual Inquiry," Living Learning Communities, accessed September 13, 2025, <https://students.dartmouth.edu/living-learning/communities/identity-based-communities/shabazz-center-intellectual-inquiry>.

1904, and control over the Canal Area remained in the United States' hands until 1999, a clear demonstration of the US's direct involvement and occupation of foreign lands.

The United Fruit Company was born from a merger between businessmen Minor Keith, Andrew Preston, and Lorenzo Baker. With Keith's prior possession of railroads in Central America, Preston and Baker's ownership of a steamship fleet and land holdings in the Caribbean, and all of them being already present in the market of bananas, the merger meant they had all the resources necessary to push the company into becoming the monopoly it is known for today.⁸ The United Fruit Company excelled in its business at the cost of Latin American nations, as it exercised a corporate colonialist approach in its industry, a theme explored in Jason Colby's book *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America*.⁹ A characteristic practice of the UFCo in Central America was the enforcement of racial hierarchies, which separated "white" and "non-white" people into "first-class" or "second-class citizens".¹⁰ In collaboration with that, the UFCo held control over international transportation of produce through their possession of both railroads and ships, weakening independent farmers and forcing them to sell to them.

Cutter, the 'Expert' on Latin America

Cutter was considered an expert in U.S. relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, given that he lived and conducted business in these regions. As a result, he published various pieces discussing trade relations with these two areas and was often invited to clubs to speak on

⁸ Marcelo Bucheli, "United Fruit Company in Latin America," in *Banana Wars: Power, Production, and History in the Americas*, ed. Steve Striffler and Mark Moberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 81.

⁹ Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 4, <https://doi-org.dartmouth.idm.oclc.org/10.7591/9780801462719>

¹⁰ Colby, *The Business of Empire*, 197.

the topic. For instance, on April 23, 1927, Cutter gave an address before the American Academy of Political and Social Science titled “Relations of United States Companies with Latin America,” which was then published in print and discussed in newspapers for days after.¹¹ In his address, he pointed out the “undeveloped” and “agricultural” nature of the Latin American countries, arguing that the countries need capital, “modern production methods,” and developed infrastructure, which the US could offer.¹² Cutter proceeded to warn US companies against disobeying the laws of the host countries and claimed to reject any sort of imperialism.

His arguments and consistent labeling of Latin America as "underdeveloped" and mentioning of the United States as their only option to what he assumes is a prosperous future, reveal his perception of the region as inferior.¹³ Cutter also commented on the United States being able to benefit from Latin America’s raw resources, framing Latin America as a supplier of resources for US prosperity. While Cutter attempted to distance himself from imperialistic attitudes in his arguments, his own language and framework demonstrated a paternalistic, Eurocentric, and corporate-dominant view of Latin America—a perspective consistent with economic imperialism and corporate colonialism.

Cutter’s arguments about the alleged interdependency between the United States and Latin America did not end after that speech. Instead, he reiterated these points at the Bond Club of New York on March 29 of the following year, after he was invited to give a speech for it. Many of his points revolved around calling out “radicals” who were “highly misinformed” and therefore criticized the US government and its actions. One of the ideas Cutter emphasized the most was that the United States government was not imperialistic—a notable shift from previous

¹¹ Writings, 1926-1929 [Victor Cutter Papers; MS-63; Box 2; Folder 6] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

speeches where he would caution the government against repeating imperialistic tactics—and that no “sensible man” would be either.¹⁴ He claimed that Latin America’s time for prosperity was arriving, and it was through their trade with the United States that they would achieve it.¹⁵ For this to be possible, Cutter argued that it is “not an international complication” for Latin American nations to take out loans, and that businessmen should not be “deterred from making loans...and giving all possible assistance to Latin America” simply because “pacifists and politicians cry ‘imperialism.’”¹⁶ Even while receiving criticism for their actions due to the imperialistic implications of the way loans are granted for alleged development, Cutter attempted to reframe the optics, claiming “radicals” and “pacifists” are stopping assistance for Latin America.

Despite Cutter’s efforts to frame himself as a savior for Latin America, there was significant opposition from the places in Latin America and the Caribbean where the UFCo was operating. A notable instance of it came after Victor Cutter’s speech at the Bond Club. A Costa Rican, publishing under the name of “Un Bananero,” released a series of approximately 20 articles in the Costa Rican national newspaper *La Tribuna*, where he deconstructed and counterargued every one of Cutter’s points.¹⁷ “Un Bananero” explained how the UFCo had a monopoly in Costa Rica, as they controlled the railroads—not built with UFCo funds, but instead taxpayer money. The UFCo purchased products from independent farmers, who, having no means of transportation for their product beyond the UFCo-controlled trains, had no option but

¹⁴ Scrapbook, 1928 [Victor Cutter Papers; MS-63; Box 4; Folder 2; Pg 43] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

¹⁵ Scrapbook, 1928 [Victor Cutter Papers; MS-63; Box 4; Folder 2; Pg 33] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Scrapbook, 1928 [Victor Cutter Papers; MS-63; Box 4; Folder 2; Pg 80] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

to sell to them for miserable prices, and the UFCo sold the individual fruit in the United States for much higher prices. Aside from the acts of the company as a whole, “Un Bananero” would criticize Cutter himself, saying, “And the President of this Company comes to us here and with the arrogance of Jupiter Tonans, threatening us with rays and sparks!...” among other comments.¹⁸

The pushback in the countries where the United Fruit operated did not consist only of published articles, but was also followed by actions. Multiple strikes took place at the times when Cutter was in positions of power in the UFCO. In Jamaica, Di Gorgio, a banana buyer, began to persuade independent farmers, who typically sold their products to UFCo, to sell to him instead, thereby putting Cutter in a more vulnerable position.¹⁹ Eventually, the efforts went beyond the individual buyer and made their way into legislation.

‘Trivial’ Revolutions

During Cutter's tenure at the United Fruit Company, many Latin American countries experienced periods of unrest and conflict, often linked to US interventions. While many of these events were central to the histories of these nations, usually as painful memories and times of loss, Cutter referred to these major political events in his correspondence as nothing more than a personal inconvenience for him, diminishing their real-world impact. In a letter sent on February 19, 1924, Cutter wrote,

I think the chances are good for my spending a few days in Hanover between now and the latter part of March. I think I should probably get more rest if I do not tell you when I shall be able to get away. In any event I cannot say. The revolution in Honduras, together

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Scrapbook, 1928 [Victor Cutter Papers; MS-63; Box 4; Folder 2; Pg 24] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

with lawsuits in Colombia, shortage of labor in Cuba, and a few other minor details make it impossible to say.²⁰

The revolution in Honduras that Cutter speaks about in that letter, which to him is an inconvenience in terms of when he can visit Hanover, was actually the second Honduran Civil War. Cutter brought up this conflict again in a letter to the same person, W.R. Gray, Tuck dean at the time. In this second letter, dated March 26 of the same year, he enclosed a copy of a confidential report on the seizure of a boat by the Honduran government in relation to the revolution, which involved deaths, but he “thought it would amuse” Gray. In a third letter, this time addressed to President Hopkins, Cutter wrote,

With two or three big deals hanging in the wind, with a Communistic strike in Colombia, a railway washed away in Costa Rica, two or three accidents to ships, I have been so fortunate as to have so many worries that it was impossible to attend to each one individually. This has been a great blessing. I really feel that I am becoming hardened, or “indurated” as you would say in academic circles, so that it would really be no shock at all if I woke up dead some morning.²¹

This letter was sent on January 22, 1929, and the “Communistic strike in Colombia” mentioned actually refers to the “Banana Massacre,” where many UFCo workers who were striking were assassinated by Colombian federal troops.²² The events that were a test of character or a challenge for travels to Cutter were actually marking events in Latin American history, and his utter lack of care for them is a demonstration of his lack of care for the Latin American people and nations.

Mapping: Costa Rica

²⁰ Cutter to Hopkins, February 19, 1924. Cutter, Victor M. United Fruit Co. [Amos Tuck School of Business Administration, Dean records; DA-5; Box 2417] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

²¹ Cutter to Hopkins, January 22, 1929. Cutter, Victor M. 1928-29 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; DP-11; Box 6867, Folder 6] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts

²² “Banana Massacre,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed September 13, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Banana-Massacre>.

Amongst Cutter's preserved possessions at Rauner is a leather-bound collection of maps that contains detailed cartographic depictions of the United Fruit Company's landholdings in the Zent District in Costa Rica, where Cutter worked as timekeeper, superintendent, and manager. By themselves, these maps are already proof of the imperialistic practices of the company in Central America, as they held large amounts of terrain, often named after US states, showing how they essentially reshaped the land to serve their purpose. The maps also contain lines representing both existing railroads and projected ones, as shown in Figure 1. The railroads were particularly significant given their role in enabling the UFCo to maintain its monopoly over the exportation of bananas cultivated in Costa Rica and much of Latin America. Despite already controlling vast Central American transportation networks, the UFCo sought to expand the railroad's reach.

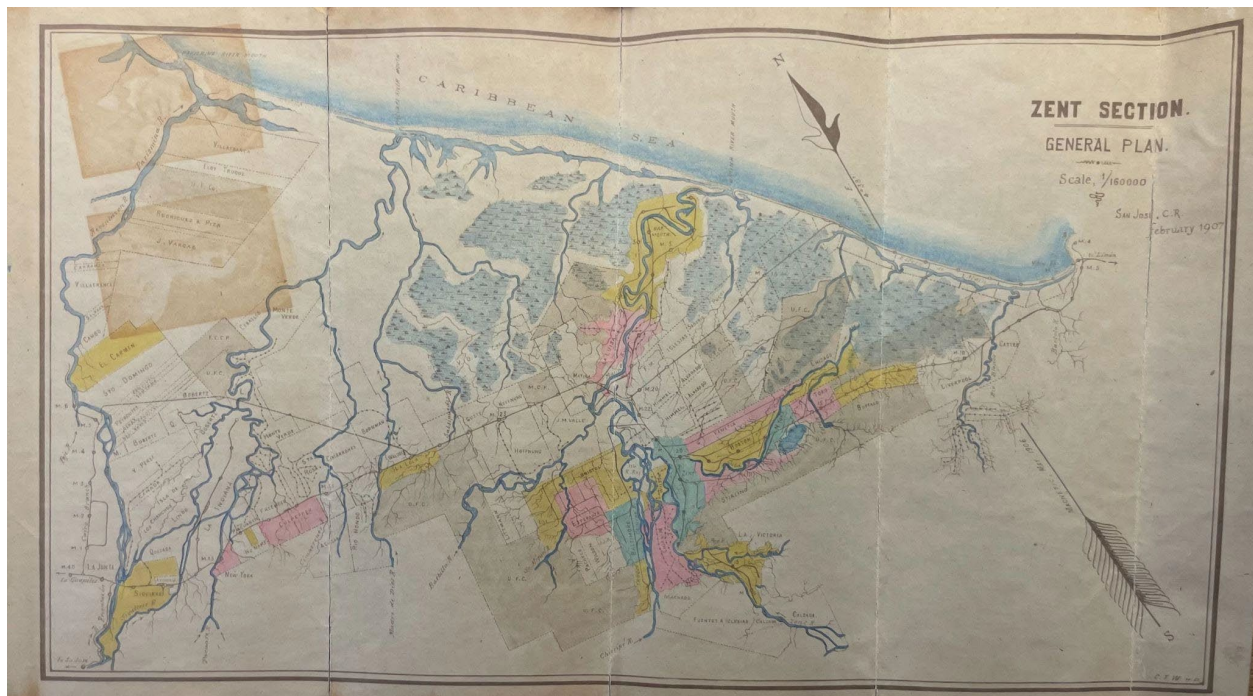


Figure 1: *Map of the United Fruit Company's Zent Section in Limón, Costa Rica.* Image from Rauner Special Collections Library

As previously mentioned, many of the farms in the Zent Division carried the names of states from the UFCo's home country, such as Boston, Chicago, and New York. While these names might seem inoffensive, merely names for plots of land, the imposition of foreign names goes beyond any administrative reasoning. The renaming of lands that most likely had names of their own before is essentially a presumption of conquest over the place. It is a reflection of the colonial capitalist thinking of the UFCo, where they have this land as an extension of US commercial and cultural interests. To further demonstrate the legacy left by these actions, Figure 2 shows a modern Google Maps satellite image of the area where the Zent district was located, and where the Boston and New York farms are still visible in the present. Such an image is a depiction of a time when a US company could essentially reimagine, repurpose, and rename an independent foreign land, and how this effect remains identifiable today.



Figure 2: *Cutter's maps of Boston Farm and New York Farm overlaid onto the modern Google Maps satellite image. The corresponding areas are still labeled "Boston" and "Nueva York."*
Image from Rauner Library Blogspot

Dartmouth Graduate-UFCo Employee Pipeline

The connection between Victor M Cutter, his role as president of the United Fruit Company, and Dartmouth extends far beyond Cutter being an alumnus. Dartmouth actively benefited from Cutter's operations in Latin America. Cutter secured his first job at United Fruit, thanks to the help of H.S. Person, the Dean of the Tuck School of Business, with whom he maintained correspondence throughout the rest of his time at the UFCo.²³ On June 27, 1905, Cutter sent a letter to Person, mentioning someone in the UFCo was looking for a person to place in one of the farms in the position of “Assistant Mandador” for \$75 monthly. The purpose of the letter was to extend the possibility of recommending someone to Person, specifically a Dartmouth/Tuck recent graduate, for the position.²⁴ This was only the first instance where Cutter essentially recruited hires from Dartmouth. In his correspondence with Person and President Ernest Hopkins, he regularly asked for recommendations of Tuck alumni to hire within the United Fruit Company, essentially creating a pipeline from Dartmouth graduates to UFCo workers. Some of the cases where Cutter mentioned a Dartmouth alumn hired or considering him for hire include Atwood, mentioned in a letter from 1906²⁵; Misch, mentioned in a letter from 1909²⁶; Brown, mentioned in a letter from 1910²⁷; John S. Kelley, mentioned in a letter from 1932²⁸; and Ellsworth Armstrong, mentioned in a letter from 1929²⁹.

²³ Cutter to Person, September 20, 1907. H.S. Person - Cutter [Amos Tuck School of Business Administration, Dean records; DA-5, Box 2411] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Cutter to Person, December 30, 1906. H.S. Person - Cutter [Amos Tuck School of Business Administration, Dean records; DA-5, Box 2411] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

²⁶ Letter citation

²⁷ Cutter to Person, February 25, 1910. H.S. Person - Cutter [Amos Tuck School of Business Administration, Dean records; DA-5, Box 2411] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

²⁸ Cutter to Hopkins, February 24, 1927. Victor M. Cutter (United Fruit Co.) 1926-1932 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; MS-1359; Box 3: Folder 11] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

²⁹ Cutter to Hopkins, November 18, 1929. Cutter, Victor M. 1929-30 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; DP-11; Box 6878, Folder 14] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

Tropical Research Project

Beyond attempting to hire alums for the United Fruit Company, Dartmouth almost had a program called the Tropical Research Board or Tropical Research Project, in which the college would collaborate with the United Fruit Company, through Cutter, to have Dartmouth students visit Latin America. The project was initially proposed by Mr. Harold D. Fish, who was not affiliated with Dartmouth in any way, but contacted President Ernest Hopkins and Victor M. Cutter with an idea for Dartmouth to offer trips to Latin America for educational purposes. Fish himself was interested in biology and what Latin America could provide for the purpose of studying natural sciences, but also mentioned in his proposal the potential for studying international relations and business³⁰.

President Hopkins and Cutter both expressed interest and agreed to continue developing the project. Cutter intended to be involved with the program himself, but upon consultation with his superiors within the UFCo, he was advised not to, given his busy schedule. Consequently, he offered to ensure that Dartmouth visitors in Latin America would be well looked after, providing them with introduction letters and suggesting routes and places that he considered would be productive for their visit. Cutter's enthusiasm is evident in his correspondence when he wrote to Hopkins,

In addition, I feel that since young men can no longer go very far west and get frontier thrills and feel the call of the wild, the only romantic appeal left is toward the south. I see no harm in capitalizing any thrill they can get out of going into undeveloped countries; quite the contrary. ³¹

³⁰ Ernest Martin Hopkins (Personal) (T) (26) 1930-31 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; DP-11, Box 6886, Folder 5] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

³¹ Cutter to Hopkins, May 21, 1930. Ernest Martin Hopkins (Personal) (T) (26) 1929-30 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; DP-11, Box 6874, Folder 10] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

The statement reflects a colonial mindset, as it essentially mourns the times of Manifest Destiny and yearns for those same circumstances to happen in South and Central America. Cutter's attitudes reflected the overall attitudes of the time, where Latin America was nothing more than the US's playground.

In the end, the Tropical Research Project was cancelled due to multiple reasons. At the time, President Hopkins was struggling with various health problems, which led to him having to take breaks from work and meant he was unable to add this new project due to his multiple prior commitments. Cutter, as well, had already expressed his inability to take on the project himself due to his own workload. Beyond this, the project's idea had been shared to secure funding, but this proved unsuccessful.

The idea of having Dartmouth students visit Latin America was not unique to the Tropical Research Project, however. In 1927, correspondence between Cutter and President Hopkins discussed the possibility of having Dartmouth students and professors go on trips through South and Central America, particularly for the study of language, diplomacy, and economics, as proposed by the Department of Romance Languages at Dartmouth. Cutter responded positively to the proposal, even offering a collaboration between Dartmouth and the UFCo, where the company would offer discounted rates to professors and students who would travel on their "Great White Fleet."³² Part of the proposition also included the collaboration with local institutions, to which Cutter responded,

As regards sending students to their educational institutions, I would first advise that someone take a trip around Central and South America and make a study of the institutions, and I am a bit afraid that there will be disappointment, as there are very few

³² Cutter to Hopkins, 1927. Cutter, Victor M. 1926-27 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; DP-11; Box 6847, Folder 6] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

universities which could offer very much to our students. I may be mistaken, and, in any case, will admit that I am not sufficiently informed to pass on this part of your idea.³³

Regarding the overall idea of Dartmouth students in the area, he also proceeded to comment,

In putting this proposition to one of my men, he remarked that he did not believe it would do any good because the atmosphere of the Caribbean region is such that all the natural laziness comes out, and very little real good is accomplished by trips to tropical America. There is something in his point of view.³⁴

While it is unclear from the items in the archive whether any efforts were made to carry on with the proposal, the fact that this proposal was not mentioned in any way when the Tropical Research Project was discussed suggests that nothing resulted from it.

Cutter's attitude for both the proposal for the Tropical Research Board and the proposal made by the Romance Languages Department at Dartmouth is a demonstration of his overall attitude towards Latin America. Cutter was very encouraging of trips to this region. However, the motivation behind it was more exploitative, as he wished for Central and South America to be an opportunity for "thrills" and exploration³⁵. His opinions on the region are also revealed when he agrees with one of his workers that the Caribbean is characterized by bringing out "natural laziness."³⁶ When the suggestion of any sort of collaboration with local institutions came up, he shut the idea down, looking down upon these, saying he doubted they had much to offer. Overall, it is evident that Cutter did not see the Latin American region as an equal to the United States, and that its value was tied solely to what could be extracted from it.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Cutter to Hopkins, May 21, 1930. Ernest Martin Hopkins (Personal) (T) (26) 1929-30 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; DP-11, Box 6874, Folder 10] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

³⁶ Cutter to Hopkins, 1927. Cutter, Victor M. 1926-27 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; DP-11; Box 6847, Folder 6] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

Hopkins and the White Fleet

The UFCo's Great White Fleet served not only as a transportation option for unfulfilled projects with Dartmouth, but it was also used by notable members of the Dartmouth community. Victor Cutter and President Hopkins maintained regular and friendly correspondence, in which Cutter encouraged him many times to take time off and get on a UFCo ship to tour the Caribbean and Central America. In their correspondence, Cutter proposed to Hopkins that he take the Zacapa route, which he explained to Hopkins in correspondence before the actual scheduling of the trip. The route would spend 5 days in Guatemala, which Cutter remarked was the most "spectacular" part of the trip, where he would get to visit the old Maya ruins, the banana plantations, jungle, mountains and volcanoes, the Spanish city, and the old capital.³⁷ The trip would then have a one-day stop in Havana, which Cutter calls a "wicked city," continue to Jamaica, where they would spend a few hours, then Spanish Honduras, and if Hopkins wished to visit it, Cutter would arrange for the trip to include a visit to the Canal Zone.³⁸

After many postponements and cancellations, Hopkins managed to confirm his plan to depart on the Metapan ship on March 19, 1927.³⁹ Before the trip, Hopkins asked Cutter whether he should make a longer stop in Jamaica, as others had suggested,⁴⁰ to which Cutter responded that there would be about three places he was sure Hopkins would like, followed by

³⁷ Cutter to Hopkins, August 30, 1926. Victor M. Cutter (United Fruit Co.) 1926-1932 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; MS-1359; Box 3: Folder 11] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Cutter to Hopkins, February 9, 1927. Victor M. Cutter (United Fruit Co.) 1926-1932 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; MS-1359; Box 3: Folder 11] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁴⁰ Hopkins to Cutter, February 26, 1927. Victor M. Cutter (United Fruit Co.) 1926-1932 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; MS-1359; Box 3: Folder 11] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

I, of course, hope that two of these places will not be Havana and Jamaica because the first is an island surrounded by bacardi; the second ditto, surrounded by Planters Punches. You will immediately admit that this is not presidential atmosphere.⁴¹

Cutters' words reveal once again his opinions about the nations south of the United States. In a later letter to Hopkins, Cutter attached introduction letters for him to use when he arrived at the different places in the trip, mentioning that those same letters had already been mailed to all the relevant men, and that these were not the standard template introduction letters.⁴² Cutter chose to personalize them, showing the high regard he had for Hopkins.

Upon his return from the Zacapa trip, Hopkins wrote to update Cutter on his experience and thank him for the journey. In the end, Hopkins did end up staying in Jamaica longer than planned, staying there after the ship departed to continue its way south and getting back on it as it stopped again in Jamaica on its way north, back to the US.⁴³ After his stay at a hotel in Jamaica, Hopkins was not charged for it, as Cutter took care of it, so he thanked him for this in his letter.⁴⁴ Upon hearing the news of Hopkins not visiting Guatemala or Honduras, Cutter expressed some disappointment, having wanted Hopkins to see "the real job in sanitation and improvements of living conditions" that he had done there.⁴⁵ Hopkins still expressed amazement at what he saw, writing,

⁴¹ Cutter to Hopkins, February 28, 1927. Victor M. Cutter (United Fruit Co.) 1926-1932 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; MS-1359; Box 3: Folder 11] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁴² Cutter to Hopkins, March 7, 1927. Victor M. Cutter (United Fruit Co.) 1926-1932 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; MS-1359; Box 3: Folder 11] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁴³ Cutter to Hopkins, April 13, 1927. Victor M. Cutter (United Fruit Co.) 1926-1932 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; MS-1359; Box 3: Folder 11] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Cutter to Hopkins, April 15, 1927. Victor M. Cutter (United Fruit Co.) 1926-1932 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; MS-1359; Box 3: Folder 11] Rauner Library Archives

I do not know what I have ever had a personal friendship with one who was so definitely an empire builder as you are. I simply want to state my comprehension of this fact and deep appreciation which I feel of the value of a career like yours to the college.⁴⁶

In saying this, Hopkins not only recognized Cutter's worth from the perspective of being his friend, but also as the President of Dartmouth College.

Mapping: Dartmouth in Guatemala

Much like the case of the UFCo having a lasting impact on the mapping of Costa Rica, Dartmouth itself appears in the Guatemalan map. Between the location of the Izabal Lake and the Motagua River in Guatemala, many of the farms owned by the United Fruit Company were located, where Cutter himself resided. Shortly after marrying Florence de Jongh, Cutter moved with her to "Virginia" in Guatemala, a farm recognized as one of the most beautiful owned by the UFCo (shown in Figure 3).⁴⁷ Located northwest of the Virginia Farm, which is still visible in modern Google Maps satellite images, is Dartmouth, as shown in Figure 4.

⁴⁶ Cutter to Hopkins, April 13, 1927. Victor M. Cutter (United Fruit Co.) 1926-1932 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; MS-1359; Box 3: Folder 11] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁴⁷ Family Papers, 1913 [Victor Cutter Papers; MS-63; Box 1; Folder 7] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.



Figure 3: *Image of the Cutter residence in Virginia Farm. Photograph from Rauner Special Collections Library*



Figure 4: *Modern Google Maps satellite image of Guatemala, depicting Virginia, Dartmouth, and the Quirguá Ruins. Photograph taken from Google Maps.*

Southeast of both Virginia and Dartmouth was located the Quirguá farm, where there is now an archaeological park, as shown in Figure 4. As Cutter was developing the area into a

plantation, he found Mayan ruins⁴⁸. The ruins became a source of fascination for him, as well as some sort of tourist attraction, as he invited President Hopkins⁴⁹ and others to visit the farm to see them.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, this was not the farthest Cutter went in terms of treating the ruins as his own. Currently, Dartmouth's Hood Museum of Art contains pieces from the Quiriguá ruins in its collection, donated from Victor Cutter's personal collection.

Cutter's Donations

Just like the indigenous art pieces from Quiriguá are currently part of Dartmouth College's collection, so are more than five hundred other pieces donated by the Cutter family. From these, the majority are from Latin America and categorized as pre-Columbian pieces, ranging from ornaments to tools. Among these are some "Mayan stones"⁵¹ and "Middle American and Mayan artifacts" that were donated by Mrs. Cutter in 1938, along with a display box for the items, given that the Hood Museum did not exist at the time, and Wilson Hall acted as the museum at the time.⁵² Interestingly, many of these objects were displayed as part of the "Globalization in Ancient Costa Rican Arts" exhibition at the Hood in 2006, so Dartmouth has continued to make use of them as of recent.⁵³

⁴⁸ Cutter to Person, December 26, 1910. H.S. Person - Cutter (Amos Tuck School of Business Administration, Dean records; DA-5, Box 2411) Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁴⁹ Cutter to Hopkins, August 30, 1927. Victor M. Cutter (United Fruit Co.) 1926-1932 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; MS-1359; Box 3: Folder 11] Rauner Library Archives

⁵⁰ Scrapbook, 1904-1922 [Victor Cutter Papers; MS-63; Box 3; Folder 2] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁵¹ From Bowen, April 19, 1938. Gifts and Bequests (A-H) 1937-38 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; DP-11; Box 6984, Folder 3] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁵² Trustees to Mrs. Cutter, April 23, 1938. Gifts and Bequests (A-H) 1937-38 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1916-1945: Ernest Martin Hopkins) records; DP-11; Box 6984, Folder 3] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁵³ "Shabazz Center for Intellectual Inquiry," Living Learning Communities, accessed September 13, 2025, <https://students.dartmouth.edu/living-learning/communities/identity-based-communities/shabazz-center-intellectual-inquiry>.

The Cutter's donations to Dartmouth are not restricted to the objects at the Hood, however. Mr. and Mrs. Cutter gave both significant and smaller-scale monetary contributions to the college, too. At the time when Cutter still worked for the UFCo, he was often invited to Dartmouth in the capacity of speaker to talk about business and Latin America. These talks resulted in him being paid an honorarium, usually of \$100, by the college, which he frequently asked to be returned to the college as a donation.⁵⁴ In 1948, in correspondence with President Dickey, Cutter wrote that he had sent his "regular contribution" to the alumni fund and was enclosing an additional \$1500 check for Hopkins Center "with expectations of duplicating this amount as soon as tax deductions permit," which suggests that Cutter regularly donated to the college beyond the instances that have and will be mentioned.⁵⁵ In 1954, Mrs. Cutter established the Victor M. Cutter T'04 Tuck School Scholarship Fund with a donation of \$1500,⁵⁶ to which she later added \$2000.⁵⁷

In terms of larger-scale donations, Cutter set up a mutual agreement fund with Dartmouth in 1937, where both he and his wife made donations to the college, from which Cutter would be paid the annual sum of \$1800 divided quarterly. Upon his death, the payments would continue with his wife if she survived him, which she did.⁵⁸ Upon Mrs. Cutter's death, their three children would annually receive \$600 each, again divided quarterly, if they survived her, which they did. Upon the death of them three, the payments would no longer continue, and any leftover money

⁵⁴ April 28, 1938. Cutter, Victor M. 1937-39 (Amos Tuck School of Business Administration, Dean records; DA-5, Box 2430) Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁵⁵ Cutter to Victor, March 25, 1948. Cutter, Victor M. 1947-48 [Dartmouth College. Office of the President (1945-1970: John Sloan Dickey); DR-12; Box 7103] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁵⁶ Bound meeting minutes, June 1952 - May 1956 VOL 10 [Dartmouth College, Board of Trustees records; DA-1, Box 2124, Pg 156] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁵⁷ Bound meeting minutes, June 1952 - May 1956 VOL 10 [Dartmouth College, Board of Trustees records; DA-1, Box 2124, Pg 201] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

⁵⁸ CUTTER VICTOR M (1903) and FLORENCE AF-FEE UNRESTRICTED FUNDS [Dartmouth College, Endowment Administration records; DA-111, Box 12722]

would go back to the college's endowment. At the time of the deal, Victor M. Cutter donated \$4,756.89 in cash and 100 shares of the United States Rubber Company. Mrs. Florence de J. Cutter donated \$33,626.83 and 100 shares from the American Metal Company.⁵⁹ In 1939, Florence donated \$25,714.29 more dollars and requested an increase in the annual payments to be made, which was in line with the standards agreed upon when the fund was created.⁶⁰

Cutter's Character

Cutter's letters consistently showed that he had little regard for Latin America and the Caribbean outside of what these regions had to offer for his own country's financial gain. His disregard for the Latin American people and poor image of them can be observed throughout his letters, often making racist and discriminatory comments about them. In a letter addressed to his father, after Cutter was in Nicaragua to explore the possibility of expanding the UFCo into there, he wrote,

That night I stayed in Bluefields which is a bum town without improvements of any kind...There the laborers are mostly Mosquito Indians and are mixed with every race on earth.⁶¹

His comments here reveal a Eurocentric perspective of development, where Bluefield's nonconformity with it qualifies it as worthless to Cutter's eyes. The wording on "mixed with every race on earth" has a criticizing tone to it, qualifying racial diversity as something undesirable, which would be consistent with the UFCo's uplifting of whiteness. On another occasion, in 1909, Cutter wrote in a letter to Person,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Correspondence and clippings, 1907 - 1942 [Victor Cutter Papers; MS-63; Box 2; Folder 1] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

One of my Indians shot it [a jaguar] full of buckshot but I hope the tanner will be able to remedy this...His [Minsch] last important job was to administer a knockout blow to an African who had smallpox and was trying to escape from the quarantine camp. This is not an argument for a course in boxing at Tuck but simply shows the general training necessary for the tropics.⁶²

As the quote suggests, “Misch” was one of the Tuck alumni whom the United Fruit Company hired. Here, Cutter makes light of the use of physical aggression against an employee who is referred to only as “an African,” while the white man responsible for the assault is mentioned by name. Furthermore, Cutter uses the possessive language “my” to describe the Indigenous person, which reflects Cutter’s colonial mindset, where he considers himself to have ownership over local workers.

In addition to his correspondence, Cutter’s papers included a poem that, although unattributed, appears to align closely with his experiences and perspectives, making it reasonable to infer that he either authored this poem himself or preserved it due to a personal sense of identification. The poem went as follows,

A Macronic Ode

Adios to thee! City of the darkeyed gente
 Land of tropic muchness and dolce far niente.
 Home of the wailing donkey and the all abounding flea,
 Manana, Gracias a Dios, I bid farewell to Thee.

Farewell ye gloomy casa, mejor dicho prison cells,
 Ye narrow crooked calles, reeking with atrocious smells!
 Ye dirty coffee shops and filthy pulperias,
 Stinking stables, dingy patios and fetid carnicerias.

Where beggars ride on horseback like Spanish Caballeros,
 And vagabonds perambulate like jolly Gamboliers.
 Where cloth washers wash your clothes when they are so inclined,

⁶² Cutter to Person, Jan 23, 1909. H.S. Person - Cutter (Amos Tuck School of Business Administration, Dean records; DA-5, Box 2411, Folder) Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

And hotel waiters strut around with shirt tail out behind.

Goodbye ye Latin greasers! Su atento servidor!
 Que vaya bien, pues adios! My boat is on the shore.
 Oh dirty people! Dirty houses! Oh despicable spot!
 Departing I will bless thee in thy dirtiness and rot.⁶³

The overall sentiment of the poem communicates distaste and rejection of the country from which the narrator is glad to depart, communicating their sentiment of cultural superiority. The speaker's criticisms center on three recurring targets: the local infrastructure, the quality of labor and service, and the inhabitants themselves, whom the speaker dehumanizes through overtly racist language and tropes

The Cutter Papers

It is worth noting that the image of Victor Cutter portrayed through his papers is not a complete representation of him and his character. Jason Colby's book has a significant focus on Cutter, informed by the words of an acquaintance of Cutter, which offers darker descriptions of Cutter's character than those perceivable from his own papers. Most of the information referenced here comes from the available materials in the Victor Cutter Papers at the Rauner Special Collections Library. The papers themselves do not encompass everything that was written about Cutter or that Cutter wrote about himself. At times, there were missing letters in a series of correspondence, and most of the newspaper clippings in Cutter's scrapbooks spoke about him positively. In the end, both he and the donor of the files could have taken the liberty of curating the contents of the files to include and exclude information as they wished.

Conclusion

⁶³ Loose Sheets [Victor Cutter Papers; MS-63; Box 1, Loose Sheets] Rauner Library Archives and Manuscripts.

Victor M. Cutter consistently profited from the resources and labor of the Latin American region and its people as he consciously created conditions of extraction and exploitation. Despite Cutter's arguments against the US government's intervention in Latin America due to its imperialistic approach, he actively participated in the same attitudes through the United Fruit Company and its corporate colonialist practices. It is also through him that Dartmouth College was able to reap the benefits of exploiting Latin America.

While it is clear—by current standards—that Cutter's actions were morally reprehensible, he is also a reflection of the time. Cutter's business policy aligned with the United States' economic and diplomatic policies. Moreover, his actions were rarely criticized at the time, except by the very communities he helped oppress. In no way does this excuse his behavior, but it underscores the importance of not only holding individuals accountable, but also confronting the larger systems and ideologies they embodied.

Although Cutter, the most evident benefactor from his work in Latin America, is no longer alive, Dartmouth College continues to exist. Presumably, it continues to benefit from the legacy Cutter left behind. Dartmouth must recognize its historical complicity and consider concrete reparative initiatives. For one, the College should address its continued possession of Indigenous pieces, particularly those from Quiriguá, and provide direct support to the Quiriguá Archaeological Park in Guatemala. Second, it should expand institutional resources and funding for the Latin American, Latino, and Caribbean Studies (LALACS) department, and create more space for conversations around Dartmouth's ties to extractive colonial histories. Third, the College should make greater efforts to recruit and support students from Latin America—particularly from Central American nations like those Cutter helped exploit—who remain underrepresented on campus today. This list is not exhaustive; it begins to address some of the

existing issues with concrete solutions. These actions would not erase the past, but they would represent meaningful steps toward institutional accountability and restorative justice.

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