

**Vermillion, Billy Budd, University of Illinois-Urbana. "A Real Threat to the Supremacy of American Pictures": United Artists Responds to the Argentine Film Industry, 1933-1942**

On June 12, 1936, Guy P. Morgan, United Artists' sales manager in Buenos Aires, wrote a letter to Arthur W. Kelly, the company's vice president in charge of foreign distribution. Attached was a copy of an earlier letter Morgan had sent to Walter Gould, another United Artists executive, concerning the rapid growth of the Argentine motion picture industry in the mid-1930s. Morgan urged Kelly to read the attachment, referring to Argentinean film production as "a matter which demands our immediate recognition." In the letter to Gould, Morgan stated that "[w]hile there are comparatively, only a handful of national pictures on the boards, they are making such inroads into the playing time formerly occupied by American pictures, that it has become a very serious problem. It is a real threat to the supremacy of American pictures."

Morgan's characterization of the Argentine film industry of the 1930s as "a real threat" seems somewhat at odds with the picture painted by such film historians as Tino Balio, Gaizka S. de Usabel, and John King, who stress the relative *unimportance* of Latin American cinema during the years leading to the development of the Good Neighbor Policy. The anxiety expressed in Morgan's letter indicates that Hollywood saw the need to act and act quickly to squelch the developing film industries of Latin America in order to maintain their dominance of those markets.

In this paper, I will draw on materials uncovered in the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research to examine the development of Argentine cinema in the 1930s and the response of United Artists and its South America Corporation, which included signing Argentine talent such as Pepe Arias and Adolfo Z. Wilson and distributing other Spanish-language films in Argentina. This response demonstrates the sophisticated distribution machine that was Hollywood in the 1930s.