

THE CINÉ “NEVER SETS...”:
BRITISH CINEMA AS A TRANSATLANTIC CULTURAL COMMODITY,
1927-1938

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at

The University of Texas at Arlington

May, 2016

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation exemplifies how the application of a transatlantic commodity approach can broaden understanding of film as a mass medium, its business, and its cultural influences. By employing a more inclusive national cinema framework, this study is able to investigate sites of interaction between the British and Hollywood film industries as a two-way exchange as well as engage those sites at their peripheries, including those between the cultural product and its consumer throughout the broader Atlantic community. This dissertation focuses on the diversity of British audiences throughout a “British world” and the distribution and exhibition methods used to reach them. Based less on the profitability of internationally-exported British films, this British film history enlarges the frame to draw upon these transatlantic connections to adjust and provide a more comprehensive look at British Cinema of the 1930s.

A British imperial film culture propagated cultural ties to the homeland through the government’s support of a domestic industry, the endeavors of British filmmakers to build a competitive and distinctively British film product, and the machinations of businessmen attempting to distribute this British output to consumers worldwide with a particular focus upon fellow British and English-speaking peoples, especially with the advent of sound motion pictures. British films were dispersed to both vital and subsidiary markets to establish a more international and presumably profitable market through the reliance upon British cultural similarities and interests of

peoples throughout English-speaking markets. Coming from a nearly obliterated industry of the mid-1920s, the growth and development of the industry relied heavily upon the perceived cultural value of their product.

Extensive use of various legal and business documents, especially from the United Artists corporation records, sheds light upon two independent British producers' aims, means, and attempts to acquire access to the US market in contrast to the methods employed by the major British combine Gaumont British. Furthermore, the UA archive provided this study an opportunity to explore the distribution and exhibition patterns in other overseas markets and expand upon British film scholarship within these specific areas, including Canada, South Africa, the British West Indies, and even beyond the Atlantic to Australia.

This study argues that a distinctive national cinema was created and built upon in Britain during the interwar years, particularly during this decade; this distinction is reflected in the transatlantic interactions of the business and in the films' use as supposed representatives of Britishness and as a British-made product. By engaging the latter, connections are drawn between the economic side of the film industry and the cultural component of the medium's dispersal to consumers. To do so, this dissertation explores trends in how Britishness is portrayed in the films' marketing and advertising in the English-speaking market with a particular focus upon South Africa and the British Caribbean. A qualitative analysis of the supply side's marketing and publicity supports that with the British film industry's growth and increased efforts for international distribution, British films became increasingly perceived as an entertaining alternative to Hollywood product. They were able to negotiate a degree of space within each of these markets by the mid-1930s; and with the creation of this space, British films of following decades would continue to have an outlet in these markets.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Upon my entrance into the doctoral program at UTA, I recognized without a doubt that I *needed* to write about film and incorporate it into the field of transatlantic history. I would first like to thank the History Department at UTA and especially my committee members for their encouragement as I followed this path. It has been a long and arduous process, and without the assistance, motivation, and patience of the following people this project would be sadly lacking.

My supervising professor, Dr. Elisabeth Cawthon, has been the steadying force through the entire process; her coaching, patience, and enthusiasm for my work continues to inspire me. I want to thank my dissertation committee members Dr. Imre Demhardt and Dr. Sam Haynes for taking me on, providing immeasurable help and advice, and being willing to step up during a shaky period when previous members retired before this project's completion. Other professors at UTA were active in my progression towards earning a doctorate, and I would like to thank these scholars for shaping my understanding of history into a broader world view of interacting cultures and peoples: Drs. Stanley Palmer, Richard Francaviglia, Thomas Adam, John Garrigus, Gerald Saxon, Steven G. Reinhardt, Stephanie Cole, and Robert Fairbanks.

I would like to thank the Office of Graduate Studies and the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at Arlington for providing me with funds with made the national and international research travel and the long writing periods of this thesis possible. This dissertation has benefited from their financial support with the Graduate Studies Dissertation Fellowship and COLA's Doctoral Fellowship and Dean's Award for Research Travel.

Researching at archives can feel simultaneously exciting and overwhelming, and the efforts of those who helped ease this process should be applauded. I would like to thank the staff of the British Film Institute Special Collections and National Film Archive, especially Jonny Davies, who facilitated the process of planning my research visits and willingly dealt with my countless off-site requests with aplomb and generosity. Additionally I would like to acknowledge the librarians and archivists of the British Library Newspapers at Colindale (although they have

moved on with its recent closure) and the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research in Madison, WI. Additionally, my gratitude goes to the various staff of the front desk and the Interlibrary Loan Services Department at the UTA Library, who stayed busy with my endless requests.

Lastly, another key personage who treaded this same doctoral path alongside me, from our coursework years through the writing of this thesis, is my colleague Mylynka K. Cardona. I can never thank her enough for her ceaseless support and enthusiasm, her willingness to make suggestions and throw around ideas, and the many Starbucks study sessions (and text message counselling) that helped us both to achieve our academic goals.

April 7, 2016

DEDICATION

For years I have spouted off random film facts when nobody asked for them, taken over the television to watch any British films related to this work, bemoaned my aches and pains from long writing binges, and generally put my close friends and family through much for which I can never fully repay. To my friends and family, thank you for your unequivocal support and for putting up with me in times of pressure and in times of procrastination. Finally and most importantly, I want to specially thank my parents for their limitless support, tolerance, guidance, and encouragement through the course of this doctorate; I am forever indebted to their generosity and love. I dedicate this work to them.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Acronyms

Britain and Europe

ABPC	Associated British Picture Corporation
ABFD	Associated British Film Distributors
ARP	Associated Radio Pictures
ATP	Associated Talking Pictures
B&D	British and Dominions Film Corporation
BIP	British International Pictures
FBI	Federation of British Industries
GB	Gaumont British Picture Corporation
GFD	General Films Distributors
LFP	London Film Productions, Ltd.
MLVs	Multiple Language Versions
UAC	United Artists Corp., Ltd (UK)
UFA	Universum Film AG, film production company in Babelsberg, Germany

USA and Canada

ACD	Anglo-Canadian Distributors, Ltd
GBPCA	Gaumont British Picture Corporation of America
MGM	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (USA)
MPPDA	Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America
PCA	Production Code Administration (USA)
RCA	Radio Corporation of America
RKO	Radio-Keith-Orpheum (USA)
UA	United Artists Corporation

South Africa

AF	African Films (South Africa), Distributing Agency
AFP	African Film Productions (South Africa), Production Company
AFT (S.A.)	African Film Theatres (South Africa), Distributing Agency
ACT (S.A.)	African Consolidated Theatres (South Africa)
AT	African Theatres (South Africa)
IVTA (S.A.)	International Variety and Theatrical Agency, Ltd (London & New York)
MGM (S.A.)	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (South Africa), Distributing Agency
UT	Union Theatres
UT & ACT	"Schlesinger group"

British Caribbean and Australia

BCFE	British Colonial Film Exchange, Ltd (Trinidad), Distributing Agency
BDF (AUS)	British Dominions Films (Australia), Distributing Agency
BFDA	British Film Distributing Agency (Jamaica)
BIFP (JAM)	British International Film Producers, Ltd (Jamaica)
BUFP	British United Film Producers
CFC	Colonial Film Committee
JT	Jamaican Theatres, Ltd (Jamaica)

KEY TO ARCHIVAL SOURCES

BFI	British Film Institute, Special Collections
UA	United Artists Corporation Records
<i>HC Deb</i>	House of Commons Debates
<i>HL Deb</i>	House of Lords Debates

Note: Citations to documents in the United Artists Corporation Records are designated by series, box, and folder. For example, UA/2A/B7/F11 refers to United Artists Corporation Records, Series 2A O'Brien Legal Files, Box 7, Folder 7.

Note: British Film Institute Special Collections will be designated by collection name and item number. For example, Michael Balcon Collection, C/4 refers to Michael Balcon Special Collection, item C/4, British Film Institute Special Collections.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“For Sale: Glourie Castle, Apply Within” Peggy Martin, an American tourist and daughter of a grocery store magnate, sees a six-hundred-year-old Scottish castle for sale. Enchanted with the castle (and its penniless heir, Donald Glourie), she and her parents extend their visit, and soon her father Joe Martin purchases Glourie Castle and ships it stone by stone to be reconstructed in Sunnymede, Florida by way of an ocean liner crossing. The American millionaire is initially skeptical that his purchase is famously haunted by a centuries-old ghost, a Scottish baron with an agenda of revenge against a neighboring clan and its descendants. And the ghost, Murdoch Glourie, is unhappy to discover he is being shipped to America. “I don’t want to go to America; I don’t want to become a confounded colonist!” He vanishes to hide from the castle’s new owners, but he still has a curse to fulfill for his long-dead father. Meanwhile, announcing he has acquired a famous ghost, Martin exploits their arrival in New York, where a tickertape parade greets the supposed ghost. (Although Capitol Hill protests its immigration). Once the stones arrive and are re-assembled in Florida, the penniless heir Donald Glourie is disgruntled to find his cherished property has become commercialized as an advertisement for Martin’s Fine Foods. Mistaken identities, business rivalries, a love triangle, and various shenanigans and hijinks follow.¹

With this transatlantic plot of *The Ghost Goes West* (1935), an architectural Scottish institution (both the castle *and* its Glourie ghost) is transplanted to America, where a rich American family appropriates a part of Scottish (or British) culture and attempts to make it their own. Just as the film traversed the same path from its December 1935 London premiere to New York a month later, this film (and its transatlantic themes of cultural transfer and its commercialization) serves as an excellent metaphor to the unique situation facing the British film

¹ For a more complete synopsis, see “The Ghost Goes West,” Turner Classic Movies, <http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/76200/The-Ghost-Goes-West/>.

industry during the 1930s. While “castles” built for their local ancestral families usually remain in their homeland and make up a distinct portion of local and national culture, so too were most British films intended for the domestic British market and reliant upon Britons’ preferences. However, the transatlantic “exportability” of ghosts and castles—that is, British culture and films, makes up its own distinct portion of the story of British Cinema of the 1930s.

Historians of cinema concur that films contribute to the development, formation, and dissemination of national identity and culture. Various national cinemas clearly have been influenced by the United States film industry, even as filmmakers attempt to differentiate their films from the internationally dominant cinema of the twentieth century, Hollywood. For much of that century, film historians reinforced this concept of a national cinema as they focused their studies around histories of specific film industries and the various measures that filmmakers and the state took to ensure its protection and maintenance in the face of such competition. However, as the twenty-first century witnesses the increased expansion and interaction of societies with technological advances and faster speeds of communications, the growth of an ever-more globalized market in all industries, including cinema, has further blurred the boundaries of national industries and consequently raised debates concerning historians’ use of a national cinema framework and questioning the existence of national cinemas as well.

In response to this current Age of Globalization and the inevitable deconstruction of specifically national film industries, historians are looking to new conceptual frameworks to help explain cinema history, including postcoloniality, postmodernity, and transnationality. Yet I contend that embracing a more inclusive framework such as a transatlantic perspective to a cultural commodity history does not exclude the viability of a twentieth-century national cinema situated within these indistinct boundaries, especially when one considers the links between identity and film. This revision of a national cinema framework will enable us to investigate sites of interaction between industries, internally and at their peripheries, as well as between the cultural product and its consumer. As a cultural commodity, film crosses political and economic boundaries in the processes of production, distribution, and exhibition. Furthermore, cinema can

also transgress the imagined and cultural boundaries which allow for the renegotiation and shaping of identity at the point of consumer experience.

Since film historians associate the public consumption of movies with the cultural component of a national or collective identity, the study of national cinema can continue to provide an opportunity to explore the ties between the notion of “nation,” the physical entity, and the various peoples residing within its geographical and political borders – and beyond.² These connections can expose how films reflect and contribute to evolving sets of shared cultural meanings within a community whose members might identify with or choose to reject them, with the latter signifying a different perspective to their collective identity. For example, as with most European Cinemas attempting to distinguish their industries from that of the more international Hollywood empire, the larger role that Britain’s government has played in British cinema reveals more apparent ties between the geopolitical borders (and former imperial boundaries) and the conceptual (or imagined) notion of “national identity” and thus of a National Cinema.

Even prior to the age of globalization, film historians debated the establishment and existence of a unique British film industry during the 1930s due to the continuous interactions between Hollywood and London filmmaking that even at the time denoted an economically-integrated industry. Did a British national cinema exist during the 1930s, or did the film industry in Britain merely serve as another outlet of Hollywood? With the establishment of a film industry quota with the Cinematograph Act of 1927, one could reasonably argue that the British government’s attempt to create a distinctive national film industry answers this question. However, this argument was limited and inadequate, even at the time; therefore today’s historians must explore other avenues of evidence to shed light on the vitality (or not) of a British national cinema during these key formative years. If one finds a cultural and/or social distinction between

² For example, see Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Higson explains how representations of nation are not reflections of the formation of the nation-state, but rather “ideological constructions of ‘the nation,’ a publicly imagined sense of community and cultural space.”

British and other national cinemas (especially the American cousin), then this framework would support that a British cinema did exist.

More recently, Ian Christie has revisited the debate concerning the use of a national cinema concept for film history, whether we still need it, and whether screen history can “help us think through this issue of nationality.”³ He draws attention to film historians’ various definitions of “national cinemas” that have frequently been understood “in terms of a highly selective account of domestic production.” This selection tends to be based on their international reputation, or as he puts it, a “self-confirming selectivity” of those films that “display national production at its most exportable, with a bias towards films that have won awards or gained critical esteem.”⁴

Nevertheless, he concludes that a national cinema framework is still viable *if* historians consider “the diverse audiences and reception within the nations that are still our primary frames of reference; and these should also give due weight to indigenous production where and when this is significant, as well as factoring in the prevailing economic and political framework.”⁵ My particular study focuses on the diversity of British audiences throughout a “British world” and the business methods applied to reach them. By doing so, the internationally-exported films of this period can remain part of a British National Cinema. Based less on the “success” of international profitmaking, these films’ history is instead grounded upon their cultural impact upon British-identifying peoples elsewhere, such as across or around the Atlantic Ocean, whether Anglophiles or British-derived rich Americans buying Scottish castles or neo-Britons of white settler societies and subjects of Britain’s colonies. Enlargening the frame to draw upon these transatlantic connections helps to adjust and provide a more comprehensive look at the history of British film.

By examining the textual and cinematic elements that shape Britain’s expression of a national identity within the distribution and exhibition of British films, my aim is to distinguish and explore some of the national and transatlantic aspects of British cinema during its foundation-

³ Ian Christie, “Where Is National Cinema Today (and Do We Still Need It)?,” *Film History: An International Journal* 25, no. 1 (2013): 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 24, 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

building years of the 1930s. I argue that a distinctive national cinema was created and built upon in Britain during the interwar years, particularly the 1930s, and this distinction is reflected in the transatlantic (and global) interactions of the business, including the use of these films as supposed representatives of Britishness. Evidence is derived from a qualitative and quantitative exploration of these texts and cinematic ephemera such as publicity materials, fan magazines, newspaper articles and advertisements. However, while British filmmakers distinguished their work from that of Hollywood in various ways, they paradoxically did this using the transnational machinery of the global movie industry, from the choice of representations provided onscreen to the marketing strategies employed in the distribution and exhibition of these films. Concerning the latter of these, further exploration of various legal and business documentation uncovers how these filmmakers traversed international boundaries for needs of business and profit simultaneously while applying different production strategies with a design towards improving and distinguishing their commodity.

But there are additional layers to this exploration of 1930s British cinema and British national and cultural identities. For one thing, did British cinema serve an audience different from those whom Hollywood served (as the dominant international market provider) or did the two industries vie for the same audiences? British films sometimes incorporated certain values and messages apart from those of Hollywood cinema not only to differentiate them, but also to connect with those audiences and peoples that perceived themselves as being British or fancied British culture. Additionally, British filmmakers' varied intents in producing films specifically for either a domestic and/or international market influenced how different audiences are targeted. From intentions to practical business decisions, how do we explain the function of these market parameters within British colonies and dominions during this period? This study will explore those connections and ideas of "Britishness" that exist for different peoples throughout the British Atlantic – from former colonists to British Commonwealth citizens and even Anglophiles.

By expanding these questions of identity and the cultural commodity of film to a transatlantic geographical scope, one has the opportunity to compare ideas of Britishness as they

are exported to other locales and are shaped to fit different cultural perceptions of British identity. In this context, I do not explore how certain films reflect British identity, but instead, whether or not certain films' publicity and marketing strategies may also convey perceptions and representations of the receiving market's culture and society, as publicity was often adapted to create a more readily accepting audience in various locales. In other words, is a British identity being shaped to fit into other cultural concepts as these films are exported beyond the geographical boundaries of the British Isles? Thus, this study attempts to uncover the scope and importance of the international English-speaking market to British film distribution and exhibition, as well as to hypothesize audiences' reception of British films in lesser-studied locations of the British Atlantic (especially South Africa and the British Caribbean).

In the face of Hollywood dominance within the international market, the government establishment of a production and distribution quota within Britain in the late 1920s served to direct attention to the establishment of a British national film culture to combat Hollywood studios' growing presence in London filmmaking. Even with the quota in place, American companies found opportunities to bypass or take advantage of quota requirements to entrench their presence in London (and ultimately to maintain their hold on the British market). Britain already had other vital entertainment industries such as radio and the stage—from dancehall musicals to “high culture” theatrical productions. While these entertainments were not necessarily of worldwide significance, they were frequently essential both culturally and economically to Britons. However, even with the existence of these vibrant domestic outlets, the British put forth efforts to boost their film industry and to embrace the modern cultural medium.

Concurrently with the institution of a quota, the advent of sound plays a significant role within the shaping of film industries in Hollywood, as well as in Britain. Once the new technology of sound started to pay for itself after the initial costly turnover, any English-speaking countries became especially important to profits, and the connections between the two film industries became intrinsically composed of a rivalry and competition for those earnings. Consequently, one finds a process of give-and-take evolving within a multi-directional exchange—each industry took

advantage (or attempted to) of any opportunities the other could provide, from production to distribution and exhibition. This study concentrates upon these latter two areas of the business. At the same time, a rivalry arose with Britain's decision to develop its own distinctive national cinema with the government's encouragement. In summation, the competition that ensued between British cinema and Hollywood after the development of talking pictures reflects something important about the formation of a national cinema in Britain. That formation was a process, a two-way exchange between these economic competitors. It was also a kind of multi-directional cultural, social, economic and political exchange, all of which contributed to a perceived need for a British cinema reflecting aspects of a more manifest British identity during the last peak of the British Empire.

Most historians who examine British cinema pinpoint the start of a truly British national cinema during the 1940s, and they give the evidence of the opportunities World War II provided, with films propagating patriotism, heroism, self-restraint and duty, the war effort, and national unity countering a common enemy. Additionally, many of these wartime films took a closer look at the social realities of life in Britain. As a result, film historians most often designate the war years and afterward as the more likely years when a more authentic and truly British cinema was created—one grounded in a somewhat everyman tradition such as the post-war Ealing comedies or with the social realism of the Free Cinema movement (or "kitchen-sink dramas") of the 1950s. In contrast, this study argues that the 1930s decade was not simply a time when the foundations for a national cinema were laid down in Britain. After its failed attempts in the 1920s, this reborn British national cinema stretched its fledgling wings to reach beyond imperial and international borders during the 1930s—anything to garner enough profits to sustain a British industry in the face of the Hollywood Goliath. Unfortunately, the limitations of British cinema's wingspan and the many obstacles encountered led to a nosedive in 1937, which has led historians then and since to write off the decade as a false start, or perhaps just British filmmakers' learning years, until ultimately it achieved a premature adulthood during wartime. In contrast, I propose that enough international business growth and limited success occurred during the Thirties to support the idea

of a British national cinema that trained the next generation of filmmakers, shaped future strategies of production, and (eventually) altered negative perceptions of British film. This decade witnessed the actual creation of a British national cinema, one with a similar structure to today's globalized British industry; a closer look at the industry and its films within a broader geographical framework reveals a distinctive national cinema that was propagated to various audiences as such (whether or not they responded positively).

By exploring a two-way (or perhaps multi-directional) exchange between the film industries of Britain and the U.S., this study is inherently transatlantic in approach. Yet the connections themselves are transatlantic in terms of geography as well. This study includes a geographical cultural analysis of how Britishness was perceived and marketed in the British Empire, British Commonwealth, and other countries with an Anglo heritage in language or law during the 1930s. These imperial market connections will include the U.S. and Britain's domestic film markets, as well as the distribution of British films to South Africa, Canada, the British Caribbean, and extending to Australia.

Limitations of Scholarship

Scholars have studied British Cinema of the 1930s in a variety of ways, but they have placed much of this research within the larger scope of either a diachronic timeframe or broader subject matter than will be included in this research. In addition to the debates about whether a national cinema existed, and when it is identifiable, there are studies of the economic and business elements of the British industry as a whole. As with historians of other nations' films, scholars of British cinema have engaged in many analyses of various genres of British films, such as the "heritage" film (or costume dramas), working-man comedies and music-hall musicals, empire and adventure films, and more. Within most of these, a chapter or two is devoted to the 1930s to diachronically explain the changes over the course of the century. Some film scholars focus upon key individuals who contributed significantly to the British screen, including producers, directors, and actors/stars. Thus historians of film in some of their scholarship lavish attention on the 1930s simply because those years represent the early careers of major players such as

Alexander Korda, Alfred Hitchcock, Michael Powell, John Mills, Anna Neagle, Gracie Fields, Robert Donat, and others. Among this scholarship, few devote their studies to understanding the representations of British national identity and how it is developed during this particular era of filmmaking except in its representation within particular genres or cycles of films such as historical costume dramas or Empire films. What is lacking is a study that combines the economic facets of the industry with the cultural role that film plays with its consumers. Furthermore, I have yet to discover any that explore how different audiences within a larger international market (beyond the U.S. and Canada) received and responded to these films and their depictions of Britishness.

While some works focus specifically upon these early years of British filmmaking, only in recent years have film academics attempted to address gaps in this scholarship. British film historians such as Jeffrey Richards and John Sedgwick devote their efforts to this era's importance in British filmmaking and try to uncover more about this often forgotten period.⁶ Some of these few key studies provide the historical and production context behind the depictions of British identity in thirties' films. For example, controversy and debate surrounds the establishment of the 1927 quota and the consequential "quota quickies" pervading British filmmaking. Given the role of Hollywood investments to get around the quota in order to get their films into the British market, some scholars question the value of these "quickie" films to British cinema and see them as a secondary output of the Hollywood studios. Recently, some film historians counter these arguments and suggest the importance of these quota quickies within the debate of national cinema.⁷

⁶ Jeffrey Richards, *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema 1929-1939*, Cinema and Society Series (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998); Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997); John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny, "The Film Business in the United States and Britain During the 1930s," *The Economic History Review* 58, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 79–112, doi:10.1111/j.1468-0289.2005.00299.x.

⁷ For example, Lawrence Napper analyzes the importance of cultural traditions and British subject matter in determining a distinctive British industry in these films. For more about the quota discourse, see Steve Chibnall, *Quota Quickies: The Birth of the British "B" Film* (British Film Institute, 2007); George Melnyk, "The Dirty Thirties: The British Quota Era," in *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* (University of Toronto Press, 2004), 48–57; Lawrence Napper, "A Despicable Tradition? Quota Quickies in the 1930s," in *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 192–201.

As previously mentioned, the critical discourse on national cinema includes debates over whether there exists a British national cinema or if Britain merely serves as an outpost to the dominant Hollywood market—a common refrain (and complaint) of any period of the twentieth century. Some historians have studied this competition with Hollywood during the 1930s as they analyze how Britain established (or arguably failed to establish) its own film industry at this time.⁸ In another field, several scholars study the industrial links and business connections between the U.S. and Great Britain in terms of exportation and reception of films, but I have yet to encounter an economic analysis of the 1930s within a larger context of geography (beyond US-UK relations), nor in correlation with a cultural analysis of national identity beyond the immediate domestic market. For example, Sarah Street's *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the USA* (2002) examines the ties between these two film industries to assess the exportation and reception of British films in the Hollywood-controlled market of North America. Other main areas of Street's research are the politics and economics of the film industry; she stresses the role of government protectionism (with the 1927 Act) in "saving" the British film industry and raising questions about the "role of film as an expression of national identity."⁹

Furthermore, outside of the study of empire films and historical film genres, few scholars explore the concept of Britishness of 1930s films exported beyond the scope of Britain and/or America.¹⁰ In the recent debates concerning national cinema, Jeffrey Richards explains that

⁸ For example, Stephen Crofts explains that this formative competition resulted in British filmmakers responding in one of three primary ways: compete by playing the same game and utilizing similar studio system structures, differentiate through the use or portrayal of cultural traditions, or create a unique independent arts cinema to avoid Hollywood competition and targeting a niche market. For more, see Stephen Crofts, "Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s," in *Film and Nationalism*, ed. Alan Larson Williams (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

⁹ See Sarah Street, "British Film and the National Interest, 1927-1939," in *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 145; Sarah Street, *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the United States*, Rethinking British Cinema (New York: Continuum, 2002).

¹⁰ From Imperial Adventure films to spy thrillers, a proliferation of genres such as these resulted as international tensions heated up during the mid- to late-1930s. Britain's increased military preparedness as foreign issues arose influenced these genres stories and depictions, especially in touting ideologies of patriotism and duty within these films. Generally, Empire and Adventure films disseminated imperialism ideology and propaganda during a time when problems are arising, and inevitably, the 1940s saw a decline in these genres with the onset of World War II and the partition of India. Then with Britain's policing of African colonies in the 1950s, Empire and Adventure film genres saw another consequential rise in

instead of a single British identity, there may have been other identities such as Scottish and Irish; but he and other scholars follow current trends that focus upon late twentieth-century filmmaking.¹¹ I delve into this composite notion of British national identity specifically among a variety of British peoples within the Atlantic region of the British Empire. This study considers how films participate in the construction of national or cultural identity, but the focus of my analysis explores how the supposed Britishness of these films is portrayed to potential audiences through its publicity and advertising. Yet in so doing, my focus upon the film output as a British-manufactured product does not negate the importance of onscreen representation of Britishness.

A number of studies about the 1930s also focus upon prominent individuals of the British industry, from successful directors and producers to popular actors of the era. For example, Alexander Korda was a vital figure of the 1930s; he managed (albeit briefly) to compete within the international market, and he was a proponent of the “international film” to create a distinctive British cinema that was also marketable worldwide.¹² While my study must definitely take into account Korda’s contributions and the impact of his own international intent, my dissertation will expand beyond Korda’s focus on the American market to discover his motives and strategies concerning other regions of the British Atlantic market.

Another growing area of study is exile cinema, and like those in Hollywood, some of British Cinema’s most influential filmmakers came from Europe. It is necessary to consider the role of these Europeans in creating a British national identity reflected onscreen, especially with the internationally successful films of producer-director Alexander Korda in the 1930s. This Hungarian made movies in Hungary, Austria, Germany, Hollywood, and France before settling down in England in 1931 and establishing himself as an independent producer. It was his understanding of the international market (as an outcome of his background) that helps to explain his international success with movies such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) and *The*

popularity. For more, see James Chapman and Nicholas John Cull, *Projecting Empire: Imperialism and Popular Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

¹¹ Richards, *Films and British National Identity*.

¹² Greg Walker, “The Roots of Alexander Korda: Myths of Identity and the International Film,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 37, no. 1 (March 2003): 3.

Ghost Goes West (1935). He built and developed Denham Studios for his London Film Productions company along the same lines of the Hollywood studio system and brought in leading technicians from abroad to train local technicians. Furthermore, several of his British actors became international movie stars that remain celebrated long after this era including: Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh, Charles Laughton, Merle Oberon, Sabu, Robert Donat, and Flora Robson.¹³

Given the role of Europeans in British filmmaking, what does this mean to the definition of a British film of this period? Chapter two explores this question in more depth, alongside other problematic factors when defining what makes a film British. If one uses the Cinematograph Act of 1927 as the legal standard of Britishness, a British film was one produced and constructed by British citizens, photographed in a studio within the British Empire, created from a screenplay or a book by a British author. Furthermore, no less than three-quarters of salaries, wages, and payments for the labor/services in making the film must be paid to British subjects living in the British Empire.¹⁴ Any study of this period will have to account for the various European influences upon British filmmaking (and thus on depictions of national identity) within the framework focus upon films defined as British by this government quota. Charles Barr helps to explain this context—that the lesson learned during the silent era of British filmmaking was that Britain became national by being international. Barr posits that only when Britain became open to international influences did it begin to acquire the ability “to find a strong, meaningful, national identity for its own production.”¹⁵

Scholars have written very little concerning British cinema within the Commonwealth, even as British law dictated the film industry parameters to include all British dominions. Prior to

¹³ Korda became a British citizen in 1936. For more of an introduction on Korda as an exile, see Kevin Gough-Yates, “Exiles and British Cinema,” in *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 125–132; for more about Korda’s life and career, see Charles Drazin, *Korda: Britain’s Only Movie Mogul* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Karol Kulik, *Alexander Korda: The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1975); Michael Korda, *Charmed Lives: A Family Romance* (New York: Random House, 1979).

¹⁴ From footnote 2 in Gough-Yates, “Exiles and British Cinema.”

¹⁵ Charles Barr, “Before Blackmail: Silent British Cinema,” in *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 151.

the modifications of the 1927 quota with the Cinematograph Films Act of 1938, any filmmaking within a dominion of the Commonwealth was considered part of the British industry. Even so, scholars usually have explored national cinemas of Canada and South Africa without reference to the 1930s or their connections to the industry in the Mother Country.¹⁶ Minimal scholarship pertains to Canada's unique situation concerning Hollywood investments to circumvent the British quota during these years. Scholarship about cinema in South Africa explores the early silent years with its brief period of indigenous film production as well as the dominance of Hollywood films in the South Africa market; yet they have yet to explore British films' reception in South Africa or even just the Cape or Natal.¹⁷ I have found even less concerning film exhibition and reception in Jamaica or the British Caribbean as a whole. This dissertation will begin to redress this lack of attention to commonwealth and colonial regions.

Significance of the Research:

This study provides a broader understanding of the complex links between British national identity and British cinema of the 1930s. Most scholarship concerning this area focuses upon economic and political ties within the domestic and/or international markets. Few scholars appear to have explored the international market except in terms of competition with Hollywood (as the leading international distributor). My study fills in some of these gaps by clarifying where imperial and transatlantic connections fit into the international British film economy and how they tie into a British Atlantic culture.

Furthermore, I explore the film reception context to address the cultural and industrial processes interacting with national identity. By using a commodity history approach, my study will

¹⁶ Instead, many of these studies focus upon the early developments of (or lack of) a local cinema, supporting the national cinema framework for analyzing an Afrikaner cinema in South Africa, a Canadian cinema, etc. For example, see Isabel Balseiro, *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2003); George Melnyk, *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* (University of Toronto Press, 2004); Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978).

¹⁷ A starting point is provided by Michael Eckardt, *Film Criticism in Cape Town 1928-1930: An Explorative Investigation into the Cape Times and Die Burger* (African Sun Media, 2005). This study looks at the first couple of years covered by my dissertation and provides an initial step to understanding some aspects of cinema exhibition and reception in the Cape from an approach of film criticism analysis.

create a more extensive understanding of British cultural and national identities, their reflections within a British cinema, and the distribution patterns in the British Atlantic. My objective is to contribute a cultural context for the existing political and economic scholarship concerning a British film industry during this formative decade. Additionally, this study is intended to show how the application of a transatlantic commodity approach can widen understanding of this mass medium and its cultural influences. While the role of government protectionism, American financial investments, and the influence of European exile filmmakers all shaped the establishment and development of a distinctive British cinema, my analyses and research will add a cultural component to the exportation of this commodity.

Additionally, this study will expand the geographical concept of nationality and culture to include those various British peoples that lived beyond the British Isles throughout the Atlantic Ocean. A distinctive element within British identity since the early nineteenth century has been the relations within the British Empire, and the 1930s saw the last peak celebrating these idealized perceptions of Empire (as portrayed in popular adventure films in the late 1930s). While scholars have explored national identity within 1930s British Cinema, no one has placed it within the larger scope of a British Atlantic during this critical period of change for the Empire. Part of what characterizes my working hypothesis is that British national identity was portrayed as a more generic Britishness—whether represented by its onscreen portrayal or simply in its nature as a British-produced commodity. The films, in turn, were disseminated abroad to other peoples and groups, especially those that considered themselves to be innately British or felt some link through heritage or ancestry. Through this process, a more transatlantic (and in some cases, transnational) identity is revealed among the transatlantic connections of a larger geopolitical framework of analysis.

Since the film medium played such a dominant part in the interactions and shaping of twentieth century cultures, it is surprising that scholars have yet to expand upon British cinema's portrayals of nationality and their reception beyond Britain (except perhaps in studying the need for British success within the Hollywood-dominated U.S. market). British cinema attempted to

compete with Hollywood within an international market, and achieving success in the U.S. is considered a critical factor (and one which some scholars have emphasized as such, possibly reflecting contemporary opinions of the 1930s). Yet I also think the utilization of its own dominions and imperial connections to supplement profits played a vital component in the success of British cinema in the 1930s—not so much in terms of achieving large box office revenues, but rather through the reinforcement and shaping of Britishness with audiences beyond Great Britain. Realizing any degree of success or profits required British filmmakers and film companies to understand and entertain their target audiences, and this study weighs in on how British filmmakers (and advertisers) used British identity as a means to acquire some degree of success.

Methodology:

Transatlantic history is a field of study defined primarily by its conceptual approach, which focuses on the interconnectedness of human experience over the centuries in the Atlantic Basin.¹⁸

Steven G. Reinhardt and Dennis Reinhartz are describing a history approach that is dedicated to analyzing the dynamic processes of encounter and interchange among peoples on all sides of the Atlantic Ocean which results in breaking from the narrow confines of a north Atlantic world to include the southern hemisphere. The ocean serves as a connective lifeline, a seaway for the exchange of goods, ideas, and peoples. While national histories have been used to forge and sustain national identities and thus present the nation-state as self-contained, transatlantic history is inherently inter-disciplinary, comparative, transnational, and problem oriented. It transcends the conventional definitions of academic disciplines and moves beyond the imposed boundaries of the nation-state concept.

Rather than apply traditional theories and methodologies of Cinema Studies or Film History, this study employs a transatlantic history approach and incorporates a more inter-disciplinary style in order to highlight the inter-connectedness of two distinct film industries and various peoples within the Americas, Europe, and Africa. Historical work on cinema should

¹⁸ Steven G Reinhardt and Dennis Reinhartz, eds., *Transatlantic History* (College Station: Published for the University of Texas at Arlington by Texas A & M University Press, 2006), ix.

encompass multiple components given the numerous elements that make up the entity—economically, politically, socially, and culturally—and all of these can be considered in relation to British Cinema situated within a global (or in this application, transatlantic) context.

Moreover, this study concentrates on the distribution and exhibition of film as a cultural commodity. Financially, the cultural commodity differs from other commodities due to its comparatively high initial production costs and very low reproduction costs. Therefore, its distribution offers a safer return on investment than production. However, it is their particular cultural nature and quality of usefulness that separates them from commodities in general. Paul Willis describes this quality as “one of actual or potential cultural meaningfulness, the ability to supply expressive resources available for local creative cultural practices ultimately helping them in their roles of the construction and maintenance of identity.”¹⁹ Within its cultural economy, what is circulated and exchanged is not financial capital but rather meanings, pleasures, and cultural or social identities. John Fiske explains that

...consumer choice between similar commodities is often not between competing use-values,...but between cultural values: and the selection of one particular commodity over others becomes the selection of meanings, pleasures, and social identity for the consumer. With the shift of capitalist economies from production to marketing, the cultural value of material commodities has enormously increased in proportionate importance...None the less, such commodities still circulate within a primarily financial economy that retains their bases in use-value.²⁰

Thus, British films in their final manufactured form are reproduced and dispersed to both vital and subsidiary markets to establish a (more) international and profitable market through the reliance upon British cultural similarities and interests of peoples throughout English-speaking markets. Coming from a nearly obliterated industry by the mid-1920s, the growth and development of the British industry relied heavily upon the perceived cultural value of their product. Additionally, this study looks at the process of planning the manufacture of the cultural product in conjunction with British filmmakers’ aims for a national industry. As chapters three and four discuss in detail,

¹⁹ Paul E Willis, *The Ethnographic Imagination* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 2000), 54.

²⁰ John Fiske, “The Popular Economy,” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (University of Georgia Press, 2006), 539.

British producers' intentions for their films and the distribution methods they applied to reach beyond the domestic market to America met with a degree of (limited) success. The subsequent chapters expand upon the distribution of British films within the wider English-speaking market before taking closer look at two individual case studies of English-speaking markets with imperial ties—one dominion and a colonial region. These local studies allow for a deeper exploration and hypothesis concerning local conditions, methods of supply, and marketing and advertising trends to connect the cultural mass medium to wider audiences.

However, it needs to be stated clearly that this study does *not* engage two common approaches within national cinema studies. With the primary focus of this history concerned with the economic and cultural connections of film at the stages of its distribution and exhibition, this study is not an analysis of the individual films or their portrayal of Britishness. Secondly, the unavailability of sources restricts any analysis of film reception within the two case studies that hopes to determine if there were British cultural preferences in viewers' selection of films to attend. Instead, I apply a different method of analyzing at the local level the supply sides' understanding of their local markets in order to determine a general local reception of British films.

Overall, this dissertation is principally a work of cultural and transatlantic history that analyzes the distribution and exhibition methods of sending British motion pictures to a wider British world. The analysis also reflects upon the different cultural facets of national identity and cinema within a transatlantic perspective. This cultural analysis will require a qualitative method of research that incorporates case study research on British films' promotion with extensive use of intertextual sources such as newspaper advertisements, movie posters, and various publicity materials available in archives in Britain and in the United States. The successful distribution of films relied upon not only the films themselves, but also on how they were presented for consumption. This study will also include distribution and exhibition information (when available) such as box office figures, rental grosses, and critical reviews to help determine the success of the films; however, in South Africa and the British Caribbean, much of this data remains

unavailable or lost. In order to assess them in cultural terms, a variety of publicity ephemera is necessary. Secondary source materials will provide the economic and political contexts of government protectionism, of export and distribution in the United States and within the domestic market of Britain, as well as supplementary information on prominent filmmakers and movie stars, and the competition of the Hollywood studio system.

Publicity materials and film analyses can help indicate how British films were intended to be appreciated by American, British, and other audiences. Publicity picture advertisements, movie posters, press books, fan magazines, and newspapers form a significant portion of my cultural analysis. These were especially important for the analysis of the representations of Britishness being portrayed to the various parts of the British Atlantic and thus reflecting how filmmakers perceived and targeted these other audiences. My focus extends beyond the domestic market (defined as Britain) and broadens the national cinema discourse, and it will consider how these films engage with various (and often conflicting) identities. The key difference for my own work will be the extent of Britishness as it is perceived not only in Britain, but its dominions and former colonies throughout the Atlantic. Advertisements and reviews in newspapers from South Africa and Jamaica should provide a starting point for my investigation, and perhaps the archived publicity material will indicate differences in materials being sent to each region.

The selection of the period 1927 to 1938 is strategic to these developing years of 1930s British Cinema. Firstly, it provides a synchronic moment in time prior to the film industry shift in style and production during and after World War II. As previously mentioned, this study begins with the establishment of the Cinematograph Act of 1927 followed shortly after by the transition to sound. By the mid-1930s production reached its zenith before the financial fallout in 1937. I chose to end my analysis with the next year—not only because many major companies closed or reorganized during the 1937-1938 transition, but the Cinematograph Act of 1938 inherently altered the structure of the quota renewal and ultimately the local industry with its attempts to aid the industry. With the renewal's increased flexibility of basic requirements, Hollywood began to

grow more increasingly involved in local production as they were able to establish their own production companies in London. MGM British exemplified the changes this may have created in British production with their extremely successful films of 1938 (*A Yank At Oxford*, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, and *The Citadel*). However, the winds of war interrupted this process, and wartime would see a more realist British cinema emerge among the few producers who remained in Britain and struggled to sustain British filmmaking.

As previously mentioned, chapter two provides a historiographical context to the problematic nature of defining a British film during this particular period. The state's attempts to define it via the quota act resulted in a surge of subpar quality product that left an enduring negative legacy for films from this era. Producers' attempts to target international markets led to the engagement of European and American film personnel to make more "international" rather than strictly "British" productions. Ironically, it would be many of these "international films" that would achieve world recognition for the British industry, further complicating the notion of a British Cinema. Finally, the British character and culture portrayed or represented by the films must be considered in the British definition of a film. Overall, financial and creative control over a film's production together with state involvement and certain distinctions of British culture make up some kind of end product that is designated British and generally accepted as such throughout the world.

Chapters three and four look more specifically at the most important market British producers needed to penetrate if they were to be able to producer higher quality films and still make a profit to enable the continued growth of their companies—North America. More specifically, these chapters explore three British producers' intentions and their methods to reach an international market—whether directly competing with Hollywood by establishing their own distributing agency in America or using Hollywood's distribution networks to achieve their goals. For this latter, United Artists, a distribution-only Hollywood studio known for their prestige product, took under contract two independent British producers and over the course of the decade aided in the process of making at least one of them a world-renown name—Alexander Korda. This UA

case study continues as a major thread through the remainder of this study and serves to exemplify the distribution and exhibition patterns in the broader English-speaking market and case studies of South Africa and the British Caribbean which make up the remaining chapters.

Chapter five contextualizes the larger English-speaking market in terms of distribution and exhibition. The importance of the “White Dominions”—particularly Australia for Britain’s industry and Canada for America’s industry—is not to be ignored. The “bonds of Empire” underline some of the connections between British peoples throughout the world, and their perceptions of Britishness frequently differed from those Britons in Britain. The latter half of this chapter investigates this notion of Britishness beyond the British Isles in order to contextualize the British identities that evolved in South Africa and the Caribbean.

The smaller markets of British colonies such as those in the Caribbean or the exceptionality of South Africa as the non-white dominion of the Commonwealth allows for an exploration into the varied distribution patterns of these countries and how British films reached far-flung and less profitable regions of the Atlantic region of the Empire. These two make up the case studies of chapters six and seven; each provides a description of British film distribution and exhibition within the locale, followed by a cultural analysis of the different groups of peoples and who likely made up cinema-going audiences. Finally, both case studies present an analysis of publicity and newspaper advertising to expose the importance (or lack of) Britishness in the marketing stage of exhibition. These observations tie into the different notions of British cultural identity within these areas and provide a glimpse into the interactions between film culture, national identity, and consumer agency.

Chapter 2

Britishness: Film, Industry, & Identity

The preparation of Noel Coward's "Cavalcade," one of the most ambitious and important of this season's offerings, is being rushed at Fox with the assignment of Clive Brook to the leading role and the arrival of Captain Reginald C. Berkeley from London to do the adaptation... Limited to English players, considerable difficulty is being experienced by the studio in casting Lady Jane. Because the picture is expected to be a moneymaker in England and the colonies, great care is being exercised in getting players with the proper accents for the social strata they represent. Fox feels that should there be an error in dialect a still louder cry would go up against "those horrible American movies."²¹

Cavalcade (1933), a Hollywood production of a British play about British lives, raises a moment of consideration for the difficulties of defining what is a British film. Just prior to the British industry's success with London Films' *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), Fox studio's *Cavalcade* offered American anglophiles and Britishers around the world a strong dose of Britishness—as seen through a Hollywood lens. Based upon Noel Coward's 1931 play, the epic drama covers three generations within the household of an upper-middle class family in London. The major events rocking English life from 1899 to 1933 are shown through the perspective of the "upstairs" family members and their few servants "downstairs." These pivotal moments shaping their lives begins with the Second Anglo-Boer war, and continues through the death of Queen Victoria, the sinking of the Titanic, the Great War, and the transition to more modern lifestyles, music and culture in its aftermath. After much loss and with the increased chaos of modern society, the film ends with the now-elderly parents, Lord and Lady Jane Maryot, toasting in the New Year 1933.

Upon its release, film critic for the New York Times Mordaunt Hall effused upon how with this film: "One sees England, merry and sad, belligerent and peaceful, an England with the characters speaking their minds. The atmosphere of London and elsewhere has been reproduced in a masterful fashion, from the days of the Boer War to the present time." He waxed on,

²¹ Chapin Hall, "Notes From Hollywood's Studios: Clive Brook Will Be The Leading Player in the Film Version of Coward's 'Cavalcade'," *New York Times*, July 24, 1932, x3.

describing the distinctly historical sounds and familiar sights portrayed in the film, from the East End to Mayfair and even the Houses of Parliament in the distance.²² For Hall, Hollywood had succeeded in depicting England, though what he described were the detailed sets and recreations of internationally recognizable London sights and sounds built in Hollywood.²³

On the other side of the Atlantic, British fans gave resounding praise to the Hollywood movie as well. *Picturegoer* fans voted Clive Brook's performance as the best of 1933 and awarded him with *Picturegoer's* 1933 Award of Merit gold medal, with Diana Wynard ranking second among the actresses.²⁴ *Cavalcade's* astonishing popularity with British audiences has been confirmed by its exhibition patterns—including the highest POPSTAT index rating among

²² Mordaunt Hall, "The Screen: Clive Brook and Diana wintered in a stirring pictorial version of Noel Coward's 'Cavalcade,'" *New York Times*, January 6, 1933, 23.

²³ Various articles promoting the upcoming production detailed the efforts put into constructing special detailed sets in Movietone City (Hollywood) such as Kensington Park, Victoria station, Tilbury docks, the Gaiety Theatre, the Caledonia market, the beach at Margate, and even Trafalgar Square "with the Nelson column and the four Landseer lions at its base...", along with various vehicles including a London general omnibus, typical London taxicabs, six "open front hansoms," and "four 'growlers' (four-wheeled cabs)" that were shipped to Hollywood. *New York Times*, September 25, 1932; "London on the Lot," *New York Times*, December 4, 1932. However, not every critic positively regaled the film, despite its success with the masses. Clive Brook kept a cutting from the (London) *Daily Express*, June 1, 1933 in which a New York correspondent gave an "unfavourable" verdict to the "English patriotic spectacle" after attending its NY premiere, and elaborated that "England itself—or rather, the English film studios of the pre-'Rome Express' period—could hardly have produced anything worse... It takes more than an omnibus to make a good film; and 'Cavalcade,' I fear, is just another of those idyllic but irritating Hollywood versions of English life. Still, the film improves towards the end, and the final patriotic toast brought the audience to their feet. Some Cheered, some wept. It should be a great success." Scrapbooks: 1931-1934, Clive Brook Collection, BFI.

²⁴ Canadian Norma Shearer was awarded their medal that year for *Smilin' Through* (1932), another Hollywood production with a British storyline and setting. For a complete accounting for 1933 fan ranking, see "Our Award," *Picturegoer Weekly*, April 28, 1934, 12. This high-ranking position for Wynard is significant given the less frequent (or even rare) inclusion of British actresses (whether working in Hollywood or London) in popular lists. Diana Wynard is among the first few to make it into the top-10 lists in the early 1930s (alongside Madeleine Carroll). Throughout the 1930s, the few to rank multiple times in British fan magazines' popularity surveys from 1930-1937 were Carroll, Jessie Matthews, Gracie Fields, Anna Neagle, and Elisabeth Bergner. This minimal selection is in distinct contrast to the extreme popularity (and perhaps phenomenon) of popular British actors in both industries with fans in both Britain and America. For a comprehensive accounting of films' and film stars' popularity in the British market, see the Appendices in Robert James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste in Britain, 1930-39: A Round of Cheap Diversions?* (Manchester University Press, 2010), 209–243, for listings of "award" winners from surveys with *Picturegoer*, *Film Weekly*, *Kinematograph Weekly*, and Sidney Bernstein questionnaires of 1932 and 1934 that make up some of the "Broader patterns of film popularity" within the British market.

the films John Sedgwick's statistically analyzes from 1932-1937.²⁵ So if British audiences were enthused with this Hollywood representation of Britishness, how do Hollywood-made "British" productions fit into the equation of defining a British film?

This Hollywood production muddies the concept of a British film when based solely on a film's content or production values. The geographical location of production and the financial sponsorship of a Hollywood major studio, Fox, make this a Hollywood film. Yet the meticulous attention to detail concerning British subject matter, the use of British talent and above-the-line crew (from the local British colony in Hollywood), and the special care to adhere to British manners and sounds for authenticity all contributed to what became a globally successful film that many saw as well-representing Britishness. Furthermore, as this announcement in the *New York Times* reflects, it was Fox studio's intention to target the increasingly vital (to the Hollywood industry) British and Empire markets after the establishment of sound productions. The use of an all-British cast and their concern with accents is tied to British market expectations and the recreation of Britishness. Class, as concern for proper dialect and accents implies, was among the important aspects of Britishness that Hollywood felt necessary to address. *Cavalcade* was one of their few exceptions to make such effort at British correctness and roundly succeed. Even so, throughout the 1930s, Hollywood continued to make numerous "British" films with an eye towards the increasingly-important English-speaking market, and the studios succeeded in further challenging the growth of a British industry that could make distinctively-British films.

At the same time, British producers, government officials, and others were interested in establishing a British national industry that they felt more accurately represented Britishness (or reflected the British national culture) than anything Hollywood could produce. Clearly, British filmmakers incorporated some of these same kinds of British aspects that Hollywood used with an

²⁵ John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 264, 269. *Cavalcade*'s POPSTAT rating for the year of its release 1933 was 92.89. For comparison, *The Private Life of Henry VIII* ranked second that same year, with a POPSTAT index of 55.13 – which was the highest rating for a British-made film during these years (with *Scarlet Pimpernel* coming close in 1935 with 51.2). See Sedgwick's study for a full accounting of his data-based ranking POPSTAT system.

eye for the British Empire markets, as well as other elements available at hand in England such as recognizable landmarks and scenery. The growth and dominance of Hollywood films in Britain raised concerns about their influence over British audiences, and some British filmmakers competed in the domestic market by making films more distinctively British, while others looking at the international market made films disputably British. The last section of this chapter will look more closely at how film, an observable signifier of nationality given its cultural make-up, and the British film industry incorporated representations of Britishness (or not). Meanwhile, as *Cavalcade* demonstrates, the geographical location of production, its financing, the talent onscreen, the key department heads in control of artistic and visual elements, and depictions of British concepts such as Class: all these elements contribute to the different features of production that enables some degree of distinction as a “British” film. This chapter aims to survey the different methods used to define the output of the British film industry as British films. In the process, production context of the 1930s is sketched out, and related areas of scholarly debate are presented. The Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 demarcated some of the fundamentals to a definition of a British film; the developing industry of British production and the choices of its filmmakers would fill in much of the rest and leave it to audiences for its ultimate acceptance or rejection.

Understandably, the concept of a British national cinema is tied intrinsically to the accepted definitions of both the British film and an idea of Britishness—not solely as a commodity and a national identity (respectively), but especially within the cultural attributes of these entities. Therefore the attempt to describe what makes a film “British” must take into account the government’s official classification of a British film (via quota legislation), how the economic parameters of the system might reformulate so-called British aspects of filmmaking, but also the cultural component of the films themselves. As already mentioned, taken on their own some cultural factors blur the lines of distinction from Hollywood’s own productions of British subject matter, especially with the narrowing (and eventually closing) foreign markets during the 1930s that made the British market increasingly vital to Hollywood’s overseas profits. Even so, certain

distinctions of Britishness alongside financial and creative control over a film's production together must play some role within designating a film and an industry to be "truly" British.

This chapter will survey how the government defined a British film upon its intervention, how the industry (through production, distribution, exhibition) shaped its historical definition within a transatlantic and transnational network, as well as how a film's content might reflect some sense of Britishness in relation to historical definitions of British national and cultural identity. Altogether, this will help to provide the context behind the international distribution and exhibition of these films, which is the epicenter of this study.

Official Classification: The 1927 Films Act

The rise of cinema as a dominant form of popular entertainment in early twentieth century Britain (as in the United States and elsewhere), inevitably led to political, economic, and cultural controversy when local production suffered in the face of Hollywood dominance in the domestic market. Opinions divided between those who felt it was merely a film business and should be regarded as such, with no intervention from official quarters, while others emphasized cinema's influence over the masses. Yet it would be the economic side of the film trade—especially the effects of Hollywood competition on British production—that initially drew government attention in the mid- to late-1920s.²⁶ The 1927 Films Act was intended to redress the imbalance of American film dominance in the British market at the same time as the British industry dealt with its own investment shortages. By 1926, British production had dwindled down until it was nearly nonexistent. British-made films had little space within its domestic market, because Hollywood films dominated British cinemas and their distributors practiced savvy strategies such as block booking and advanced booking. To add to these problems, British producers lacked significant financial resources, and British banks and investors considered production to be an inevitable

²⁶ Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the Government, 1927-84* (London: BFI Pub., 1985), 1.

loss.²⁷ By requiring a specified percentage of British-made films to be distributed and exhibited within the British Isles, it was hoped that state intervention would bolster or stimulate the industry's production of British films.

The statutory definition of a British film was drawn up in consultation with representatives of the British film industry. In a description of the Cinematograph Act of 1927:

Under Section 27 (3) of the Act a British film is defined as one which has been made by a British subject, or subjects, or by a British company (which is, for this purpose, one constituted in any part of the British Empire, the majority of the directors of which are British subjects). The studio scenes must have been shot in the British Empire; the author of the scenario must have been a British subject and, generally speaking, not less than 75 per cent. of the salaries, wages and payments specifically paid for labour and services in the making of the film (excluding payments in respect of copyright and to one foreign actor, actress or producer) must have been paid to British subjects or persona domiciled in the Empire.²⁸

The Board of Trade had to register a film as either British or foreign before it could be distributed to or exhibited in Britain's cinemas. Quota provisions designated a specified minimum percentage of films to be acquired by distributors (renters) and the total length of films exhibited to be British. This percentage increased gradually each year in stages from 1929 to 1936, starting at 7.5% for distributors and 5% for exhibitors in the first year, and reaching 20% by 1936.²⁹ Meanwhile, the geographical condition required all studio scenes to be filmed in the British Empire. While a few films were imported from Australia and even India, the majority of film production occurred in England. Additionally, the Act regulated booking practices in order to make room for British films in the domestic market.

With the establishment of the 1927 Films Act, the state's intervention led to an official classification of British film; however, the end result was a definition concentrated upon the

²⁷ H. Mark Glancy, "Hollywood and Britain: MGM and the British 'Quota' Legislation," in *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema 1929-1939*, Cinema and Society Series (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 59.

²⁸ Great Britain, Board of Trade, and Committee on Cinematograph Films, *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Departmental Committee on Cinematograph Films Together With Appendices and Index, First to Fourth Days...* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1936), 4, accessed January 14, 2016, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015030915493>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4. Distributors' quota was higher because exhibitors wanted a selection of films from which to choose.

economic side of production and financial backing of the films. Quality, including cultural content and the national cultural character (among other aspects), were left out of the Act's official explanation. However, as British film historians have pointed out, it was a popular element in the talks leading up to the creation and establishment of the quota.

The 1927 Films Act was ratified less than five years before Britain implemented a major program of general protective industrial tariffs (in 1931).³⁰ Since the late nineteenth century, Britain had pursued a policy of free trade (although their share of the world export trade in manufactured goods was falling in recent years amidst the rise of competing industrial economies of Germany and the United States.)³¹ Yet government protection for the film industry innately countered this policy. As Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street explain it, a "special case" had to be presented for governmental assistance, because "economic arguments were not persuasive since the sector to benefit, film production, played a minor role in the national economy" with relatively few people employed and based in the fairly well-off southeast region of England.³² Instead, supporters cited cultural arguments to defend the quota; since the films to receive this protection were defined as "British," many supporters emphasized the cultural significance of nationality.

Ironically, the Films Act's criteria for determining a film's Britishness dealt surprisingly little (if at all) with defining any cultural characteristics. As seen above, the principal factor was the percentage of labor costs paid to British nationals. Dickinson and Street suggest that the creative team on a British film could therefore be American as long as a large percentage of the labor force was British subjects.

Ian Jarvie highlights that officials broadly used two chief types of argument in debates prior to the quota legislation to justify government intervention: commercial and cultural.³³

³⁰ Royal Assent was given January 1, 1928.

³¹ Dickinson and Street, *Cinema and State*, 6.

³² *Ibid.*, 2.

³³ Ian Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign: The North Atlantic Movie Trade, 1920-1950* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 19. Jarvie takes issue with the simplicity of their arguments,

Commercially, the employment of local labor, materials, and capital was preferable to importing foreign-made product. Culturally, locals should see domestically-produced material and their own culture in cinemas, with the upshot of minimizing foreign product.³⁴

Ultimately, fears of American influence and “cultural invasion” underlined the various cultural arguments and concerns expressed in the years prior (and after) to quota legislation. Some of these concerns were revisited, summarized and responded to in the final weeks before the Bill’s passage. For example, Viscount Peel, chief advocate of the Cinematograph Films Bill, addressed a number of objections being made. For one thing, critics asked “whether the definition of a British film is too wide; that is to say, whether it would not let in a number of films which, though in name British, were really foreign films.” Viscount Peel assured the House that the parameters already established (a British majority of a filmmaking company’s directorship, studio shooting located within the British Empire, and the majority of actors being British subjects) would ensure that films would “be distinctively British.” In defense of the quota, he likened it to “American films, though often produced by non-Americans with non-American actors, are distinctively American in character, being made in an American atmosphere and chiefly for the American public.”³⁵

Another objection raised was that “films of higher quality and artistic merit are required and that nothing in the Bill encourages their production. Poor British films, it is said, will be but a bad advertisement of British character and life, especially among the great native populations.” (Note the transposed duty of Empire from man to this cultural commodity reflected here in his statement. Chapter five deals further with Britishness, film, and notions of Empire.) Viscount Peel endeavored to assuage their fears (which, ironically, soon appeared to become reality amidst the surge of low-quality quota production):

as they assume film to be a homogenous product with no “differential demand” and take for granted the nation-state’s role as conservationist of culture and commerce.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁵ *Cinematograph Films Bill*, HL Deb (5th Series), November 28, 1927, vol. 69, c281, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1927/nov/28/cinematograph-films-bill>.

I think your Lordships will agree that you cannot possibly lay down in an Act of Parliament standards of quality. You may deal with quantity, but, the category of quality is beyond the power even of Parliament itself. But the checking of these choking practices [such as block booking] will enable the public taste to assert itself by producing good films which will be able to obtain a booking, and the competition of a living British industry with the American, which has so long dominated the market, must improve the standard of films generally.³⁶

These few examples are but two among many through the debates that highlight concerns about the threat of the American industry and fears of its influence. Simultaneously, they reveal a glimpse at the problematic nature of enacting quota legislation to ensure a “living British industry” able to compete and thrive alongside the dominant American one (as well as impregnate it with cultural obligations of the British character).

In his economic history of the “tripartite industry” (between the US, Canada, and Britain), Ian Jarvie links the British government’s direct intervention to ruling elites’ fears of American influence on the mass electorate. Jarvie argues that officials’ resistance to U.S. domination of films “reveals strains and tension caused by the emergence of mass society and culture of a mass democracy.”³⁷ From this politico-economic perspective, mass cultural goods challenged the power of the ruling elites (in Britain and Canada) and undermined their self-confidence. The extension of the franchise in Britain (in 1918 to include all adult males; and to females in 1928) as well as the changing geopolitical and commercial position of the United States (in relation to Britain’s world trade export) combined with the rise of mass culture and consumerism during the interwar years to increase elites’ anxiety.³⁸ Jarvie suggests that the use of movies as propaganda, as mass electorate entertainment, and as a tool for shaping opinions “lurks behind” ruling elites’ dealings with movies during this period, including their discussions of government protection of a national film industry.

Additionally, Jarvie briefly surmises how American influence of its ideals and values could be “prejudicial to high national and patriotic interests in Britain and its Empire.” He submits that

³⁶ Ibid., c282.

³⁷ Jarvie, *Hollywood’s Overseas Campaign*, 6.

³⁸ Ibid., 103–104.

American films could promote “an ideology different from the paternalistic form of democracy developed in Britain...”³⁹ The examples Jarvie offers include slapstick comedies that ridicule authority figures, business and political elites frequently being portrayed as corrupt, and “an atmosphere of egalitarianism and opportunity for all was pervasive.”⁴⁰ Deference and respect to one’s betters within a rigid social structure are rejected, and thus Jarvie agrees that ruling elites were correct to fear American films.

In addition to the quota legislation not addressing key cultural components of building an independent national industry, some of the provisos of the 1927 Films Act were soon discovered to be problematic. For instance, a British company had to make the film, but this definition indicated only that the majority of its Board of Directors ought to be British citizens, and not that control should be entirely in British hands. It did not indicate that British subjects should hold entire control over the company.⁴¹ As Mark Glancy has suggested, this small detail allowed American companies to set up British subsidiary companies (with British citizens making up their board of directors) to meet their quota requirements. These British directors were likely employees of the larger American company that ultimately financed and controlled production.⁴² Glancy explains that the government understood this, but as they did not want the state to be responsible for providing support to film production, funding would be necessary from other means; these means came partly from British investors, but also from American film companies.

Rachael Low points to these financial considerations to be the core of British industry problems during these years. “Cost and quality are not synonymous, of course, and everyone can point to good low-budget films. But shoestring masterpieces are rare, and because British pictures had to be relatively cheap they suffered in comparison with American rivals.”⁴³ Instead, British filmmakers were denied a share of the American market, which would have made more

³⁹ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Dickinson and Street, *Cinema and State*, 6.

⁴² Glancy, “Hollywood and Britain,” 59–60.

⁴³ Rachael Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939: Film Making in 1930s Britain*, vol. 7, *The History of the British Film* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1985), xiv.

elaborate production economically feasible. Ultimately, the difficulty for productions to acquire financing led to lower-budget films unable to compete with American producers.

Another aspect of this British definition of a film became tricky enough to be ignored, for the most part, until discussions for the Film Act's renewal. While revisiting the 1927 Films Act in 1936, officials explained that the requirement of the "scenario author" to be a British subject was problematic, especially after the advent of sound, because the scenario writer was not the person to control the aspects of the story or theme that officials felt "should be essentially British in character and atmosphere." Instead, the scenario writer was considered more of a technician than an artist. As an alternative explanation, the 1936 report suggests, "The persons who actually determine the national character of a film are those responsible for making it. It is they who select the story, theme or plot and who hazard capital for its production."⁴⁴

Overall, quota protection led to a significant increase in British film production and in the British industry's share of the domestic market. Initial growth occurred at a time when the US industry was dealing with the Depression and the transition to sound. During this early phase, British-registered films increased their share of the market from 4.4% in 1927 to 24% by 1932.⁴⁵ Newborn confidence in the aftermath of the protective legislation hastened a trend towards vertical integration which resulted in the development of two major combines, Gaumont British Picture Corporation and Associated British Picture Corporation, with control over the largest portion of circuits in Britain by 1933. These two companies' acquisition of cinema chains throughout the British Isles guaranteed domestic screening of their films and ensured an increase in capital funds flowing into their production side of business. Additionally, the subsequent introduction of sound into British filmmaking raised the cost of production and lowered the (previously surging) number of quota-producing smaller companies. By the mid-1930s, the industry settled into a new structure with these two combines and a number of smaller companies that (with a few exceptions) usually produced quota and low-budget films for Hollywood

⁴⁴ Board of Trade, *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Committee on Cinematograph Films*, 20.

⁴⁵ Statistics drawn from US Dept of Commerce Reports, 1927-1932, referenced in Street, "British Film and the National Interest," 186.

distributors in the British market. Between them all, they established two basic types of productions during this period: higher quality films intended for the international market and lower-budget “quota” films for the domestic market. Overall, by 1934 the British industry was doing well, and British filmmakers consistently exceeded their quota requirements. John Sedgwick’s statistical work has revealed that British producers maintained their hold of around 25% of the domestic market share from 1934 to 1936, with an even larger percentage (up to 36%) taking up a share of the hit films for the 1934 and 1935 seasons.⁴⁶ Sedgwick connects his results of this increased popularity of British films among British audiences as further support to other claims that a “viable national cinema” existed during the 1930s.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the conditions after the passage of the 1927 Films Act not only stimulated British production but likewise prompted a wider range of American involvement within the British industry. As previously mentioned, American companies could invest in and take part-ownership of British companies, as long as the majority of the British company directors were British subjects. However, only two American companies set up production units in Britain to supply their own quota films—Warner-First National at Teddington Studios and Fox at Wembley. Since Hollywood could commission films from British production companies to meet their British distributing subsidiaries’ requirements, this led to an outpouring of production companies being launched, including fifty-nine new companies in 1929 alone.⁴⁸ At least with United Artists, these commissioned British films would also be used for American release. Some Hollywood studios established film production units in Britain for quota film production, both during the early 1930s

⁴⁶ John Sedgwick, “Cinema-Going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s,” in *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema 1929-1939*, Cinema and Society Series (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 16.

⁴⁷ Sedgwick uses the example of Marcia Landy’s explanation that her examination of British genres (which includes those of the 1930s through the 1950s) “suggests that whether the British critics wished to acknowledge it or not, Britain did in fact have a viable national cinema. This national cinema was, of course, highly dependent on Hollywood, as were other popular national cinemas, but while similarities in overall form can be discerned, the differences are instructive...” as seen with their negotiations of the codes of historical films and empire films, genres common to both British and Hollywood industries. For more on this discussion of a national cinema in terms of genres, see Marcia Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 485.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930-1939* (1984; repr., London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 39.

phase of “quickies” as well as the “quality” phase later in the decade.⁴⁹ Even after the establishment of the quota, Hollywood films continued to dominate the protected British market. While Hollywood ownership of cinemas in the United Kingdom was less important during the 1920s while they had unrestricted access to the market, the quota provisions after 1927 “prompted a rethink,” and the major Hollywood studios resumed the diversification of their involvement by slowly acquiring British exhibition interests in addition to their established first-run “flagship” cinemas in London and other major cities.⁵⁰

One of the core consequences of the 1927 Films Act that film historians continue to debate is the resulting surge of “quota quickies” from the plethora of new companies during the early 1930s that seemingly ruined the British film industry’s reputation – despite the successful production of higher quality pictures during and after this period. The enduring image of this period is of small producing firms churning out low budget productions of minimal critical value. This orthodox view (or canon) of British film history has relegated said “quota” films to the rubbish bin as bi-products of quota legislation that were almost exclusively used for domestic consumption and often served as secondary supporting features accompanying a main Hollywood production.

Within the film trade and in the following decades, these “quota quickies” became a national humiliation, and film critics and historians reinforced this view throughout the twentieth century. Rachael Low, in her pivotal 1985 history of filmmaking in 1930s Britain, declared the 1927 quota legislation to be an utter “failure”. According to Low, while film production may have doubled during these years, the increase “consisted almost entirely of cheap and inferior films, the famous quota quickies and others not much better, which took advantage of the protective market and went far to ruin the reputation of British production as a whole.”⁵¹ Low simplified British production of the 1930s to one of “either quality or quota,” in which quality was based on a

⁴⁹ Tom Ryall, *Britain and the American Cinema* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), 39.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 40. For more indepth examination of American companies’ involvement in Britain during this period, see Ryall, Chapter 3.

⁵¹ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:xiv.

“reasonable standard of production,” while quota referred to “approximately half the large number of British films up to 1937 [that] were produced at minimum cost simply to exploit the protective market or, at worst, to comply with the law.”⁵² Low further qualifies her point, that among the overall film production, films from “quality” producers (such as Herbert Wilcox, Alexander Korda, Michael Balcon, and others) were good as far as budget allowed, and the British public liked them. However, that is why the plethora of “cheap pictures,” in contrast to these few quality films, ruined the reputation of British filmmaking.

Low’s negative take on quota productions was not the only one to reinforce their national shame and lasting harm to the industry. From contemporary critics and individuals that worked within the industry on quota film productions to prominent film historians thereafter, quota films have been dismissed as “bad films” and responsible for the negative reputation of British Cinema for many years. One of the most popular anecdotal references in many of these histories stems from producer Michael Balcon’s account of exhibitors (more specifically, “certain American-controlled cinemas in the West End of London”) burying their screening of quota films by showing them in the early morning hours when only the janitors were present.⁵³ Even Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street have stated that quota films were “best forgotten.”⁵⁴

Steve Chibnall explains that since Hollywood produced or commissioned most of these quota films to be distributed by American companies within Britain, it was easy to denounce their part in British Cinema. This dismissal frequently occurs, despite that quota films were made overwhelmingly by Britons for domestic audiences and “when we view the examples of 1930s low-budget production that have survived, there is usually little doubt that they are culturally ‘specifically British’ (usually specifically English)...”⁵⁵ It has only been in recent years that film historians such as Chibnall are attempting to challenge this negative outlook on quota production

⁵² Ibid., 7:115.

⁵³ Michael Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents ... A Lifetime of Films* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 92–93; Mark Glancy refers to the popularity of the anecdote in Glancy, “Hollywood and Britain,” 60; Lawrence Napper also makes mention of it, in Napper, “A Despicable Tradition?,” 194.

⁵⁴ Dickinson and Street, *Cinema and State*, 42.

⁵⁵ Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, xi.

from a range of perspectives. Others, like Chibnall, feel the necessity to reexamine this period of low-budget filmmaking to uncover its contributions to British Cinema, including the beneficial (as well as the usual negative) aspects that made them.

Linda Wood and Lawrence Napper assert that the quality of this low budget production was not unvaryingly dreadful, and a more thorough examination of this underside to 1930s British Cinema reveals a richer picture of accomplishment than personal remembrances from the time have implied. Early quota films suffered from the initial limitations of equipment, training, and adapting to sound, but successive years increased technical assurance. Linda Wood admits that “some dreadful films continued to be made” throughout the 1930s, but Wood insists that “...this was a minority; more typical were the solidly made second features, and judged as such they were of a reasonable standard.”⁵⁶ Lawrence Napper advocates looking at these British films (as they made up almost half of British film output in their period) “in terms of their richness as a reflection of the society and culture that produced them.”⁵⁷ A British film was “expected to represent an indigenous and unchanging version of British national identity, specifically distinct from the alternative presented by Hollywood” yet simultaneously be able to export this message competitively among international markets. However, the early 1930s trade papers and popular critics vociferously criticized British productions for their imitation of Hollywood, or for being too internationalist, slow-paced, or even too reliant on foreign stars and technicians.⁵⁸ Napper contrasts these expectations and criticisms with the crime “whodunits” and music hall comedies; he suggests these quota films might constitute (in their formal and thematic aspects) “narratives of resistance to American values of mass consumption in exactly the ways intended by the 1927 Films Act.”⁵⁹ These genre cycles:

...addressed their audiences with an intimacy and intensity unavailable to American films. Unable, because of their minuscule budgets, to construct worlds

⁵⁶ Linda Wood, “Low-Budget British Films in the 1930s,” in *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 218.

⁵⁷ Napper, “A Despicable Tradition?,” 192.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 199.

of glamorous fantasy or protagonists defined by conspicuous consumption, they relied on portraying the spartan worlds of the British defined by class.⁶⁰

Despite American companies' involvement in quota production, much of the quota output tended to deal with British topics and stories, local humor and items of interest, and more—all with the intention of targeting the domestic market. Chibnall likens these lower budget productions to “B” movie productions of Hollywood’s “Poverty Row,” especially as both provided opportunities for training in production, acting, etc.⁶¹ For some, these low-budget British films seem to represent a distinctly “British” type of film compared to those produced for the international market. For example, low budget production provided a small window of opportunity for the emergence of new genres (in conjunction with sound’s introduction), such as comedies that exploited British music hall traditions with nationally recognized stage performers such as Gracie Fields and George Formby. Another “distinctive indigenous genre” of films to emerge was the numerous crime films.⁶²

Although the 1927 Films Act was framed within a context of heightened concern about film’s propaganda value and its importance in national life, the industry that grew in its wake did not meet all of the hopes and expectations of its policy-makers. The absence in the legislation of certain features, including dealing with cultural and general production components, inherently limited the creation of an independent and consistently prosperous British film industry. Dickinson and Street insist that “...the mechanism adopted to combat the ‘Hollywood invasion’ was not really appropriate as a means of establishing a flourishing British film industry which would be independent of American economic and cultural influence.” Furthermore, the Films Act was the “cornerstone” of the policy, but it did not answer significant questions such as “How can a film

⁶⁰ Ibid., 199–200.

⁶¹ Steve Chibnall, Mark Glancy, and Linda Wood have also argued that low-budget production was beneficial in providing a “training school” function for British filmmakers. See Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, xi; Glancy, “Hollywood and Britain,” 62; and Wood, “Low-Budget British Films.”

⁶² Ryall, *Britain and the American Cinema*, 47; See chapter four of Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, 92–137 for a wealth of analysis on the genres of quota production. The “staple” of quota production, comedies and crime films, accounted for about two-thirds of all films made, roughly 38% of comedy and 26% of crime films; Napper, “A Despicable Tradition?,” 198; Statistics from both Chibnall and Napper were drawn from Denis Gifford, *The British Film Catalogue, 1895-1985* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1986).

industry be encouraged to serve the national interest from the perspective of production? What kinds of film reflect the national image?"⁶³ These national culture questions become increasingly pertinent when loopholes in the quota legislation allowed for foreign investment to supplement production and for many Americans and Europeans to work within the British industry.

The Transatlantic & Transnational Nature of British Production: International Films

In addition to the problematic aspects of American involvement with quota productions leaving some critics to disregard their contribution as British films, the industry's "international films" also challenge the notion of a British Cinema. In the past, scholars have ignored or negated the influences European and American film personnel have had upon British filmmaking of the 1930s. Yet the output of these "international" productions represents a strong corner of the "quality" films that met with more success and achieved higher recognition for the British film industry as a whole. Therefore, these films also make up part of the equation defining British film. *An "International Film"...*

With an eye on American and European markets, the more ambitious producers aimed to make an "international film" (or "international picture" in contemporary parlance). By this term, producers meant a film with production values comparable to the best from Hollywood, and as Andrew Higson has eloquently described, with a combination of the "narrational fluency, economy and continuity of the American film and the technical accomplishment and visual style of the German quality cinema."⁶⁴ For producers in the British industry after the quota's enactment, these films would aim to achieve a "British atmosphere" along with this international appeal.⁶⁵ While he claimed later to dislike altering British films to fit American preferences, Michael Balcon became a prominently visible representative of Gumont British's internationalist star policy in film trade papers as a result of his frequent trips to the USA. Furthermore, earlier in his career (prior to sound film production), he had clearly publicized his opinions about internationalizing filmmaking.

⁶³ Dickinson and Street, *Cinema and State*, 33.

⁶⁴ Andrew Higson, "'A Film League of Nations': Gainsborough, Gaumont British and 'Film Europe,'" in *Gainsborough Pictures*, ed. Pam Cook (London: Cassell, 1997), 62.

⁶⁵ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:195.

...Making pictures 'international' is an art in itself which I and my colleagues have studied very closely. The process is expensive, but it is profitable – and much safer than pandering to Peckham. There is no doubt that British pictures with an international appeal will save British film production.⁶⁶

In trade paper publicity about his company, Alexander Korda also extolled upon his international policy remaining “the bulwark of London Films,” and he continued to describe his company’s use of recognizable and multi-national authors and stars.⁶⁷ With budgets comparatively higher than films intended solely for the domestic market, international films required globally recognizable stars and highly qualified and creative department heads and technicians. Accordingly, producers rallied multi-national units and casts in order to create films with international settings and themes that hopefully appealed to audiences across national boundaries (like Hollywood films seemed to do). And they did this within the parameters for a nationally-based production.⁶⁸

Sarah Street has also weighed in upon the concept of an international industry, modelled by Hollywood and exemplifying “universal” attributes and standards which were “seen to provide qualitative pointers to international acceptance...” She continues:

Producers learned from Hollywood that successful exportation depended on presenting a combination of 'local' representations with 'international' elements, something that was a little different but not alienating or incomprehensible to overseas audiences.⁶⁹

With this perspective, films and filmmaking responded to what Michael Walsh has described as “imperatives of international competition rather than simply ‘reflect’ a national identity...”⁷⁰

Furthermore, these “local” representations allowed for a semblance of national culture and character to make up the “British atmosphere” of the film even as they modified it to fit into what they hoped to be “international appeal.”

⁶⁶ Balcon, “British Film Production: Is the general conception too narrow? A plea for wider vision,” *The Film Renter and Moving Picture News*, January 3, 1925, quoted in Philip Kemp, “Not for Peckham: Michael Balcon and Gainsborough’s International Trajectory in the 1920s,” in *Gainsborough Pictures*, ed. Pam Cook (London: Cassell, 1997), 14.

⁶⁷ “International Policy is Applied by Korda,” *Film Daily*, February 14, 1935, 11.

⁶⁸ Higson, ““A Film League of Nations,”” 62.

⁶⁹ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 2.

⁷⁰ Sarah Street is referring to Michael Walsh’s 1997 study which looks at questions of national transferability, and has found further evidence to support his claims. Michael Walsh, “First and Finest: British Films on US Television in the Late 1940s,” *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 40 (1997): 4, quoted in *ibid.*

Distinct phases of this type of production carried over from the mid-1920s through the 1930s, stemming from the internationality of silent-era filmmaking in Britain and Europe, through utilizing networks established through the “Film Europe” movement and transnational co-productions in the late 1920s, and drawing upon connections developed during the brief attempt at multilingual productions when sound entered the frame. Historians such as Pam Cook and Tim Bergfelder have made this same association, tying the “Film Europe” movement and internationality of filmmaking to production companies like Gaumont British and London Films within the 1930s industry (and even further to the costume melodramas of Gainsborough fame in the 1940s).⁷¹ These links can be seen by the embracement of what Tim Bergfelder refers to as a “cultural hybridity” throughout this period.⁷²

Film Europe: A Failed Collaborate Effort, 1925-27

Like Bergfelder, Andrew Higson also ties the European connections at Gaumont British (and other British and European companies of the 1930s) to the internationality of film as a commodity in the years prior to sound production. In the latter half of the 1920s, some European companies found the strategy of collaboration with other companies elsewhere in Europe as an attractive possible solution. The advantages of co-producing included the ability to expand their budgets by pooling their resources, and thus increase their production values. Reciprocal distribution deals would enlarge domestic markets into a potentially “European-wide exhibition space of the size comparable with the American domestic market.”⁷³ The “Film Europe” movement, or the idea of “Pan-European cooperation,” was an attractive option to challenge Hollywood’s hold throughout Europe’s markets. As Higson explains it, this concept of wide cooperation was more a “set of principles than concrete practices,” but some leading companies in Britain, Germany, France, and elsewhere did adopt “loosely related industrial policies” with

⁷¹ For the case in point, see Pam Cook, *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996).

⁷² Tim Bergfelder, “Surface and Distraction: Style and Genre at Gainsborough in the Late 1920s and 1930s,” in *Gainsborough Pictures*, ed. Pam Cook (London: Cassell, 1997), 31.

⁷³ Higson, ““A Film League of Nations,”” 61.

mutually beneficial intentions, including reciprocal distribution agreements and co-productions.⁷⁴ Parallel to the industrial contest for distribution and Hollywood's dominance in Europe, there were ideological concerns such as fears about the displacement of local, cultural, and national identities, and at times these fears were enacted to promote resistance strategies (economic and/or political ones), as seen in Britain's parliamentary debates towards quota legislation during this period.⁷⁵ And while "Film Europe" was an attempt to strengthen European companies to challenge the dominance of American distributors, simultaneously companies like Gaumont British aspired to gain access to the American market. "So if there was a Europeanization of cinema designed to challenge American cultural expansionism, there was also a much more extensive cultural and industrial internationalization which involved colluding with the institution we have come to know as Hollywood."⁷⁶

Quota and Sound: Transnational Co-Productions & MLVs

Philip Kemp briefly addresses the apparent contrast between Michael Balcon's general recognition as "the most staunchly English" of producers and his pursuance of so internationalist a policy at his career's outset in 1925. While studying current American productions for "the high standard of photography and all film technique generally" (as Balcon proclaimed to a 1925 trade journal), the technical expertise that Gainsborough chiefly drew upon during these years was German.⁷⁷ Gainsborough's first co-production with Universum Film AG (UFA) in Babelsberg,

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby, eds., *"Film Europe" and "Film America": Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange, 1920-1939* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999); In particular, see the chapter contributions of Richard Maltby and Ruth Vasey, "'Temporary American Citizens': Cultural Anxieties and Industrial Strategies in the Americanisation of European Cinema," in *"Film Europe" and "Film America": Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange, 1920-1939*, ed. Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 32–55, which deals with these debates concerning industrial strategies and the cultural anxieties that sharpens even further with the conversion to sound within the international trade system. And for more on the Film Europe movement's origins and its decline by 1929, see Kristin Thompson, "The Rise and Fall of Film Europe," in *"Film Europe" and "Film America": Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange, 1920-1939*, ed. Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 56–81.

⁷⁶ Higson, "'A Film League of Nations,'" 63.

⁷⁷ Michael Balcon, "British Film production: Is the general conception too narrow? A plea for wider vision," *The Film Renter and Moving Picture News*, January 3, 1925, n.p. quoted in Kemp, "Not for Peckham," 14.

Germany, *The Blackguard* (*Die Prinzessin und der Geiger*, 1925) initiated an association with Erich Pommer and German studios (that lasted nearly ten years); up to the coming of sound, seven of the twenty-two features released by Gainsborough were Anglo-German co-productions. Philip Kemp likens Balcon's use of the German industry to a kind of "finishing school" where he could send both a promising younger generation for experience as well as his "seasoned professionals ready for their ultimate step up such as Alfred Hitchcock."⁷⁸ Some of the more well-known Anglo-German co-productions of the mid-1920s are those involving Alfred Hitchcock, who was sent by Gainsborough to Emelka Studios (near Munich) to make *The Pleasure Garden* and *Mountain Eagle* in 1926. (Although as Philip Kemp notes, the Emelka Studios were a less imposing rival studio (to UFA).)⁷⁹

This two-way association continued into Balcon's years at Gaumont British and only officially terminated with the Nazi's attainment of power. From his early years at Gainsborough to those of Gaumont British, and even later during his reign at Ealing studios (that most "English" of studios in the 1940s and 1950s), he surrounded himself with a broad range of foreign-born collaborators, enough to rival Alexander Korda's.⁸⁰ One of his Russian-born colleagues, Monja Danischewsky, would later refer to Balcon's international community:

While Balcon's film units roamed over the world, film actors, writers, technicians, came from the world over to work with him in England. There was such an influx from Central Europe that at Shepherd's Bush the corridor of offices containing Balcon's became known as the Polish Corridor. (With the Balcons at the end!)⁸¹

But to return to the late 1920s, Lawrence Napper's case study of *The Ghost Train* (1927) has shown that with the timing of the 1927 Films Act, a distinctive shift took place between British filmmakers travelling to Germany's higher-end (and better-equipped) studios to film their co-productions and enticing German industry filmmakers to Britain, where a "rebirth" of industry was

⁷⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁸¹ Monja Danischewsky, ed., *Michael Balcon's 25 Years in Films* (London: World Film Publications, 1947), 13.

taking place.⁸² By 1927, the end of inflation started strengthening German currency which lessened the economic incentives for filming in Germany. And the timing with this dissolving incentive and the quota requirement of British registration spurred a rapid shift in the transnational traffic broadly across the British industry.⁸³

Another shift occurred with the implementation of sound a few years later. These attempts at British-European co-productions morphed into multilingual productions and remakes as strategies to adjust to the expenses of sound production. In the early 1930s, language specific markets became a problem with these developing international co-productions, so they attempted to make multiple language versions (MLVs)—producing different language versions of the same film. Usually these films were shot simultaneously in different languages, with the same director for those shot in two or three languages only, or with a director for each version in the productions for a larger number of language versions (up to fourteen), as seen with Paramount. Another type of MLV was one shot with a short time gap between the versions. As Ginette Vincendeau's now classic article about MLVs explains, unlike remakes that make use of an audience's prior knowledge of a film to help sell the new version, the type of MLV made after a short time gap was an audience's first exposure to the story; in most cases the audience would have no knowledge of the other language version(s)—especially if the national character of the film might be questioned.⁸⁴ The third (and less common) type of MLV was the polyglot film, in which each actor speaks his or her own language.

These new methods and approaches somewhat revitalized the "Film Europe" idea of a few years prior, especially with the deal established between Gaumont British and UFA in 1932.⁸⁵ British International Pictures (BIP), John Maxwell's company that was also accustomed to

⁸² Lawrence Napper, "Geza von Bolvary, Arnold Ridley and 'Film Europe,'" in *Destination London: German-Speaking Emigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950*, ed. Tim Bergfelder and Christian Cargnelli (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 36.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸⁴ Ginette Vincendeau, "Hollywood Babel: The Coming of Sound and the Multiple-Language Version," in *"Film Europe" and "Film America": Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange, 1920-1939*, ed. Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 210.

⁸⁵ Higson, "'A Film League of Nations,'" 72.

employing foreign directors and stars, became the most prolific producer of multilinguals in Britain.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, at Gainsborough, Michael Balcon did not prefer this production method; he later credited Isidore Ostrer for initiating the program of MLVs at Gaumont British with the UFA studio in 1932.⁸⁷ Gaumont British reorganized and took over full control of Gainsborough Studios at Islington in 1931. With Balcon's previous experience with German and Austrian co-productions a few years prior, and then the unexpected box-office successes with the British MLV *Sunshine Susie* (1931) and the English language version of UFA's musical *The Congress Dances* (*Der Kongress tanzt*, 1931), a deal was made that reinvigorated Anglo-German co-production arrangements with a succession of MLV films to be made by Erich Pommer at UFA, including *Happy Ever After* (1932), *FP1* (1933), *The Only Girl* (1933) and *Early To Bed* (1933).⁸⁸ However, none of these were registered as British, and in Rachael Low's opinion: "nor can they realistically be regarded as products of the British film industry."⁸⁹

Many of these multiple language versions and remakes, like the co-productions filmed in Germany a few years before, were unable to be registered as British and thus were less attractive to exhibitors (for quota purposes).⁹⁰ After 1927, any British films shot at UFA's studios in Germany were no longer valid for quota distribution. In addition to the limits of their practical usage in conjunction with quota legislations, Ginette Vincendeau asserts that criticisms of MLVs "went hand in hand with a phobia of the cinema in its industrial as opposed to its artistic dimension."⁹¹ Some filmmakers saw this early 1930s production as indicative of the commercialism within the industry, similar to factory-style production that ignored the artistic differences that different languages and cultures could bring to a film. Ultimately, MLV filmmaking was a brief experiment that had proven a failure by 1933. Subsequent years would continue to see remakes of foreign language productions (with larger time gaps between versions, and

⁸⁶ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:94.

⁸⁷ Michael Balcon said this in an interview with Rachael Low in 1973, referenced in *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Higson, "'A Film League of Nations,'" 72.

⁸⁹ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:94.

⁹⁰ See Higson, "'A Film League of Nations,'" 73, for a list of various examples of non-British-registered films.

⁹¹ Vincendeau, "Hollywood Babel," 217.

possibly more audience awareness of previous foreign versions) to varying degrees of success. For example, the later Gaumont British remake of the UFA film *Viktor und Viktoria* (1933), GB's *First A Girl* (1935) was more prominently in the control of GB and resulted in a much clearer distinction made between it as a British film in contrast to the original German version.⁹²

Again, timing seems quite significant within the shifts and changes that occurred around 1933. At Gaumont British, the company's desire for the American market (from Michael Balcon as Head of Production to the Ostrer brothers as president and director of the corporation), and the company's increased control over production after 1932 led to more lavish productions with continental workers in increasingly vital roles. Co-production was no longer necessary as a strategy with so many high-ranking colleagues from major German studios now working at Gaumont British and other British companies. However, as Andrew Higson comments, "the European and the American always went in tandem."⁹³ He is referring to their interexchange policy of Hollywood stars and actors in conjunction with the use of both American and European personnel (often in influential artistic roles and head positions). As a result, the mid-1930s booming British production saw many cosmopolitan-esque productions designed for pursuing international markets. Higson describes it as a "hybrid internationalism" constructed from the Germans' imagination, the Americans' showmanship, and the narrative skills of the British.⁹⁴

By 1933, the failed attempt and phasing out of multilingual productions coincided with an increased influx of émigrés streaming from the German film industry into London (with some continuing on to the beacon of Hollywood). With the accession of Adolf Hitler and Nazism to power in Germany, many German industry personnel (including a mix of many European nationalities) were pushed out and exiled from their homeland.

⁹² Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:94; Higson, "A Film League of Nations," 73.

⁹³ Higson, "A Film League of Nations," 76.

⁹⁴ Higson is pulling these three aspects from a contemporary reference in *Kinematograph Weekly*, November 24, 1932, in *ibid.*, 77.

Émigrés & Exile filmmakers

Historical canon of British cinema appears to have silenced much of émigrés' and exiles' contributions during the 1930s, but recent scholarship led by Kevin Gough-Yates and Tim Bergfelder revisits their legacy not as "economic migrants seeking employment, but experienced filmmakers who helped develop a nascent industry."⁹⁵ While many worked on the production of "international films" with larger companies such as Gaumont British and British International Pictures, American and European émigrés worked throughout the industry at all levels of production, including low-budget and quota productions intended for the domestic British market. The transnational network of international production in previous years was already in place when the increase of émigrés stimulated in 1933, specifically those exiled from Germany, further supplemented the industry. By the late 1930s and 1940s, the number of émigrés in the British film industry had risen to around 400, a substantial amount in view of the size of the British film industry.⁹⁶ Even so, it is important to consider that not all of them were able to achieve stable positions within the British system; often as not, many did not achieve the more influential positions such as those enjoyed by individuals such as art director Alfred Junge or the more visible émigré actors like Conrad Veidt and Elizabeth Bergner.⁹⁷

With a specific look at the historical and economic conditions of their movement to Britain, Bergfelder has argued elsewhere that the British film industry's employment of Germans and Europeans during these years was "less about their stylistic preoccupations than with their technological expertise, which made them attractive to British producers."⁹⁸ Even so, it was evident among their colleagues and coworkers in the industry that they contributed much more

⁹⁵ Gough-Yates, "Exiles and British Cinema," 125.

⁹⁶ Tim Bergfelder, "Introduction: German-Speaking Emigres and British Cinema, 1925-1950: Cultural Exchange, Exile and the Boundaries of National Cinema," in *Destination London: German-Speaking Emigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950*, ed. Tim Bergfelder and Christian Cargnelli (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 4.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4. For more on the inability of exiles and émigrés to integrate or find employment, see also Laurie Ede's essay on Erno Metzner or Bridget Mayr's study of Carl Mayer in this book.

⁹⁸ Bergfelder, "Surface and Distraction," 32; Bergfelder refers to a central argument he posed in Tim Bergfelder, "The Production Designer and the Gesamtkunstwerk: German Film Technicians in the British Film Industry of the 1930s," in *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, ed. Andrew Higson, Rethinking British Cinema (London: Cassell, 1996).

than just technical expertise. Some of the departments more prolific with émigrés were art direction and cinematography, but recent studies are beginning to uncover other areas where they made significant contributions.

For instance, Tim Bergfelder (proliferate author of various writings about émigrés in the British film industry) has explored the interaction between the British and European industries and its impact on films during the late 1920s and 1930s. More specifically he looks at the production areas of art direction and cinematography. He argues that art direction especially reflects this ‘German’ influence, given that art directors attained a key position in the production process and their influence on technical decisions was substantial.⁹⁹ For example, 1920s European stage design and UFA’s visual design was already admired by British designers. Arriving in Britain in the late 1920s with a background in German theater and film, Alfred Junge and Oscar Werndorff highly influenced the introduction of new design concepts and techniques in British cinema.¹⁰⁰ Alfred Junge first worked as an art director in Britain as a member of a German production team (headed by director E.A. Dupont) with British International Pictures’ Anglo-German co-productions intended to introduce ‘continental techniques’ with films like *Moulin Rouge* (1928) and *Piccadilly* (1929).¹⁰¹ But from 1932 to 1937, Alfred Junge worked as supervising art director at Gaumont British to a variety of genres, from historical films, comedies, and musicals to dramas and Hitchcock thrillers like *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934). Sarah Street credits his efforts as largely responsible for British film advancements during this decade, especially those intended for the international market.¹⁰²

Junge, alongside the creative contributions of other notable designers (many of whom were émigrés, including Andrei Andreiev, Vincent Korda, Ernö Metzner and Oscar Werndorff), applied many German styles and techniques in set design to British cinema. Among other

⁹⁹ Bergfelder, “Surface and Distraction,” 34.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰¹ Sarah Street, “Extending Frames and Exploring Spaces: Alfred Junge, Set Design and Genre in British Cinema,” in *Destination London: German-Speaking Emigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950*, ed. Tim Bergfelder and Christian Cargnelli (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 100–101.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 101.

techniques, these “German” art directors’ main objective was “to convey both atmosphere and meaning through an overriding design concept, encompassing every visual aspect.”¹⁰³ Bergfelder has claimed that these artists’ concept of “total design” and their role in preplanning the “look” of a film with this aim in mind, led to increased creative influence and a kind of reorganization of *mise en scène* within British filmmaking.¹⁰⁴

Similar developments also took place in cinematography. At one point in 1935, as Kevin Gough-Yates has indicated with the “Technical Section” of *Spotlight* for Winter 1935, every major British production company (aside from Herbert Wilcox’s British & Dominions) had at least one European cinematographer under contract.¹⁰⁵ However, as Bergfelder has been sure to remind us, the translation of German photography was not pure, not uncompromised, due to the British industry’s own constraints and the introduction of sound.¹⁰⁶ Even so, cinematographers were able to influence the story-telling with focus on the visual, which worked well in tandem with the “total design” concept.

Recent scholarship has started to explore more deeply how Europeans’ efforts and input influenced British films. Tim Bergfelder has studied Gainsborough’s Ruritania operettas and their white-collar-worker musicals (starring Jessie Matthews), and he uncovered a “continuity in studio style and a persistence of ‘gender’ and ‘cultural hybridity’ as thematic and production concerns at

¹⁰³ Bergfelder, “Surface and Distraction,” 33. Junge led the art department at Gaumont British’s Lime Grove at Shepherds Bush studios from 192-1937, and Werndorff headed their studios at Islington. Hungarian Vincent Korda, another influential art director, headed the art departments at Elstree and Denham studios. Metzner and Andreiev had a temporary stay in Britain, but according to Bergfelder, their influence was felt none the less.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 33–36; for more specifics concerning Alfred Junge’s stylistic contributions such as his incorporation of contemporary architectural/design movements like Art Deco in his Gaumont British films, see Street, “Extending Frames and Exploring Spaces”; for more about how émigré activity in the industry should be understood within the broader cultural exchange between Britain and Germany and against the modernist internationalism as an idealist aspiration, see Amy Sargeant, “‘German, or Still More Horrible Thought, Russian - at Any Rate, It Is Un-English!’ A Wide Shot of Exile, Emigre and Itinerant Activity in the British Film Industry in the 1930s,” in *Destination London: German-Speaking Emigrés and British Cinema, 1925-1950*, ed. Tim Bergfelder and Christian Cargnelli (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 89–99.

¹⁰⁵ Gough-Yates, “Exiles and British Cinema,” 127.

¹⁰⁶ Bergfelder, “Surface and Distraction,” 34.

Gainsborough.”¹⁰⁷ Bergfelder contends that “the ‘original’ German or European sources did not conform to a fixed or ‘pure’ national identity, but fed upon a variety of different stylistic and generic influences as well as international market considerations. Drawing on these transnational interactions and on contemporary discourses,” he investigates the narrative and visual styles within these two genre cycles.¹⁰⁸

However, Bergfelder has observed that with subsequent Gainsborough films, the continental “origins” became increasingly camouflaged—there were further shifts to help them relate to British audiences. They transported the German fascination with modernity into a “distinctly British context.”¹⁰⁹ Even so, Bergfelder claims that in translating German to British, rather than providing “a more pronounced national identity,” the translation process accentuated the genre’s “ambivalent social dimension further.” The German film versions of these stories reflected the state of flux within various identities, and this fluidity could pose a challenge when reconfigured into the context of the rigid British class system. The British middle class did not have a tradition of social mobility, and neither does there seem to be an equivalent in British film criticism to assign this “progressive potential” to it. With these observations, Bergfelder questions as an example Jeffrey Richards’ evaluation of Matthews’s and Gracie Fields’s characteristics representing working and middle class “static binary opposition.” Richards describes Jessie Matthews’ gain in popularity from her embodiment of an “individualist middle-class success ethic,” and Gracie’s popularity rested on “being the people’s heroine with her roots in the community.”¹¹⁰ Ultimately, Bergfelder views the “cultural hybridity” of these films as an element that detracts from the British national character of GB’s British films.

Korda – Extreme Filmmaking

If Gaumont British (and Michael Balcon as production head) serves as a good example of a major British combine utilizing internationalist policies, so too does UA’s independent British

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁰ Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 224; referenced alongside Bergfelder’s main point here in Bergfelder, “Surface and Distraction,” 43.

producer and Hungarian-born Alexander Korda. Prior to his arrival in England in 1931, Korda made films in Hungary, Austria, Germany, Hollywood, and France; he brought what he learned with him to Britain, and relished the greater control and lesser artistic limitations he was able to attain as a producer in Britain in contrast to his experiences in the Hollywood studio system.

Alexander Korda's approach to "international films" exemplifies the extremity of internationalism in British production as well as its criticisms. It is not by chance that Korda's films became targets of critics worried about foreign influence within British cinema. Just as his image became aggrandized like his style of filmmaking, he also represented the "problem" of internationalized British filmmaking.

The Private Life of Henry VIII grabbed the world's attention in 1933: winning Academy Awards (Best Actor for Charles Laughton), successfully penetrating the U.S. market, and making unprecedented profits worldwide.¹¹¹ Korda and his fledgling company, London Films Productions, came to represent for many the possibilities of the British film industry. Many credit his film of *Henry VIII* as the stimulation the industry needed to promote financial investments in the British industry, and some have blamed it (and his epic and expansive style to filmmaking) on the "bust" in the industry five years later.¹¹² Other contemporaries criticized this "best known" of British films as essentially non-British, as it was produced by three Hungarians (Korda, as producer and director, his brother Vincent as set designer, and playwright Ljajos Biró, as co-author of the

¹¹¹ According to a box-office report in the Prudential archive, the total world receipts up to September 1938 were cited as £214,360. Report referenced in Drazin, *Korda*, 105.

¹¹² This misguided claim is redressed by Rachael Low, Margaret Dickinson, and Sarah Street. Low elaborates on the role of Max Schach and the Aldgate Trustees in the downfall effect upon the industry in 1937. See Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:199–208; Dickinson and Street explain the unstable method of film finance that arose during the boom "30s period; the Bank of England's 1937 inquiry into British production financing and the plight of Korda's LFP; and the Capitol Case of 1939 which "exploded the whole precarious system," with Westminster Bank taking court actions against fifteen insurance companies guaranteeing bank loans to Max Schach's Capitol group of production companies. Dickinson and Street, *Cinema and State*, 78–88.

script), as well as a Frenchman (cinematographer Georges Périnal) and an American (editor Harold Young).¹¹³

Following *Henry VIII's* success in 1933, Korda was able to make a series of films with the aim of targeting the world market (with varied degrees of critical and commercial success). Thus the British press frequently called upon him to outline his “recipe” for a successful international film. In an early interview describing the ingredients for an “international” film, Korda clarifies his definition:

[P]erhaps the phrase ‘international film’ is a little ambiguous. I do not mean that a film must try to suit the psychology and manners of every country in which it is going to be shown. On the contrary, to be really international a film must first of all be truly and intensely national. It must be true to the matter in it.¹¹⁴

Greg Walker interprets Korda’s explanation that to become international, the “national” film “must convey a cultural identity that is both internally consistent and recognizably authentic.”¹¹⁵ And Korda biographer Karol Kulik perceptively observes that Korda’s “recipe” for international achievement relied especially on axioms and cliché: “The international film was to be one which relied on stereotyped situations and characters peculiar to one country, but recognized immediately by audiences of other countries.”¹¹⁶ And consequently, in Korda’s own words, “An outsider often makes the best job of a national film. He is not cumbered with excessively detailed knowledge and associations. He gets a fresh slant on things.”¹¹⁷ With this particular approach, Korda was right—it would be easier for an outsider to simplify the complexities of another’s national identity and culture into what might appear to be the more obvious traits and signifiers. Unfortunately, this means any particular nuances or in-depth exploration of national culture would likely be missed or misunderstood.

¹¹³ Various discussions of this particular criticism can be found in Walker, “The Roots of Alexander Korda,” 5; Kulik, *Alexander Korda*, 96; Geoffrey Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 1993), 193; Drazin, *Korda*, 104.

¹¹⁴ Stephen Watts, “Alexander Korda and the International Film,” *Cinema Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1933): 13. Interview is also referenced in Walker, “The Roots of Alexander Korda,” 21; Kulik, *Alexander Korda*, 97.

¹¹⁵ Walker, “The Roots of Alexander Korda,” 21.

¹¹⁶ Kulik, *Alexander Korda*, 97.

¹¹⁷ Watts, “Alexander Korda and the International Film,” 14-15.

Greg Walker has explored Korda's foreignness as part of his perpetrated myth (even as he downplayed (or concealed) his Jewishness) as the outsider better able to envision national subject matter and incorporate it into an international film. For Walker, Korda's obfuscation of his Jewish origins is significant given his notions of nationality, cultural identity and belonging played a key role in his filmmaking theories—for "roots" were "at the heart of his published thoughts on the much-vaunted idea of the international film."¹¹⁸ He suggests that Korda's sense of the international film reflects the tensions in his own personal conflicts and past experiences. His "Jewish literary and cultural traditions of his native Hungary" and feeling of responsibility for family (and friends) rooted him in a more European literary/high culture that a translation to film could help it move forward into modernity and a world market.¹¹⁹

Just as other British producers balanced making British films with their international ambitions, Korda simultaneously had to keep an eye to the possibility of greater financial returns available in the American market that would enable continued filmmaking with his expensive international approach. In a 1938 interview, Korda submitted that the reason a few of his international films had not done as well as his earlier films in America was because of the difficulty to convey a proper sense of the English spirit without digging to its roots.

Roots strike deep into history and may be very local things. In America, where roots are near to the surface, they are not easily interested in what lies deep down in other countries, and unless we can interest America there may be no great market for our films... I think we are compelled, as far as world markets are concerned, to stick to stories based in broad issues of the national life... All that we can say, based on screen experience, is that stories that dig deep into national roots start with a handicap.¹²⁰

Thus, as this interview implies, these international films were compromised by their fundamental nature from being "truly" British. For Greg Walker, in a parallel to Korda's own divided cultural identity and Jewish heritage, Korda's need to appeal to "the shallow-rooted cinema-goers in the West" (i.e. American market) and his unwillingness to throw aside "the high-cultural baggage that

¹¹⁸ Walker, "The Roots of Alexander Korda," 20.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹²⁰ G.A. Atkinson, "That Amazing Mr. Korda," *Answers*, May 14, 1938, p. 12, quoted in *ibid.*, 23.

rooted it firmly in the East” (i.e. European heritage and identity), fatally compromised the idea of an international British film that was also a truly national British film. Walker asserts that this divided nature would keep it “essentially a myth,” then and now.¹²¹

Yet just prior to this assertion, Walker highlights the location of England as a meeting point between the two: European high culture and American markets/capitalism. In this same way, a British film industry would serve as a transitional entity not just in its geographical location (especially during such a period of political migrations and transnational economics), but also perhaps as a location in national culture. I can see how one might view this contradiction as a hindrance to the notion of a national cinema as well. However, I would suggest that Korda’s very understanding of his contemporary situation enabled him to walk the borders between nations with a projection, albeit usually an accepted stereotyped image, of Britishness that not only helped British filmmakers to aspire to a global market, but has since been an approach utilized by filmmakers when dealing specifically with the international market. International films are but one category of British production during this period, but they, too, played their part in creating an image of a functioning and somewhat profitable native industry.

By 1936, Korda’s status as a producer of world-class films in Britain had reached previously-unheard of levels. (More about Korda’s intentions, tempered successes, and London Films’ international distribution is explored in detail in chapter four.) Alexander Korda serves as an example of both the epic style of British moviemaking and British industry achievements, simultaneously emphasizing the internationality or transatlantic components of filmmaking—the funding, the filmmaking, and as the following chapters will show, the distribution and exhibition of it. Yet the internationality of Michael Balcon’s “Polish corridor” at Gaumont British and the dispersed Europeans and Americans throughout the industry suggests that maybe what helped differentiate British film from American, even as both served as English-speaking industries utilizing international crews and cast, was derived from the transnational and transatlantic processes at work within Britain itself.

¹²¹ Ibid., 25.

Complications with “International” Films in a “National” Industry

What is an English film? There are times when one cannot help brooding with acute distress on the cheap silly international pictures exported under that label... England, of course, has always been the home of the exiled; but one may at least express a wish that émigrés would set up trades in which their ignorance of our language and our culture was less of a handicap: it would not grieve me to see Mr. Alexander Korda seated before a cottage loom in an Eastern country, following an older and a better tradition. The Quota Act has played into foreign hands, and as far as I know, there is nothing to prevent an English film unit being completely staffed by technicians of foreign blood. We have saved to the English film industry from American competition only to surrender it to a far more alien control.¹²²

In 1936, Graham Greene, then film critic for the *Spectator*, voiced what has since become a “notorious” and oft-referenced critique against the use of foreign film personnel in the British film industry of the 1930s. Andrew Higson uses Greene’s “extreme anxiety” to signify the strands of concerns of a “cultural invasion” within British film culture.¹²³ Korda biographer Karol Kulik uses Greene’s vitriol to exemplify the “fairly widespread feeling among many” in the British industry concerning this alien invasion; Kulik emphasizes the resistance that Alexander Korda faced while making his patriotic British films. Even so, Kulik acknowledges that Korda was more at ease working with foreigners as well as utilizing the established talents of his foreign colleagues to make his elaborate pictures more efficiently.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, Kevin Gough-Yates opens his overview of “Exiles and British Cinema” with what he referred to as Greene’s anti-Semitic and “gross misrepresentation” of the quota as exemplary of the debate concerning not just employment, but the traditional “concept of national identity as expressed through the cinema.”¹²⁵

And yes, Graham Green did misrepresent the 1927 Films Act in his diatribe. As previously discussed, the quota legislation had statutes in place to limit foreign staffing with a 75% minimum of labor costs going to British subjects (among its other requirements). However,

¹²² Graham Greene, *Spectator*, June 5, 1936, quoted in Andrew Higson, “The Instability of the National,” in *British Cinema, Past and Present*, ed. Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (London: Routledge, 2000), 43. Greene’s film review is frequently referenced, usually to represent the more extreme views and anxieties concerning the “cultural invasion” occurring in the 1930s British film industry.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹²⁴ Kulik, *Alexander Korda*, 143.

¹²⁵ Gough-Yates, “Exiles and British Cinema,” 125.

there are traces of the loopholes within the Films Act that perhaps he was sniffing out and exaggerating for his own purposes. Another glimpse at the Parliamentary debates of the Films Bill in 1927 reflects early concerns about allowing foreign employees to make films. While they perhaps had primarily American filmmakers in mind, they do not specify this distinction.

Take, for example, the responses to a suggested amendment to the Bill that would have required a producer to become a British subject within five years, and which raised a debate over the role of the position and its importance (or not) in ensuring a film's British "atmosphere". Lord Askwith countered the notion, arguing that British films:

Would do much better having an opportunity of getting from foreign countries suggestions and ideas which would enlarge their minds and enable them to come forward with finer films than they are even now producing. I think that with a mainly British cast, with a British scenario, photographed in a British studio, and with British environment, it is impossible to suppose that you cannot gain the effect of British atmosphere in the films produced... I have never heard that it has been to the advantage of the country to prevent art being international. The best of these producers are like artists in many senses. They come here and give us the value of their artistic achievements, and if, in this country we had had protection against the finest artists of the world coming here to give us some instruction it might have been a fatal thing for the development of art in this country. I feel very strongly that it is one of the best points about this particular clause that the hands are left free, and that the best producers in the whole world will be able to come to this country without undue restriction.¹²⁶

Viscount Peel agreed with Lord Askwith and asked if it was "essential" that the producer be a British subject. He added that while the producer is the one responsible for the organization and direction of the film's production, he thought there were other considerations that validated leaving the matter open. Among these, he suggested there might be a "particular kind of technical expert" needed for a certain production who happens to be foreign. Or there might not be enough "skilled British producers to go round." Salaries cannot compete with those in Hollywood, and he felt that they would be unable to "always keep our good producers in this country." Thus, he advocated allowing "some of these foreign experts to be employed here, having regard to all the

¹²⁶ *Cinematograph Films Bill*, HL Deb (5th Series), December 5, 1927, vol. 69, c490, accessed January 20, 2016, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1927/dec/05/cinematograph-films-bill#S5LV0069P0_19271205_HOL_308.

securities taken in the Bill to see that these films are British films.”¹²⁷ It would be these kinds of perspectives, at least within the ruling elites’ governmental capacity, that enabled a more open definition of what constituted a British film.

Ironically, while these kinds of cultural concerns pervaded the Parliamentary debates during the development of the Cinematograph Films Bill in 1927, as previously mentioned at the start of this chapter, the government was willing to set aside their cultural concerns within the practical application of governmental law. Furthermore, the priority of building up a national film industry (and especially increasing funding and investing opportunities for the production side) remained more important than ensuring a seemingly homogenous national film culture. Finally, within the context of Britain’s Free Trade policy as well as government involvement in industry, they did not want to be obliged to provide state funding; thus outside financing and to a limited degree employment could be utilized to enable the industry’s growth. Ultimately, government officials were willing to look aside from transatlantic and transnational involvement and they avoided official designation of quality and cultural factors within films. Thus, opportunities were available throughout the industry for émigrés to work and train the next generation of British filmmakers, as well as place their own stamp (to varying degrees) upon the films themselves.

Some scholars suggest that the deliberate adoption of internationalist policies, i.e. looking to Europe for “artistic inspiration and technological innovation and training” and to America for “economic success and potential distribution markets,” was pivotal to the British film industry’s resurgence during the 1930s. As Bergfelder describes it, this looking elsewhere resulted in “a busy transnational traffic of production strategies, generic formulae and personnel.”¹²⁸ At the same time, protection measures and national quotas were emerging across Europe, and various unions and others hoped to block the employment of foreigners in British studios. The mixture of

¹²⁷ Ibid., c491.

¹²⁸ Bergfelder, “Introduction,” 3; Other scholars to refer to the importance of internationalist policies of the 1930s include Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*; Richards, *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema 1929-1939*; Higson and Maltby, *Film Europe “and” Film America*; and H. Mark Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood “British” Film 1939-1945* (Manchester University Press, 1999).

these forces upon the individuals navigating their work within the British film industry resulted in a variety of experiences and outcomes which was reflected in the films during these years.

Additionally, Tim Bergfelder reminds us that even with the dramatic increase of émigrés after 1933, it does not necessarily follow that their influence in the industry increased accordingly. The notion of “influence” is complex, whether referring to the scope of popularity with audiences, or at the level of production with various studio methods and technical innovations. It could apply to “foreign” training of the next generation of British technicians, or concern their impact on a film’s visual style or narrative content.¹²⁹ And one must not forget the restrictions implemented within studio hierarchies and the different film industry situations of the host country, in this case—Britain.

The international component to British filmmaking needs to be acknowledged within any attempt to define a British film, as well as its national cinema. But I would argue that a transatlantic and transnational process in the production (and distribution and exhibition) of these films does *not* necessarily negate their Britishness. Instead, given more time and space for further study, one might approach the international influences of this varied film personnel like intercultural transfer, or a cultural exchange, in which the end (host) location shapes the ideas to *fit* into the production system they have in place, including the laws framing said industry, and audience expectations and tastes taken into consideration (especially of the primary target market). Bergfelder hints at this in his own study of GB’s musicals of the mid-1930s, and he also credits Christine Gledhill’s *Reframing British Cinema* with a similar approach.¹³⁰ Even so, he criticizes the limitations of it within her final product. He, like many other historians, perceive the transnational aspects of filmmaking (and the seemingly hybrid nature of the resulting output) as a diminution of a national character’s representation in film. Given the spread of foreign technicians and talent in both the “quality” and “quota” productions, British filmmaking en totale could be arguably “impure” in its establishment of a British national industry. Instead, I propose the

¹²⁹ Bergfelder, “Introduction,” 8.

¹³⁰ Christine Gledhill, *Reframing British Cinema, 1918-1928: Between Restraint and Passion* (London: BFI Pub., 2003).

transatlantic and transnational processes significantly contributed to both the growth of the industry and its global recognition during these years, and that this does not necessarily indicate an industry or its product less “British,” especially given the historical heritage of interactions with Europe and America. But a more detailed/in depth exploration of the application of an intercultural transfer approach is an area for future study. In the meantime, this study remains focused upon the transatlantic processes of distribution and exhibition, and will now turn to the third major component contributing to understanding what makes a British film.

Britishness and Film

English films, above all, lack nationalism. There are no characteristics to be found in their products that are typical of Great Britain and that would make a spectator immediately recognize the picture as coming from England.¹³¹

In the years leading up to *Cavalcade* (1933), Hollywood's “English Gentleman” Clive Brook vociferously [and unabashedly] declared his opinions concerning the British film industry to the press, with pointed comments such as this one in 1929. His negative attitude towards the British industry in the press for the next few years ranged from concern about nationalist content to a more practical awareness of how reduced technical capabilities could ultimately shape an actor's reputation and a star's enduring image. He only truly began to alter his attitude and consider the opportunities of Britain's industry in the years following the culmination of his Hollywood success when *Cavalcade* (1933) took the world by storm (as well as the reported international success later that year with Korda's British film *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933)). Apparently homesickness and the growth and popularity of British filmmaking led to Brook's eventual change of heart and return to work in London in 1935.

Another method of determining the Britishness of a film is in the inherent composition of it as a *cultural* commodity. No discussion about a British classification of film should neglect the means by which a British national character can be displayed within or represented by the films' content. The aim of this chapter has been to attempt to define the British national character of

¹³¹ “Chatterton and Brook,” *New York Times*, September 29, 1929, X6.

Britain's films in the 1930s. The loopholes and limitations within official designations and the problematic elements of transatlantic and transnational aspects of production only marginally address the seemingly more apparent signifier of nationality—its representation in the films. There is little room here to do justice to the role that this component plays within defining what makes a film British, so the following is merely a sketch of common areas of debate and scholarship concerning British films' cultural task of representing the nation.

Rarely has anyone debated whether Hollywood-made, British-topical films that surged during the mid-1930s (and thereafter) were genuinely British films.¹³² Their geographical location of filming, the more extravagant budgets and presumably exceptional quality seems to negate any question of Britishness, but this can also be grounded upon audiences' accepted assumption that Hollywood interpretations were non-British but also the acknowledged standard. Foreign involvement in Hollywood production does not appear to raise debate over the concept of an American national cinema. Historians generally accept that the universality of Hollywood films and their establishment of international standards (such as the classical narrative Hollywood style) in conjunction with worldwide distribution dominance indicate that Hollywood is more of an international cinema (and not a national cinema). As elsewhere, audiences in Britain were accustomed to certain levels of production values and the pleasures derived from these Hollywood international standards. Thus, British audience expectations of films (based on these standards) affected the different economic production strategies British producers employed to compete against or cooperate with Hollywood in their domestic market.

The critical antipathy to international films (specifically those with international stories and settings and/or the influence of foreign personnel), correlates with their calls for a national, indigenous product and an authentic representation of Britishness onscreen. In the case of the British film industry, the intelligentsia and ruling elites felt that British films should represent some

¹³² Debates only arise concerning Hollywood productions taking place within Britain, such as during the late 1930s or the more transatlantic co-productions such as those in recent years.

sense of British nationality in its make-up, whether it consisted of an onscreen projection of Britishness (or being a British people).

Contemporary expectations of Britishness and subsequent historical comment thereafter has established a negative perception that little to no representation of Britishness was portrayed in most 1930s films. Critical opinion during the 1930s was in unequivocal agreement that there was “almost total absence of the reality of contemporary British life from the mainstream British cinema.”¹³³ Jeffrey Richards’ overview of critical commentary likens the idea of rectifying this situation to a “veritable crusade” among cinema’s intelligentsia (among which included the group of documentarists such as John Grierson, “father figure of the British documentary movement”).¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the calls for a “truly British cinema” ranged across the critical spectrum, from the left-wing to the right-wing, including highbrow and lowbrow alike. On the left, critics wanted more depictions of the ordinary lives of ordinary British people, or the realism of a working people. Observer’s film critic C.A. Lejeune frequently returned to the theme, and in 1931 (on the cusp of a burgeoning industry) she wrote:

We want pictures of real life, of plain facts, of industries and expeditions as adventurous as the wildest tales of the woolly West. We want our own country put on the map, our cities, our pasturage, our machinery, our railways, our fisheries, our workers, our traditions, gnarled and rooted in the soil as grand old forest trees...¹³⁵

Jeffrey Richards draws attention to the difference in emphasis between two primary types of these calls for more British films. Those on the left-wing wanted films about contemporary social problems and working class lives. However, another group was interested in propaganda for British institutions and traditions, such as the celebration of monarchy and Empire.¹³⁶ Richards lists out examples of national institutions and virtues on either end of the spectrum, but also adds his own personal list. Many of these entities represent what many consider distinct aspects of British culture, values, and national symbolism, from notable literature like Shakespeare and

¹³³ Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 245.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ *The Observer*, March 27, 1931, quoted in *ibid.*, 246.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 248.

Dickens, to recognizable institutions like Parliament, Oxford, and the British Navy, as well as hobbies such as gardening and football and landmarks in London. However, Richards emphasizes that “the call for a sympathetic and patriotic depiction of British institutions and British character was resoundingly endorsed by the bulk of both the popular press and the popular film press, which was right-wing and chauvinistic, and wanted British films to be similarly orientated.”¹³⁷

Whether due to foreign involvement or targeting an international market, some film historians (and stemming back to contemporary critics) examine the resulting product as less “British” and more “international.” Richards (among others) claims that a truly national cinema did not emerge until the Second World War, and this has become a significant part of British film historical canon. Of the multiple reasons he presents (including the restrictions of the censorship system and the ease of formulaic production with musicals, detective stories, and historical epics (and comedies)), he stresses the role of the producer and the impact of key figures’ internationalist policies.¹³⁸ As previously discussed, for a number of film historians these international films at the least have diminished their inherent Britishness.

Various methods might be applied to investigate Britishness within the British film industry of the 1930s. Many of these approaches are linked to the way a British national character can be represented with this cultural commodity. Shared aspects of British films across a spectrum might be analyzed, such as common style or world-view portrayed. Common themes and motifs might be utilized in narratives, or perhaps the narratives dramatize shared fantasies, hopes, fears, or anxieties of the contemporary British society. Britishness might be represented within the individual films as well, or perhaps reflected across film output as a whole. The films could project the national character, or in some way they help construct a sense of a nation. There are numerous possibilities – and as these deal with a sense of Britishness, they are also characteristic to the search for a British National Cinema. A few scholars have attempted to find a

¹³⁷ Ibid., 249.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 250–251.

method, formula, or narrative style that represents some kind of “national approach” to filmmaking. Others have looked at more specific genres or cycles of films to uncover shared traits and representations of a British national character. Generally, scholars have uncovered various ways British films have endeavored to tell stories that encourage audiences to understand them in terms of ideas about the nation and national identity.¹³⁹ Some of these approaches are briefly explored in the following examples and discussion of factors shaping the relationship between representations of British national character and the production circumstances of the period.

While recent scholarship on the Britishness question has helped us to understand the fluid nature of being British throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, in the 1930s’ reality, it appeared to be a more static identity and was usually referenced as such. At that time, national and cultural identity was assumed simply to exist; it was not understood (as it is today) as essentially a social construct, an “imagined community.” There were accepted overarching values, political institutions, cultural traditions, leisure and hobbies, and more that seemed to provide a blanket definition of Britishness.

Many of the accepted traits of national character at this time appeared more inherently English than British, and this reflects a frequent debate of scholarship of Englishness versus Britishness. The exclusion of other nationals seems to be presumed in this definition, but was it truly? And was it presented that same way or reflected that way in the British industry’s product? How do those films of Scottish stories and setting fit into this version of Britishness, if it assumed to be essentially Englishness. This can be an area for further investigation.

For a brief example, the success of Korda’s *Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) triggered a cycle of historical films (on both sides of the Atlantic). National historical subjects, especially a biopic of a well-known monarch, would seem an easy way to exploit Britishness to film’s advantage. In Paul Ward’s study of Britishness from 1870 to 2000, he claims that until the 1950s, the monarchy and royal family has been seen as central to national identity in terms of its imperial

¹³⁹ John Hill, “British Cinema as National Cinema: Production, Audience and Representation,” in *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 18.

role, the sense of imperial mission, and as a common and stable thread to a nationality constructed from multiple nationalities. The centrality of the royal family in particular

suggests that the British monarchy provided a way in which diversity and unity could be celebrated, not as something imposed from above, but through the participation of thousands, indeed millions, of people. The monarchy validated different social and national identities, while stressing unity within the kingdom.¹⁴⁰

Historical films are a common avenue for the exploration of a film's national representation. It is also a frequent area of study among scholars in this field and particularly with 1930s British film, especially given the context of *Henry VIII's* popularity and designation as a "landmark film in the history of British Cinema."¹⁴¹ Jeffrey Richards emphasizes the dual functionality of Korda's picture—endorsing the system of monarchy yet also mythologizing the King by casting "larger-than-life" stars like Charles Laughton as well as incorporating (paradoxically) "the humanization of the monarch."¹⁴² It is this element that reflects the general "humanization policy" deliberately occurring on the part of the actual British royal family during this time. The role of royal family as a stable thread of British national identity is able to continue identification with British subjects on a personal level, through this personalization of them as people and the concentration of the film (and others following) on their private lives. (And as Richards points out, it caters to everyday people's fascination to know about private lives of the famous.)¹⁴³ Additionally, Korda's particular depiction of the personal and humanity of the King relied upon a more "coarse" representation of Englishness that fit popular tastes of the working classes (making up the majority of British cinema audiences). James Chapman highlights the Englishness of the film as a representation of the "rough rather than the respectable face of

¹⁴⁰ Paul Ward, *Britishness Since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004), 10–11.

¹⁴¹ James Chapman, *Past and Present: National Identity and the British Historical Film* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 13; the film's importance is reflected by the accumulative scholarship over the years examining its production and reception in Britain and the world. See works by Drazin, *Korda*; Kulik, *Alexander Korda*; Landy, *British Genres*; Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*; Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*; Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*.

¹⁴² Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 260.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

popular culture” by exhibiting the “bawdiness and innuendo of the provincial music hall.”¹⁴⁴

Scenes such as Henry belching and gobbling his food at a banquet, and subsequently throwing leftover chicken legs onto the floor for the dogs particularly irked conservative critics of the film.

Upon the monarchy crisis in 1936 (Edward VIII’s abdication to marry American widow Wallis Simpson), the representation of royalty as a family played a large factor in restoring the monarchy as a part of identity. Around this same time, the ban on the cinematic depiction of Queen Victoria was lifted, allowing for Herbert Wilcox to produce two hugely popular films about Victoria’s reign, films which focused especially on the role of monarch in a “national family extending throughout the Empire.”¹⁴⁵ Jeffrey Richards has taken this analysis further, describing these films as “a picture of Victoria as the mythic Great White Mother, the living symbol of the British Empire, divine source from which all the benefits of that Empire are seen to flow.”¹⁴⁶ The cinema perpetuated an image extolled by poets and artists “from Tennyson to Wilde.” Furthermore, as Ward explains further, monarchical celebration becomes a living experience within the nation with the reinforcement of film and radio, as well as participation in parades and pageantry.¹⁴⁷ These particular films seem to incorporate that same purpose.

To briefly return to the now-repetitive theme in this chapter and subsequently this entire study, “international films” seem to be (and have been) one of the biggest points of contention concerning representations of Britishness, given the international influence in production, the expectations of the target market, and the frequent use of international stories (even as some did represent British subject matter, often as not there were more “continental” atmospheres). The problem with focusing on this one type of film production (as many historians have in their analyses, including Jeffrey Richards) is that it limits the scope of the British film industry to a select number of films. International films were more expensive and did not make up the majority portion of the commodity output. Granted, as I have already argued, they were the films to bring

¹⁴⁴ Chapman, *Past and Present*, 33.

¹⁴⁵ Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 22.

¹⁴⁶ Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 264.

¹⁴⁷ Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 18–19.

the industry worldwide recognition, especially as a functioning industry that was able not only to utilize Hollywood and foreign involvement, but managed to compete against the dominant Hollywood through the core of the decade. The British film industry became second to only Hollywood in the production of films and the extent of their distribution and exhibition. But I digress—the remainder product must also be considered within the broader scope of a national cinema, including the lower budget films targeting the domestic market as well as quota production, as Steve Chibnall advocates.

Let us briefly address another economic strategy of production which does lend itself for more indigenous, national character representations.¹⁴⁸ Some British film companies, such as the other major combine British International Pictures and the independent film company Associated Talking Pictures (ATP), attempted to compete with Hollywood in the domestic market alone. John Maxwell, former Scottish solicitor and head of BIP (and its associated Wardour Films distribution and Associated British Cinemas), deliberately chose to turn away from the international market in the early 1930s and focused the company's efforts at home (with the exception of a string of German operettas which could also serve an overseas market in Central Europe, around 1935). His strategy was to produce "first feature" films on a small enough budget to make it feasible to generate profits solely from the British (and in some cases, Empire) market. Rachael Low describes his policy as one of "cut-price window dressing, trying to make cheap films which looked like expensive ones."¹⁴⁹ Even so, BIP managed to maintain a steady supply to its steadily growing cinema circuit. In addition to "heavy dramas in the German manner," BIP produced West End musicals, operettas, stage plays, music hall comedies, and some Alfred Hitchcock pictures in the early 1930s. But a BIP staple would be the "stream of comedies featuring music hall stars and aimed at lower-class audiences."¹⁵⁰ For Maxwell, the purpose of

¹⁴⁸ John Hill points out that this strategy became the mainstay for most of British cinema throughout the century. See Hill, "British Film and the National Interest."

¹⁴⁹ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:116–117.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7:118, 121.

filmmaking was to make a profit, not create intellectual art pieces with social messages for the intelligentsia.

Along these lines, Andrew Higson explains that the possibility of product differentiation within this particular production strategy:

involves producing films with distinctively indigenous attractions and a qualitatively different regime of experiences and pleasures...building different audiences with different tastes, [and] often recruiting them from pre-cinematic cultural forms such as music-hall or middle-class theatre, given the attachment of mainstream audience taste to American films.¹⁵¹

BIP's reliance on working-class music hall comedies alongside more middle-class light, contemporary stage plays provide some of that product differentiation and varied target audiences. Meanwhile, Higson utilizes the example of Basil Dean's ATP and their similar use of this strategy in the extremely popular series of Gracie Fields star vehicles that made her a British favorite throughout the 1930s.¹⁵² Higson's analysis of *Sing As We Go* (1934) highlights the deviation from classical Hollywood style with the films' aspects of a performative genre, the self-conscious attempt to utilize cultural traditions and "reference-points" that were nationally (and regionally with Lancashire) specific, and popular enough to generate sufficient profits from the home market.¹⁵³ (The home-grown nature of the music hall cultural traditions contrasts especially with his comparison to GB's Jessie Matthews musical *Evergreen*, an example of internationalist policy and use of conventional classical narrative style.) Higson correlates these elements into a sense of Britishness: "*Sing As We Go* bids for both cultural respectability and popular acclaim and seeks to do so not only by constructing a sense of both the national and the local, but also by working with a complex mix of dominant, residual, and emergent cultural traditions."¹⁵⁴

Various factors influenced films' depictions and representations of Britishness, some of which I touched upon earlier, concerning quota productions and international films. As other

¹⁵¹ Higson, *Waving the Flag*, 10–11.

¹⁵² Her fast popularity enabled her to contract one of the highest British star salaries of the time in August 1933, just two years after her first film, *Sally In Our Alley*. She went from a paycheck of £1,171 to a £22,000-25,000 per picture contract. *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 162–164.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

historians suggest, there definitely are problematic aspects and limitations to the representation of Britishness in films produced during this period. Jeffrey Richards broaches a few of these various reasons and factors, including audience tastes, censorship, the fundamental role of the producer in determining the content of the films, and the predominance of internationalist policy with “quality” films.¹⁵⁵ To this I would add the many economic constraints, as well as the reliance upon certain source materials (specifically the stage and popular authors) which overlapped with conflicting class cultural traditions, just to name a few.

Concerning audience tastes and preferences, Robert James stresses the role that consumer agency plays in popular leisure; consumers are not the passive observers that they are frequently purported to be. Film producers wanted to ensure their products “remained popular (and thus profitable) with the mass consumer.” Recognizing the reciprocal relationship, they tailored their products with these target audiences in mind and presented the material in a manner designed to be pleasurable for the consumer.¹⁵⁶

Interestingly, these 1930s cinema-going audiences were *not* fully representative of the nation, even during peak attendance of the 1940s. The relatively inexpensive cost of cinema-going attracted predominantly lower-middle and working classes who attended on a more regular basis.¹⁵⁷ Generally, women were the more frequent patrons, given that many working-class leisure activities were still somewhat of a taboo for working-class women. According to James, “Respectability” was a key determinant in this regard.¹⁵⁸ Other certain social groups were more likely to attend, such as townies more than country dwellers, and a younger age bracket of under-45s.¹⁵⁹

Most likely, these audiences were less concerned with films’ ability to represent their national identity or character than finding pleasure in their entertainment. Here one sees the

¹⁵⁵ Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 250–251. See Chapters Six and Seven for the domestic and foreign policies of censorship.

¹⁵⁶ James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste in Britain, 1930-39*, 6.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵⁹ Hill, “British Film and the National Interest,” 16.

obvious disconnect between ruling elites' and intelligentsia's concerns for a more "national" film. Apprehensions about cinema's power and influence were primarily conceived in terms of films' effects on a primarily working-class audience that ruling elites assumed to be "the most impressionable sections of the community."¹⁶⁰ The condescending assumption of the lower classes' passive observation, susceptibility, and inferiority is reflected in this manner.

The dominant use of these source materials is also stringently connected to class cultural connections. It is to the latter factor to which I now turn to wrap up this brief sketch of 1930s British films' relationship with national identity and culture. In a critique for the *Spectator* in 1932, John Grierson censured the limited scope of British productions' source materials:

It is not satisfactory to face the world with British films which are, in fact, provincial charades of one single square mile within the Empire. They neither project England nor project the very much larger world in the Dominions or colonies. There is an unknown England beyond the West End, one of industry and commerce and the drama of English life within it, which is barely touched.¹⁶¹

Thus critics complained about the influence of the stage and the limitations of what was primarily the scope of London as a representation of the nation. Producers frequently chose popular stage plays and popular novels to adapt to film, relying on the hopes for a pre-sold audience. According to Jeffrey Richards, the whole range of films during this period reveals an overwhelming majority of "standard genre pieces, in particular comedies, musicals and detective stories."¹⁶² Concerning the comedies and 'whodunits', these were adapted from popular books and plays.

West End Theater was almost exclusively a middle-class preserve in contrast to the mass cinema-going working class audience. This disparity becomes apparent with the success of working-class narrative films over the ostensibly more intellectual stage-based stories. Basil Dean, noted for his numerous attempts at adapting stage plays for the screen, pulled in larger audiences for his Gracie Fields musicals and George Formby comedies than he did with his

¹⁶⁰ Board of Trade, *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Committee on Cinematograph Films*, 1.

¹⁶¹ *Spectator*, May 14, 1932, quoted in Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 245.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, verify.

“screen transcriptions of West End stage successes.”¹⁶³ Even so, the stage remained the dominant source for film production throughout the 1930s.

According to Jeffrey Richards, examining the most popular authors sourced for cinematic adaptation helps instruct us further about the types of stories most often onscreen. While the bestsellers of the 1930s were predominantly realistic, cinematic selections were primarily from authors Edgar Wallace and Ben Travers. Thirty-three films were based on the plays and stories of Edgar Wallace (mostly thriller stories), and eighteen were based on the plays and original scenarios of Ben Travers (primarily farce). Jeffrey Richards draws to attention that these were not the clever intellectual puzzles like those of Dorothy L Sayers or Agatha Christie; these were the less demanding thrillers with “chases, fights and mayhem.”¹⁶⁴ Among the comedy genre, it was the less demanding farce that dominated in contrast to the more sophisticated stage comedy like that of Noel Coward (with the exception of *Bitter Sweet*; his other pieces were filmed instead by early 1930s Hollywood for middle-class American audiences).

However, Lawrence Napper interprets the class cultural traditions and source materials and predominance of a “middle-brow” aesthetic as indicative of the “creation of a common culture”¹⁶⁵ Napper argues that a “middle-ground cinema” situated between Europe and Hollywood, art and escapism, high and low brow, “was largely realized by the British film industry of the 1930s.”¹⁶⁶ These films included known literary or theatrical adaptations, including G.B. Shaw’s *Pygmalion* (1938), J. B. Priestley’s *Laburnum Grove* (1936) and *The Good Companions* (1933), alongside Korda’s *Henry VIII* and *Fire Over England* (1937), among others. From adaptations to original stories “steeped in the landscape and the heritage of the nation,” these films made up a “suitable fare for the educated audiences of the new suburban middle classes.” In terms of audience preferences, Napper emphasizes the cultural barrier between this new middle-class (educated) audiences’ own taste and the “surface sophistication and mechanized

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 253–234.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁶⁵ Lawrence Napper, “British Cinema and the Middlebrow,” in *British Cinema, Past and Present*, ed. Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (London: Routledge, 2000), 121.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

narrative thrills of Hollywood.”¹⁶⁷ This barrier created a dichotomy in which the working classes tended towards Hollywood films and the middle class towards British texts. However, he continues by connecting this “middle-ground cinema” to a distinct representation of national culture:

We should not perhaps lose sight of quite how far the very Englishness of these productions was responsible for the reactions they provoked. For this general educated audience it was their Englishness that guaranteed their quality. The crisp English accents reassured provincial middle-class audiences as often as they infuriated others.¹⁶⁸

The application of a homogenous concept of national identity to national cinema during the 1930s was always going to be problematic because of the multiple nationalities within Britain and the very different cultural traits that result. These become more apparent in a medium such as film where the visual and the sounds as well as the stories can make any individual viewer encounter their own differences in terms of self-identification with whatever perpetrated image of nationality is up on the screen. Therefore like Korda proposed, in some ways it would be easier for outsiders to see these films as more distinctly British than those within Britain. And that would also coincide with the need for international profits to maintain the growth of the industry, and in such a way that an internationalist policy would make logical sense. Unfortunately, because of the dominant role of Hollywood in the markets, it would ultimately fail—albeit with some individual successes. The very complex concept of Britishness within the British Isles alone would demand a more realistic representation within films at least in terms of the various peoples. But because the majority of audiences attending these films appeared satisfied with the escapist entertainment provided by the major studios in bulk, there was less necessity to attempt these endeavors and perhaps triggered motivation for some producers to imitate Hollywood product (style, escapism, standardized genres, and the like).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 116.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.; John Ellis, “British Cinema as Performance Art: *Brief Encounter*, *Radio Parade of 1935* and the Circumstances of Film Exhibition,” in *British Cinema, Past and Present*, ed. Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (London: Routledge, 2000), 95–109.

“If censorship made contemporary novels difficult projects to handle, Britain’s rich literary heritage surely provided less controversial cinematic material. But here it was Hollywood that scooped the pool.”¹⁶⁹ Finally, the underlying element beneath all these strategies and decisions that shaped the Britishness of British films was the dominance and power of the Hollywood studios: in the US market, the British market, and throughout the world. This domination and access to significant funds enabled Hollywood to produce some of the most recognizable British literature before British companies could even consider them. Among the most quintessentially English authors, Hollywood produced three Shakespeare adaptations to Britain’s solo attempt and seven Dickensian productions to only two in Britain during the 1930s. The list for Hollywood extends to hallmarks of British literature from the Brontë sisters to Wilkie Collins and Lewis Carroll. Mark Glancy makes a good point about the different cultural tasks of films from these two industries: “While British films were charged with representing the nation, Hollywood films were often granted greater license and as a result could address a wider range of audience needs and interests.”¹⁷⁰ So it is with great irony that Hollywood’s efforts with British literary classics met with significant success, making them carriers of British culture and ideology in large measure. And such efforts to do so are indicative of the importance Britain’s market played in Hollywood’s strategies for profit. The next few chapters will explore how British producers navigated these Hollywood-infested waters for the distribution and exhibition of their films in the international market.

¹⁶⁹ Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 254.

¹⁷⁰ Mark Glancy, *Hollywood and the Americanization of Britain: From the 1920s to the Present*, 1st ed. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2013), 11.

Chapter 3

“No Stone Unturned”: Moving British Films into the American & English-Speaking Markets

Gaumont British, after a number of false starts in its so-called ‘invasion’ of the American market, has finally hit a good one. ‘Transatlantic Tunnel’ has Julesverneish imagination, romance, bigness of thought, idea and production execution—and a couple of marquee names for the Anglo-American market.¹⁷¹

Set in the twenty-first century, *The Tunnel* (1935; US re-titled: *Transatlantic Tunnel*) tells the futuristic and innovative attempt to build a subterranean tunnel to connect England with the United States. The tunnel project receives the world’s rapt attention. However, several problems and obstacles hinder the progress of the transatlantic tunnel, and many lives are impacted by the business machinations of rival companies, the resistance of the environment with the encounter of volcanic activity and release of gasses, the injury and death of loved ones, and so much more. It takes the strenuous devotion of one man, an engineer who proposed the revolutionary technologies to accomplish the feat, to press on through the hardships to achieve what the above film reviewer referred to as the “transatlantic union of the two major English-speaking nations.”¹⁷² The premise of this story embodies the very heart of what Michael Balcon and Gaumont British hoped to accomplish with this film and a succession of others—a way to establish a *permanent* connection into the large and profitable American film market. Like the tunnel’s key engineer, this description resembles the efforts of a number of seminal British producers and the many obstacles they faced during the 1930s as they aspired for the means to enable and sustain the growth of a strong British Cinema.

British filmmakers’ objective in producing films for both domestic and international markets influenced how distributors (and local exhibitors) targeted their advertising at different audiences. In the first place, few producers could afford to make the more expensive, prestigious pictures; to recoup those costs, it became necessary for a few daring filmmakers to look beyond

¹⁷¹ Film Review of “Transatlantic Tunnel,” *Variety*, October 30, 1935, 14, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.archive.org/stream/variety120-1935-10#page/n277/mode/2up>

¹⁷² Ibid.

Britain's domestic market. Among the English-speaking territories of the world, the most practical target was the market with the greater potential for film profits: America. Other motivations aside from profits also underlined these decisions. Scholars have noted that key figures like Sir Alexander Korda (London Film Productions), Herbert Wilcox (British & Dominion Films), and Sir Michael Balcon (of Gaumont British) sought to establish a national cinema and industry capable of competing with Hollywood in the global market. Overall, there was limited success for British filmmakers in the American market during the Studio Era; most Hollywood studios were reluctant to share any space within their dominance of the U.S. and English-speaking markets. As this chapter investigates, Michael Balcon's repeated trips to the United States (especially those during a peak period of British filmmaking) and his various company strategies illustrate how Gaumont British, one of the more successful British studios at that time, failed to bring about competitive and widespread American releases for their films. However, Balcon did manage for a period of time to establish an entry into the US market and some successful GB releases in metropolitan areas, especially New York. The following chapter shows that using an American distribution company to access the US market came with its own limitations, as Herbert Wilcox and Alexander Korda quickly discovered. Finally, while British films met with some success in various English-speaking territories in the world, the United States remained the most difficult yet most essential market to penetrate during the 1930s development of the British film industry.

The British film industry throughout the 1930s was economically unstable and experienced a short series of "boom-crash cycles."¹⁷³ After the spectacular worldwide success of Alexander Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), investments increased and the local industry grew exponentially in the mid-30s, creating a boom period from 1933 to 1937. Many British producers tried to sell their films to US companies for wider distribution, and the British film

¹⁷³ After the initial surge in production with the formations and investment into numerous new companies following the passage of the Cinematograph Films Act in 1927, a slump in production occurred as many of these investments fell through. After the transition to sound was completed, production picked up again, and this boom period lasted from 1932-1936, when the risky investments and overspending landed key financiers into hot waters. Many of the major studios and companies were forced into temporary closure or re-organized along new company lines. This entered the industry into a new form of filmmaking and finance during and after the war.

quota encouraged Hollywood studios to buy these films if they wanted their own films to have access to Britain's market. The cheaper films were more likely to earn them a profit, so by the mid-1930s "quota quickies" tended to fulfill these needs. It would take a different product to distribute beyond the British Isles, especially in America (with or without Hollywood's help). The dominance of Hollywood in Dominions and colonies of the British Empire further limited opportunities. And given the costs of additional prints, dubbing, and superimposing titles, targeting foreign language territories would require even more investment. Thus, it was rare for independent British producers to successfully distribute outside of Britain.

Throughout the 1920s and '30s, and especially during Michael Balcon's years as production head of both Gaumont British (GB) and his Gainsborough Pictures, Balcon attempted to establish the substantial US release of GB films first by trying to contract Hollywood studios' distribution and eventually through a more direct but inadequate means through GB's formation of their own US distributing company. Meanwhile, other independent British filmmakers like Herbert Wilcox (and his British & Dominions Film Corporation) and Sir Alexander Korda's London Film Productions, were able to establish a repartee with a Hollywood distribution studio: United Artists. During the mid-30s peak of British production, these two producers chose to use Hollywood's global distribution network instead of fighting the current (pardon the pun), and they met with some degree of success. While Balcon, Korda, and Wilcox may not exemplify the entire British industry during these years, they were among the few successful British producers that helped to establish an identifiably British national cinema.

Context: Distribution & The English-Speaking Market

Historiography

This chapter and the next primarily deal with the aims and outcomes of British producers to attain the distribution of British films within the American and English-speaking markets. The following two chapters will travel to less common areas of study by looking at the examples of a British dominion and colony: South Africa and the British Caribbean. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, scholarship has shown more interest in the distribution and reception of British films,

but the focus remains primarily upon British and American markets and the competition with Hollywood. Scholars such as Sarah Street have recently examined British films' experiences in the United States, while others flip the path's direction.¹⁷⁴ For example, Ruth Vasey looks at how British and international market expectations shape Hollywood films.¹⁷⁵ Mark Glancy recently examined Hollywood films' reception in the British market.¹⁷⁶ John Sedgwick focuses upon the two transatlantic industries, their asymmetrical sized markets, and investigates the failures of British producers to access the American market.¹⁷⁷ However, Pierre Sorlin calls attention to the weakness of scholarship that examines how British films fared in export markets.¹⁷⁸ Regardless of the rising trend in film reception studies, little has been written about the transatlantic or English-speaking markets beyond the United States. Given the smaller importance of these markets to British industry profits, perhaps this is not surprising. Ian Jarvie initiated a more expansive transatlantic investigation of the political and economic triangular relationship of film exportation between the US, Britain, and Canada.¹⁷⁹ Before examining the more elusive markets of the Atlantic, these two chapters explore British producers' sentiments and the legal parameters involved within the traditional transatlantic trajectory towards the United States, and it places this primary market within the English-speaking market context.

It is important to note that the archival sources from Michael Balcon and Gaumont British at the British Film Institute National Archive provide intermittent materials and limited sections

¹⁷⁴ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*.

¹⁷⁵ Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

¹⁷⁶ Glancy, *Hollywood and the Americanization of Britain*; Another interesting study is Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-34* (London: BFI Pub., 1985); Thompson investigates how Hollywood came to dominate and maintained their position within the international market during the first third of the twentieth century.

¹⁷⁷ Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain*; Sedgwick and Pokorny, "The Film Business in the United States and Britain During the 1930s"; John Sedgwick and H. Mark Glancy, "Cinemagoing in the United States in the Mid-1930s: A Study Based on the Variety Dataset," in *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*, ed. Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes, and Robert Clyde Allen (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 155–95.

¹⁷⁸ Piere Sorlin, "From The Third Man to Shakespeare in Love: Fifty Years of British Success on Continental Screens," in *British Cinema, Past and Present*, ed. Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (London: Routledge, 2000), 80.

¹⁷⁹ Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*.

concerning 1930s production, distribution, and exhibition. Unfortunately, there are no systematic budgetary accounts (black books, financial accounting ledgers, or box office receipts) available for the films that Balcon and GB produced. John Sedgwick's two-year case study during the peak of GB's attack on America has been extremely helpful in supplementing my findings.¹⁸⁰ My illustration of Michael Balcon primarily draws upon the available company business correspondence during these years. Meanwhile, autobiographies and others aid in determining these three producers' intentions and aims concerning distribution and the methods they attempted in regards to the United States.¹⁸¹ They also help outline how their goals and expectations evolved through their varied negative and positive experiences in the course of the decade.

Finally, this chapter (and those following) provides a case study involving the United Artists Corporation, and thus relies upon both the original corporate records as well as Tino Balio's two-volume history of United Artists, which provides one of the most comprehensive studies of the corporate functions of a Hollywood studio. He presents United Artists' evolution as a film distribution company maintaining its reputation for high-quality films in spite of big business competition from the vertically-integrated Majors. He emphasizes the unique aspect of this distribution-only company founded for independent producers: "those actors, directors, and producers who were constitutionally opposed to the studio system and who risked their own money on custom-made pictures that reflected their special talents."¹⁸² Like this study, he bases the majority of his research upon the extensive company records available within the United Artists collection at the Center for Film and Theater Research in Wisconsin. Balio's survey

¹⁸⁰ John Sedgwick, "Michael Balcon's Close Encounter with the American Market," in *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 211–29.

¹⁸¹ Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents*; Herbert Sydney Wilcox, *Twenty-Five Thousand Sunsets: The Autobiography of Herbert Wilcox* (London: Bodley Head, 1967); Victor Saville and Roy Moseley, *Evergreen: Victor Saville In His Own Words* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000); Richard Henry Brinsley Norton Grantley, *Silver Spoon: Being Extracts from the Random Reminiscences of Lord Grantley*, ed. Mary Wood and Alan Wood (London: Hutchinson, 1954); Basil Dean, *Mind's Eye: An Autobiography, 1927-1972* (London: Hutchinson, 1973).

¹⁸² Tino Balio, *United Artists, Volume 1, 1919-1950: The Company Built by the Stars*, reprint of 1976 edition (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), xi.

compiles this rich corporate history and focuses upon incorporating the behavior and decisions of its famous owners (Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks) that shaped the studio's course. His history supports my study with the American company perspective of events and the context occurring within the organization in relation to their English subsidiary's activities and their distribution to an overseas market. My research fills the remaining gap by providing a more detailed account regarding United Artists' foreign-exchange offices, their overseas distribution, and their progressive series of business relations with British producers in the 1930s.

British Distribution: The Interdependence of Britain's and United States' Markets

To better comprehend these British producers' desires and distribution intentions as well as the restricted opportunities that Hollywood studios afforded them in the American market, one must first understand why these two industries depended upon each other's markets. Why was the domestic British market insufficient during this period of its film industry growth? Since the 1920s, the British film industry's primary investment was in exhibition, the most profitable sector; hence from the start, British producers were the worst off, and it was harder for them to acquire funding from City financiers. In contrast, finance was easier for American producers to obtain, so their output was much more lavish and costly and seemingly better quality. The economic advantages were entirely in the Americans' favor, and US companies took defending their overseas markets very seriously.¹⁸³

However, with the establishment of the British quota in 1927, more British films were made and the British share of their domestic market increased when the Depression and the initial impact of sound costs created a brief "window of opportunity." The increase in British films allowed British producers to acquire access to their home market in spite of Hollywood's domination of it (consistently capturing 80% of the British market; and reaching 95% control of the market in 1926).¹⁸⁴ With the growth of circuits and vertical integration trends during the 1930s, the British market developed two powerful combines, Gaumont British Picture Corporation and

¹⁸³ Dickinson and Street, *Cinema and State*, 10–11.

¹⁸⁴ Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain*; Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 127.

Associated British Pictures Corporation.¹⁸⁵ However, since Hollywood companies continued to dominate the market, they were less concerned if British combines gained favor during these years; they had little difficulty convincing exhibitors to show their own films. Consequently, it would be the weaker of the American companies (as neither United Artists nor Universal owned their own cinemas) to do business with Alexander Korda and Herbert Wilcox (and later, Arthur Rank).¹⁸⁶

Even with the British industry's growth, the disparity in the size of the US and British markets was the root of British filmmakers' difficulties. Geographically vast with a large cinema-going audience, American revenues enabled Hollywood studios to recoup their production costs. Any revenues earned from the world market became surplus that they would reinvest in their companies and extravagant productions. Therefore, from the First World War, the Hollywood industry solidified its dominance over British cinemas and their audiences.

From the American perspective, the British market was the largest overseas market and thus the best means to maintain the Hollywood majors' extravagant levels of production. The densely populated but geographically small country allowed for a more efficient means of servicing its 5,000 cinemas through a single distribution center (usually London). Like Americans, Britons were frequent moviegoers and given their common language, the arrival of talkies did not diminish the popularity of American films. These various factors help to explain estimate reports that the British market made up 35% of Hollywood's overseas revenues in the 1920s, a value which rose to over 50% in the 1930s.¹⁸⁷ Hollywood was not going to sit back and abandon a

¹⁸⁵ At its inception in 1927, GB merged a number of renters and cinema chains to provide a circuit of 187 cinemas. By 1933, the other giant combine, ABPC, controlled 147 cinemas and at this stage, Gaumont-British held 287 cinemas. By the end of the decade, these two circuits along with the emerging Odeon circuit, owned 1,011 cinemas, about 21% of the total; of the remainder, smaller circuits controlled 15% and independent exhibitors owned the remaining 64% of cinemas. For more on this expansion of the industry, see Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace*, 35–38.

¹⁸⁶ Sarah Street, "Stabbing Westward: The Distribution of British Feature Films in America, and the Case of *The Private Life of Henry VIII*," in *British Cinema, Past and Present*, ed. Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (London: Routledge, 2000), 53.

¹⁸⁷ Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*, 127; Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain*, 20.

market worth \$35 million by 1937.¹⁸⁸ Among the various strategies used to maintain their control, major studios would lure British talent to Hollywood where they began forming their own “British colony.” Additionally, films’ subject matter was another key element in which they could choose British topics and themes; studios began producing numerous films on British subject matter, especially adapting classic British literature.¹⁸⁹ While these methods appear to have aided their hold over the British market, it subsequently satisfied some American audiences’ interest in British culture—a counter swipe to any product differentiation of “Britishness” from British films.¹⁹⁰

American companies held the advantage of market size, which enabled them to undertake a lavish scale of production. In contrast, the British (and Dominions) markets were of relatively small size. During the 1930s, the United States had about four times as many cinemas in operation; in terms of box office revenues, John Sedgwick calculates that the British market was approximately one-third the size of the American market. Even during the Depression, some 3.64 billion Americans paid \$518 million in admissions in 1934. That same year in Britain, 903 million admissions generated £38.8 million. Sedgwick stresses this “fundamental asymmetry” is essential to understanding film relations between the two countries.¹⁹¹

As Rachael Low explains it, in order to counter the American advantage within the British market, the “big” British producers tried to break into their competitor’s market.¹⁹² Britain’s quality film producers faced the dilemma of making high production value cost films with inadequate British market revenues; they would have to find a large enough market to supplement their profits from home if they hoped to uplift and sustain subsequent product quality with reinvestments coming from generating revenue streams. In terms of size, the British market was

¹⁸⁸ Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain*, 23.

¹⁸⁹ Ian Scott, *From Pinewood to Hollywood: British Filmmakers in American Cinema, 1910-1969* (Basingstoke, Hampshire [U.K.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 66.

¹⁹⁰ Popular Hollywood films such as Paramount’s *Ruggles of Red Gap* (1935), MGM’s *David Copperfield* (1935), Selznick International Picture’s *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1936), and RKO’s *Mary of Scotland* (1936) functioned to satisfy both American and British tastes.

¹⁹¹ Statistics available in Sedgwick and Pokorny, “The Film Business in the United States and Britain During the 1930s,” 82; Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain*, 213. Sedgwick allows for an exchange rate of 1 to \$4.5, making the British receipts total about \$175 million.

¹⁹² Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:xiv.

second only to America. In order to compete effectively, British producers needed to match this level of quality to compare with the production values common with Hollywood studio productions. And their films needed to be as popular in the US market as Hollywood's own product.¹⁹³ With this daunting aspect, not all filmmakers chose to compete in Hollywood's back yard; some producers kept to modest and small budgeted films intended solely for their home market.¹⁹⁴

Consequently, quality British film producers intended to target an international market by applying a standard business concept: counter your competitor's advantages in your home market by trying to get into their domestic market. As with other scholars after her, Rachael Low stresses the significance of the disparity in the two markets' sizes at the root of their issues; the inherent makeup and structure of the American market denied this strategy to most British films and allowed for only a "trickle" of success.¹⁹⁵ Sarah Street delineates three distinct problems that distributors of British films in America faced: first, the power network of the majors and the associated difficulty establishing a British film distribution network outside of the weaker companies that handled them, such as United Artists. For the widest US distribution, British films must play in cinemas owned by the Majors, yet doing so would potentially displace Hollywood's own product. Except for the occasional "special" British film, most studios blocked access to their own theaters. Secondly, exhibitors' attitudes and audiences' tastes were significant obstacles (in terms of profits) to those films released indiscriminately and on an unequal basis. Finally, size and diversity of the market itself, the "sheer geographic enormity and cultural diversity of the USA

¹⁹³ Sedgwick and Pokorny, "The Film Business in the United States and Britain During the 1930s," 82.

¹⁹⁴ Rachael Low gives a breakdown of the different major companies and British producers during the 1930s. After early attempts on the US market failed for British International Pictures (amalgamated into ABPC in 1933), John Maxwell established their practice to keep costs down to that their first features might make a profit from the domestic market alone. Even with major expansion in 1936-38, Maxwell's policy was "to make medium-priced films to satisfy a protected and not very demanding home market He therefore consistently opposed any measures which would favor high priced films." Smaller companies usually made shorter films used as quota by importers and exhibitors, such as Twickenham, Sound City at Shepperton Studios, British Lion, and others. Julius Hagan at Twickenham did better than most in the British market with his "many mass production machine." For more, see Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:117; 231; 174.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7:xiv.

militated against the extensive exhibition of British films.”¹⁹⁶ (For more information concerning production and international distribution of the films referenced in this study, see Appendix A.)

British Producers' Intentions

Desiring a British National Industry: Michael Balcon & Gaumont British

Michael Balcon, one of the fundamental personages of the British film industry from the 1920s to the 1960s, openly aspired to establish a national industry in Britain. What he was willing to do in order to realize that dream shaped his decisions throughout his career. One of the core themes behind creating this national industry was his hopes (and others') for penetrating the American market. It took his experiences and failures in the 1920s and 30s to realize a more effective tactic by the 1940s—making a film “thoroughly national” in order to make it international.¹⁹⁷ Throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, he would make regular transatlantic crossings to network in Hollywood, to acquire Hollywood movie stars on loan, and to establish US distribution of his and GB's films. In the process, he became more cautious and hesitant as Hollywood constrained him at every turn, though he did manage to attain partial access to the American market primarily through direct distribution. As their British and some American markets' film successes could not sustain the higher costs of high-end quality production, his and the Ostrer brothers' (heads of Gaumont British) internationalist strategy failed in the long haul.

With Hollywood films' dominance in British cinemas, Michael Balcon wanted to build a competitive British industry as early as the 1920s. He understood that Hollywood had taken advantage of the opportunity and need for films to fill England's theaters in the aftermath of World War I. But with the strategies of block and blind booking in the 1920s, “British cinema owners had to contract anything up to two years ahead to hire and show films often yet been made.”¹⁹⁸ In his autobiography, Balcon summarizes his challenging long-term dream: “To break this economic

¹⁹⁶ Street, “Stabbing Westward: The Distribution of British Feature Films in America, and the Case of The Private Life of Henry VIII,” 54.

¹⁹⁷ Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents*, 61. He was able to apply this theory once he was head of Ealing Studios in the 1940s and '50s; under his supervision, Ealing became notable for more “modest” films about English life aimed primarily at the domestic market.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

stranglehold and create an industry in which people could learn and practise [sic] their technical jobs with a reasonable guarantee of regular employment seemed an impossible task.”¹⁹⁹ Yet during the silent era, product was intermittent and often came from independent filmmakers working on shoestring budgets. Not until the Cinematograph Act of 1927 outlawed these practices of blind and block booking in Britain could his dream seem more attainable.

Balcon’s attempts to break the American market (and his instinctive mistrust of Hollywood) dates back to his first feature film *Woman To Woman* (1923) and a trip to America when he tried to sell the silent film to theaters. “I say ‘try’ because getting a British film into American cinemas was very difficult indeed. I failed with all the major American companies but at last succeeded in selling it to the Louis J. Selznick company, which was by then in receivership.”²⁰⁰ Not only did the film succeed as an “international commercial success,” but Balcon also learned both the value and high costs of providing a recognizable name, which at that time meant a Hollywood star.²⁰¹ Furthermore, he was able to establish his own investment contacts during his trip abroad, and he used these contacts to build his own career and make further films. Balcon continued to seek American support for British films in 1926, and he considered producing an MGM series with Ivor Novello, but he rejected this deal due to his fear of MGM imposing their authority over his production company, Gainsborough Pictures. Nor did he want MGM to interfere with his British market distribution via his British distributor, C.M. Woolf; he ultimately decided “...that the financial control of British films should remain in British hands. I turned down security, and never regretted it.”²⁰² Sarah Street concludes from this episode that “It appears that Balcon’s aspirations in the United States had been thwarted by a combination of split loyalties (the problems with C.M. Woolf); bad timing (American annoyance at the prospect of

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 18.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 15; Sarah Street also confirms Balcon’s observation of commercial success with other sources, including box office reports in variety and various reviews. Street explains that Balcon himself did not make much money from the US distribution, “even if its reputation did much to inspire greater confidence in British films.” See Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 21.

²⁰² Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents*, 23; for more on Balcon and Gainsborough Pictures during the 1920s, see Kemp, “Not for Peckham.”

protective legislation for the British film industry); and Balcon's own qualms about the nature and extent of Anglo-American cooperation necessary to ensure reciprocity (his rejection of the MGM deal).²⁰³

During the initial years adjusting to the new film quota and the arrival of talking pictures, Balcon kept his eye directed towards the United States. Gainsborough and Gaumont British chose to equip their studios with RCA (Radio Corporation of America), because they "thought, quite unwisely, that films made on an American sound process would have easier access to the North and South American markets. This proved a fallacy."²⁰⁴ Moreover, Balcon's transatlantic ambitions continued motivating his concerted attempts to acquire American distribution of Gainsborough's (and then Gaumont British's) films.

A series of his business correspondence exemplifies Michael Balcon's continued struggles in the early 1930s against American companies' control within the US market and their reluctance to distribute British films. A succession of cables and letters in 1931 reveals an account of an RKO distributor said to have refused screening Gainsborough's films *Ghost Train* and *Michael and Mary* with the statement that he was "not interested in British pictures."²⁰⁵ As managing director of Gainsborough pictures, a subsidiary of Gaumont British since their merger in 1927, Michael Balcon sought out clarification on why RKO was not screening his films, let alone not considering them for distribution in the States. With the advocating of Balcon's representatives, Lee Marcus (RKO) retracted his earlier comments and claimed that RKO "should be very happy to screen" any pictures submitted by Gainsborough.²⁰⁶ He clarified his position in a

²⁰³ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 22.

²⁰⁴ Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents*, 38.

²⁰⁵ Delahanty to Marcus, copy of cable, 5 December 1931; Marcus's cable response to Delahanty (7 December 1931) was that he did not talk to Arthur Lee directly regarding screening pictures, and that a "representative from some British company was in my office several weeks ago requesting we distribute English pictures" including *Ghost Train*, which he pointed out had been distributed in the US as a silent film a few years prior. He then went on to point out the two-picture deal with Basil Dean. Series of cables and letters between Lee Marcus (RKO Distributing Corporation in New York), Mr. Delahanty, Michael Balcon, and Arthur Lee (Gainsborough's representative of Amer-Anglo Corporation in New York, i.e. GBPCA), Arthur A Lee Correspondence (GBPCA), Michael Balcon Special Collection, B/98, British Film Institute Special Collections (hereafter Michael Balcon Collection, B/98).

²⁰⁶ Marcus to Delahanty, cable, 7 December 1931, Michael Balcon Collection, B/98.

direct letter to Michael Balcon, and explained that RKO was “open-minded, in fact, rather interested in distributing worth-while British-made productions, that [RKO] had a commitment with Basil Dean to do this, that [RKO] had distributed British pictures the year before, and had gone out of [their] way to release ‘the W plan’, a British-made picture. I am merely reiterating this as an example of this company’s attitude.”²⁰⁷ RKO had already established a contract to release two British films to be made by Basil Dean in the following season’s schedule. Marcus’s claim was that they would be unable to take on any further obligations from other producers, as it would inhibit any additional distribution of some of RKO’s own British-made pictures. Basil Dean’s films would satisfy the British quota requirements for RKO distribution in Britain. Arthur Lee (Gainsborough’s New York representative) later reported to Balcon the ironic outcome for *Ghost Train*’s preliminary American distribution, that “in the meantime we were successful in making a deal with Universal, and now RKO is booking the picture from Universal for their first-run house, the Mayfair.” Considering his letter’s closing, Lee’s perspective as one of Balcon’s colleagues highlights how important accessing the American market was to Balcon in the early 1930s (as in other years): “...now, Mickey, please be assured that we are leaving no stone unturned to get your picture in on this market...”²⁰⁸

Additionally, as other scholars such as Sarah Street have gleaned, the Hollywood majors were aware of British producers’ sensitivities and sought to appease them (or at least keep them quiet). In this same correspondence, it becomes apparent that Marcus was placating Gainsborough and Balcon in the retraction of his supposed refusal, in the “happiness” to screen their films (amidst this drama), and in his reiteration (to Mr. Delahanty) that RKO continuously screens British, German, and French films and thus assures that they “are most open-minded on [the] matter [of] distribution, realizing [the] necessity [of] extending courtesy and helpful

²⁰⁷ Marcus to Balcon, 30 December 1931, Michael Balcon Collection, B/98.

²⁰⁸ Arthur Lee to Balcon, 4 December 1932, Michael Balcon Collection, B/98. *Ghost Train*’s (1931) New York premiere was in February 1933 in the U.S.; GBPCA would coordinate the general US release by the end of the year. *Ghost Train*, Internet Movie Database (IMDB), accessed June 9, 2015, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0021907/releaseinfo>.

cooperation to British and other producers.”²⁰⁹ As this implies, while he probably did not expect to do business with Balcon at that time, he did not want to hinder future possibilities of British-made product that might be needed for British market quota requirements (as well as those in Europe). Yet in 1932, the American press was only beginning to promote the improvements within the British film industry and its output; like the other Hollywood majors, RKO would have felt little inclination to invest in distributing their films without more guarantee of profit. Ultimately, Marcus’ correspondence serves primarily as mollification, since he made it clear (in person) to Gainsborough’s representatives that there was no use for him to look at any of Gainsborough’s pictures, because “if they could release any British pictures at this time, they would certainly release the ones sent over by Basil Dean.”²¹⁰ The “if” further implicates RKO’s intentions towards the distribution of British pictures in the United States—to keep British producers contented so that RKO can continue to acquire British quota films, and to imply ambiguously that they shall release them for distribution in the States.

By 1933, Gaumont British had acquired 300 cinemas throughout Britain, over 14,000 employees, the capacity to shoot 1,000,000 feet per week, with newsreel and subsidiary companies in the fold.²¹¹ A major reorganization of the company eased out the old regime of stockholders and put control in the hands of the Ostrer brothers. Their two primary distributors, Gaumont Ideal and Wardour & Films merged to form Gaumont British Distribution. This growth and expansion of the Gaumont British Corporation during the early 1930s, including the promotion of Michael Balcon in 1932 as the Head of Production for both companies, continued with the creation of an Overseas and Foreign Department as well as a US distribution arm for their company: Gaumont British Picture Corporation of America. In 1932, Michael Balcon was excited and anticipative about this expansion of the Corporation both at home and abroad,

²⁰⁹ Marcus to Delahanty, cable, 7 December 1931, Michael Balcon Collection, B/98.

²¹⁰ Arthur Lee to Michael Balcon, 4 December 1932, Michael Balcon Collection, B/98.

²¹¹ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:135.

“expanding beyond even our normal hopes and the time has come when certain work will have to be delegated to other people.”²¹²

With this growth (in size and power) of the combine, a shift in the company’s aims and strategies occurred, and some of them coincided with Balcon’s personal goals. John Sedgwick, using the sources available in the BFI’s Michael Balcon Collection as well as US box office information in *Variety*, has studied Gaumont British’s and Michael Balcon’s US business strategy during the peak years of production from 1934-1936. Gaumont British strove to become a “major player” in the world industry and increase the quality and quantity of their production in order to rival the major Hollywood studios’ output and scale of films. Inherently with this decision, Gaumont British would need to sustain access and penetrate the US market. To achieve widespread distribution, Gaumont British arranged their own distribution network (headed by Arthur Lee in New York and with representatives in the thirty-one distribution exchange offices) and embarked on a mission to sell those GB films “specifically addressed to the perceived tastes of American audiences.”²¹³ It is apparent from the archives materials that this was a serious challenge to which the entire GB organization was committed.

Gaumont British Picture Corporation of America (GBPCA) enabled GB to establish a more direct means of competing with Hollywood for US distribution of their films through the 1930s.²¹⁴ Unfortunately, GBPCA could not compete with the major American distributors, and while Fox Film also distributed a certain few films (until 1935) for them, American exhibition was not enough to sustain the production company’s expenditures by the end of the decade. And these were not cheap productions from the perspective of these British filmmakers; the average

²¹² Balcon to Arthur Lee, 2 July 1932, Michael Balcon Collection, B/98.

²¹³ Sedgwick, “Michael Balcon’s Close Encounter with the American Market,” 212–213. Sedgwick also mentions an ironic aside that this internationalist strategy Balcon prosecuted in the mid-30s contrasts with his championing of a national cinema. But why do they have to be separate? – it was a failed tactic in an effort to build a national industry. He learned through the experience but was unable to alter strategies until he took over Ealing Studios in 1938. .

²¹⁴ GBPC of America distributed an average of twelve to sixteen films per year in the USA from 1933-1938. Fox Film, who held significant stock in Gaumont British, distributed the occasional feature film from 1933 until 1935 (when Fox merged with 20th Century-Fox). GBPCA handled the rest of the American distribution until 1938. For more concerning the successes and fails of GB films in America based on the data-set from *Variety*, refer to Sedgwick, “Michael Balcon’s Close Encounter with the American Market.”

costs of these films ranged between £40,000 to £60,000, and in the case of *Jew Süss* (1933), £100,000.²¹⁵ Sedgwick disagrees with Rachael Low's general evaluation that British producers were operating on a much smaller scale of production than Hollywood studios; at least in the case of GB, Sedgwick's compilation of data on their production budgets was comparable to the bulk spent by the Hollywood majors.²¹⁶ So according to Sedgwick, by the mid-30s, Gaumont British had achieved films of comparable quality to U.S. studios (although half the quantity in comparison), but they received less than average revenues from American exhibition. Yet with the limited average box office return in Britain (calculated as being around £10,000), Gaumont British was obliged to increasingly focus their efforts on their internationalist strategy.²¹⁷

At the same time, with these rising production costs, the British market would no longer suffice if they wanted to continue making profits—a larger market became vital. A cyclical reinforcement of this dependency quickly developed, in which the cumulative costs from sound production and company expansion necessitated targeting the American market; and that necessity led Balcon (and the Ostrers) to apply tactics such as investing more in high quality costing films, instituting a "Hollywood name policy," frequent transatlantic visits for personnel and talent acquisitions, and shaping the types of films to be produced. These business strategies escalated the costs of production to a greater extent, thus driving the company's need for American (and international) distribution for their survival.

GB established a portfolio ranging from twelve to sixteen films per seasonal year to be distributed by their American company (GBPCA) from 1933-1938. The company invested in massive advertisement campaigns in American film trade papers such as *Variety* and *Film Daily* in order to hopefully convince the major studios of their potential market value for exhibition and

²¹⁵ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:142; Sedgwick, "Michael Balcon's Close Encounter with the American Market," 214. According to Low, the average costs of these films ranged from £30,000 - £50,000, but Sedgwick has since accounted for the higher figure. On an additional note, *Jew Süss* (retitled *Power in the United States*) is not to be confused with the anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda film of same title from 1940.

²¹⁶ Sedgwick, "Michael Balcon's Close Encounter with the American Market," 213–214. Calculations approximate that GB standard film budgets were a third lower than the average at Warners; Warners exceeded RKO's but was less than MGM's, thus GB's were at least comparable to the Majors.

²¹⁷ Calculation from *ibid.*, 214.

(more practically) to extend their reach beyond the cities to independent theater owners in suburban and less populated areas throughout the U.S. According to Sarah Street, the GB film to do best in the United States was *Transatlantic Tunnel* (1935), perhaps due to its Anglo-American theme and symbolism of the “tortuous collaborative relationship between the two countries.”²¹⁸ During the peak of GB’s “attack” on the American market in 1935-37, *Transatlantic Tunnel* was included among some of their various multiple-page advertisement spreads. (See Figure 3.1 for *Variety* Ad for *Transatlantic Tunnel*, and later Figures 5.1-5.3 for other GB advertisements.) The British film’s popularity among New York audiences is the primary selling point of the ad, with the second page focusing on their “name” policy by showing the various recognizable faces of both American and British movie stars in the feature. Whether due to the symbolic themes or massive publicity campaigns, *Variety* predicted its “big box office” for those exhibitors to show the film, and subsequent reports of its first-run release grosses in various cities of the United States support their claims.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 76–77.

²¹⁹ In a few randomly selected examples, the Fox in Brooklyn reported making \$15,000 the first week, its “big and holds [over]”; *Variety*, November 20, 1935, 25. Independent theater the Lafayette in Buffalo, NY saw a “swell pace, an overdose of newspaper display advertising and showing this as a single feature seems to have convinced the locals that it ought to be seen.” They saw proceeds of up to \$17,000 in its first two weeks; *Variety*, November 6, 1935, 12 and November 13, 1935, 11. And lastly, the Roxy in NY reported making \$30,000 in its two-week run. *Variety*, November 6, 1935, 9. In other cities throughout the United States, from Portland and San Francisco to Denver, New Haven, and Montreal, first-run theaters reported *Tunnel*’s one-week run grosses ranging from \$3,500 to \$13,000 and comparable to each theater’s usual Hollywood business and takings. See “Comparative Grosses for November,” *Variety*, December 18, 1935, 23 and 31.



Figure 3.1 *Transatlantic Tunnel* (1935) two-page *Variety* ad (October 30, 1935)

Yet while many Gaumont British films of the 1930s were popular with British audiences and some metropolitan American audiences, many were not making enough profit overall. John Sedgwick's calculations from American box office information reported in *Variety* reveal that GB films "on average earned less than the average box-office at both the cinemas and cities in which they appeared..."²²⁰ With American companies hindering the spread of distribution and blocking access to many of their own first-run theaters, most of the cinemas they played at were independently owned (and thus did not have first call on major Hollywood productions).²²¹ The returns from America never reached the necessary levels for significant reinvestment in production.

²²⁰ See Sedgwick, "Michael Balcon's Close Encounter with the American Market," 218–222, for his detailed calculations with the *Variety* box office data set. "Altogether, the 80 single-feature billings and 94 double-feature billings containing a Gaumont-British film were counted amongst these cinemas during this period."

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

Michael Balcon explains that when Gaumont British began to look for markets overseas, the Ostrers believed that they needed to feature American stars in order to attract international and American audiences and make their films more marketable; they sent Balcon on many voyages to secure them between 1932 and 1936.²²² The bi-directional star migrations between GB and Hollywood constitute an important feature of their internationalist strategy. Balcon's many trips met with only moderate success; in 1935 he failed to acquire stars for specific films in mind, such as Robert Young, Spencer Tracy, James Cagney, and Freddie Bartholomew, among others.²²³ Likewise, a commonly referred example of this on their own side of the pond occurred with their favorite star Jessie Matthews, whom they were *unable* to convince to make one picture in Hollywood in order to raise her star value.²²⁴

In hindsight, Balcon criticized this star policy: "The policy did not achieve the object we had in mind. Too often the stars were chosen more for the value of their names than for their suitability for the roles, and they did not fit easily into films which were largely British in conception."²²⁵ Throughout his autobiography, Balcon repeatedly stresses that they were mistaken with this "name" policy and making artistically wrong decisions that were financially "unrewarding."²²⁶ The experience also helped to confirm his "growing conviction that a film, to be international, must be thoroughly national in the first instance, and that there was nothing wrong with a degree of cultural chauvinism." However, it was not until his years at Ealing Studios that he was "free to carry out [his] own ideas uninfluenced by other considerations."²²⁷

Michael Balcon personally balked at the idea of changing British filmmaking style and production just to please American audiences; but in dealing with their American representative, he reiterated that Gaumont British seemed receptive to ideas put forth towards altering the

²²² Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents*, 61; Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:135–136.

²²³ Sedgwick, "Michael Balcon's Close Encounter with the American Market," 218; additionally, among the Balcon collection files, there are numerous lists of stars available for limited loans with Balcon's notations and crossings out as he considered various names during these years.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*; Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 78–83.

²²⁵ Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents*, 61.

²²⁶ See *ibid.*, 95–96, for a sample listing of the various Hollywood stars and directors brought over.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 61. Balcon headed production at Ealing Studios throughout the '40s and '50s, producing some of the greatest British comedies ever made—modest films intended for the home market.

commodity to meet market expectations. Arthur Lee regularly offered advice concerning production and stylistic features of their British films that they could modify to fit American preferences. In one letter of their correspondence, Balcon chastises Lee that even as he aims for an international outlook, one must not make a product counterintuitive against what is successful with British audiences: their own people. "Although I pride myself on being fairly internationally-minded, we have always got to remember that comedies and comedy musicals seem to be the greatest successes in this country and the Dominions."²²⁸ He explains that some of Lee's suggestions and advice, such as the tempo of dialogue, which might influence the productions "...are always circularized to those concerned in the studios and you can depend that they will have an influence even if the process is a slow one."²²⁹ As he implicates a warning to Lee from asking for too many alterations in their approach to filmmaking, this conciliatory gesture consents that there are some aspects of Hollywood filmmaking that can serve as a guide.

Ultimately, Balcon let his New York representative know that he and others at Gaumont British would select what would influence their filmmaking, like the technical aspects such as editing, but that Lee must not expect him to cater to American preferences at the detriment of British audience expectations. He elaborated upon this by explaining how the Fox version of 'The Good Companions' is used "...as an object lesson in editing and everybody in the place from top to bottom was vitally interested in it. We have benefited by it to a very large extent."²³⁰ Sedgwick details even more anecdotes in the archives of Balcon's dealings with the American wing of the company. He points to Balcon's growing wariness of its degree of authority and questioning its sales judgements as the office made continual requests for cuts and changes to films, and

²²⁸ Balcon to Lee, 9 October 1935, Michael Balcon Collection, B/98. In contrast, Balcon has been reported saying that the British film genres that did best in the American market were dramas and musicals. So the primary overlap between the two markets (and if including the Dominions and Empire, the English-speaking market) would be musicals. Thus one can easily surmise that the promotion of a major British star like Jessie Matthews who made musicals would be the perfect selection for and at another attempt on the American market. For more about Jessie Matthews' stardom and reception in the U.S., see Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 78–83.

²²⁹ Balcon to Lee, 9 October 1935, Michael Balcon Collection, B/98.

²³⁰ Balcon to Lee, 9 October 1935, Michael Balcon Collection, B/98.

suggestions for which films to pull that they judged would not do well with American audiences. Frequently Balcon urged for them to make every effort to “put this picture over in America.”²³¹

Even so, Michael Balcon paid close attention to the American market when considering the studio’s film roster and the methods of exploiting them. Among the various memorandums and documents of this period, this influence becomes evident. John Sedgwick briefly details a few of these; but one especially also indicates the values of the domestic and Empire markets as well. In a letter to the Joint Managing Directors (Mark Ostrer and C.M. Woolf), he set out 1935’s plan of activity and explained: “The attached programme has been framed after a careful consideration of the results of our visit to America. The subjects included are, therefore, those which, besides being of value in the home and dominion market, are also in my opinion, of great international appeal.”²³² From this wording, one can see that his perspective of the “dominion market” places it in tangent with the British market and yet separately from his concept of an international market, (by which he likely means America, given his focus).

Balcon’s general attitude towards the American market had grown increasingly skeptical with Gaumont British’s continued lack of success with particular British films:

If at times I appeared to be a little querulous as to the lack of success of certain of our outstanding productions in the American market, you must forgive me. I know that you more than anybody else will appreciate how hard it is to believe that films which are such a success elsewhere can find no market in your territory. However, facts are facts and there does seem to be a special type of picture which appeals to the American mentality. As to whether anybody else outside the American film producers is capable of providing that type is a matter for a long and somewhat academic discussion. I do believe that by the slow process of education they will learn to appreciate our pictures as we have had to do with theirs.²³³

Balcon was willing to adjust Gaumont British product to a limited degree, especially in making a few “epic” films, but he was not willing to replicate the same types of films produced by the Hollywood studios. Instead, he hoped to educate slowly the 1930s American audiences to

²³¹ Memorandum from Balcon to Mark Ostrer, quoted in Sedgwick, “Michael Balcon’s Close Encounter with the American Market,” 218–219.

²³² Letter from Michael Balcon to Mark Ostrer and CM Woolf, 13 December 1934, quoted in *ibid.*, 217–218.

²³³ Balcon to Lee, 9 October 1935, Michael Balcon Collection, B/98.

appreciate British movies as they were. Furthermore, he was unwilling to relinquish any (more) control or power over his films to American entities, influences, or preferences. Even as he made these claims, GB did produce a special “type” of film during the mid-1930s, “epics” with an eye on the American market. Per GB policy, they were producing more “internationally-appealing films,” with European spy thrillers such as *I Was A Spy* (1933) and *Rome Express* (1932) triggering their first international recognition and success.

Aside from a few highly successful films such as *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *Tudor Rose* (1936), Michael Balcon later criticized the bulk of their substantial product from 1934-35:

...on the whole our films in those years were not as good as they should have been, and they were costing more than they should have. The financial results might have been different if we had had a sufficiently powerful and effective global selling organization, but we did not; also the policy of using American artists had not paid off and the attack on the American market again fizzled out.²³⁴

Rachael Low reasons, “Full circuit distribution in the American market was essential if films of this standard were to be really profitable. But even if they were well received by the critics and successful in New York they did not get national distribution on equitable terms, and Mark Ostrer finally acknowledged that the powerful American companies had no intention of promoting British films.”²³⁵

By the end of the 1930s, Gaumont British and Michael Balcon accepted that their strategies had failed to secure the profits needed to maintain such a substantial, high cost production drive. The studio executives blamed the US industry entrenchment, and not the public reaction.²³⁶ With the difficulties of acquiring a widespread distribution at studio-owned first-run theaters, it seems a valid argument. On the other hand, as with supply and demand, if public response does not create demand, Hollywood majors would be less inclined to support GB’s aggressive attempts in their market. John Sedgwick’s statistical analysis of Gaumont British films in the US from 1934 to 1936 reveals an overall disappointing performance, since screenings

²³⁴ Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents*, 95.

²³⁵ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:142.

²³⁶ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 76.

occurred at smaller, independent cinemas, while the Hollywood majors continued their various strategies to maintain control over the international market.²³⁷ Michael Balcon left Gaumont British when his contract expired in 1936; he attempted a brief stint working with MGM British before leaving to join Ealing Studios, where he then made Ealing history for the next two decades.²³⁸

Michael Balcon, or more correctly Gaumont British, was one of the few companies to acquire at least a temporary foothold into the US market by means of a direct “attack.” The growth of GB into one of the two major combines in Britain enabled this attempt to directly compete with Hollywood in their own yard and with British film industry product. However, as the next chapter explores further, some producers were able to penetrate the US and international markets by more “indirect” means and utilized a Hollywood distributing company. Before that investigation, one factor which directly affected both methods of entry into the US market must be briefly mentioned in context here, especially for those British films entering the USA after 1933.

Censorship and the US Market

Censorship played a significant role in controlling access to the American market and provided another means for Hollywood studios to limit outsiders (in this case, British filmmakers) from accessing the American market. The timing of this seems critical, as the Production Code Administration began enforcing the Production Code more stringently after 1933—during the mid-1930s peak years of Britain’s film industry expansion and as British sound films began to breach the American market. British producers, including Michael Balcon, Herbert Wilcox, and Alexander Korda, frequently negotiated with the power of the Hays office and Joseph Breen (code enforcer). Each of these producers encountered similar struggles with American censors. Herbert Wilcox’s fiasco with *Nell Gwyn* (1934), based upon the life of King Charles II’s mistress, became “the first British film to undergo considerable re-filming and editing in order to win Production Code approval.”²³⁹ Like Wilcox, Korda would face the problems of questionable immorality in a

²³⁷ Sedgwick, “Michael Balcon’s Close Encounter with the American Market,” 228.

²³⁸ Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents*, 113.

²³⁹ Anthony Slide, *“Banned in the USA”: British Films in the United States and Their Censorship, 1933-1960*, Cinema and Society Series (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 107.

historical costume drama with *Lady Hamilton* (1940). Even United Artists went up to bat for one of B&D's British films, *Brewster's Millions* (1935), which became the first British film subjected to an appeal against the PCA. UA lost the appeal, but they chose to release the film uncut and without a PCA certificate in the United States.²⁴⁰

In 1935, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America and the Federation of British Industries arranged for a sub-organization of the PCA to provide facilities in New York for the examination of British film scripts and completed films. According to the Hays office, their intention was to place these facilities "at the disposal of British producers [and] shall be both a convenience and a practical help to them in their context with and operations in the American motion picture market."²⁴¹ Meanwhile, when Michael Balcon found out about these arrangements, he vociferously denigrated the decision and questioned the motives of the PCA. He apprised his colleagues:

First of all, any practical person [knows] that there will never be enough time to submit scripts to the organization in America, —there is hardly time to do it in England. In any case, by the time their comments are made known to us the pictures will be started, half [way] through or finished. The fact that this arrangement has been made puts a weapon in the hands of the American Association. Even if they were the most unbiassed [sic] people in the world—and obviously I am prepared to believe they are—it must react against the British film producer. In any case of doubt a picture would obviously be turned down in America and there will be no defence [sic] against their attitude because they will quite rightly say that the opportunity was given to British producers to submit the scripts before production. This statement must inevitably be made and I cannot see what possible answer there can be to it.²⁴²

Film scholar Anthony Slide explains the process a bit more objectively. The American distributors of British films, including Gaumont British Picture Corporation of America (GBPCA) in the 1930s, would undertake most of the editing of these films in order to make them suitable for American audiences and the appropriate links for fitting the second half of a double bill. These edits would take place prior to their submission to the PCA in New York. Many factors could delay the US

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 18–19; 41–42.

²⁴¹ Will H. Hays to Charles Tennyson (Film Producers' Group chairman), copy of letter, 13 June 1935, Gaumont British, Michael Balcon Collection, C/4.

²⁴² Michael Balcon to Maurice Ostrer and HG Boxall, 25 June 1935, RE: American production code, Gaumont British, Michael Balcon Collection, C/4.

release of a film, including the registration of a film title not already in use within the US or with any objectionable word or phrase in it. The PCA charged British producers half the regular fee for the issuance of a Certificate.²⁴³

Given their desires to enter the US market, these British producers had to work closely with the Breen (aka Hays) office in New York. Even though Balcon hated the very idea of passing more control over to an American organization so closely tied to the major studios, Gaumont British's US distribution arm (GBPCA) liaised with the PCA staff throughout the 1930s. Slide describes it as a close relationship between the Breen office and British producers, especially with Gaumont British by the late 1930s.²⁴⁴ Breen's closest friendship was with Herbert Wilcox, and the two with their wives often socialized and corresponded informally through the 1940s.²⁴⁵ More importantly, Herbert Wilcox could use his friendship to seek Joseph Breen's opinion on prospective film ventures. The close business relationships between British producers and the PCA also underscore the significance and priority they felt towards achieving a substantial release of their films within the American market and at theaters affiliated with members of the MPPDA. British film producers would have to comply with the PCA's requirements if they wanted this access, and according to Slide, they generally did so without complaint.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Slide, "*Banned in the USA*," 6–7; for more on the American censorship of British films in some of the issues they frequently faced, see pp. 10-27.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10; Slide also suggests the possibility that this close relationship was based covertly on the reality that the majority of British producers were not Jewish, unlike in Hollywood. Joseph Breen was an extreme anti-Semite, as private letters have since revealed, pp. 4-5; 12.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 23. He does allow that there were disagreements, but that they were usually confined to correspondence.

Chapter 4

“The United Artists of the World”:

An “International Alliance” Between British Producers & Hollywood to Create a Worldwide Market

Cooperating with the Production Code Administration was not the only way British producers could (and did) work together with Hollywood’s studio system. As the example of Michael Balcon and Gaumont British reveals, it was often difficult for British producers to acquire American distribution (and fair treatment) from the major Hollywood studios. Establishing their own direct distribution company in America, Gaumont British struggled against the competitive hold of the Majors. Yet there were those few British filmmakers that were more effective in choosing to work with an American company to acquire distribution beyond the British Isles as opposed to establishing their own direct distribution apparatus. United Artists Corporation provided an opportunity that evolved into a mutually beneficial relationship for some British producers, including Herbert Wilcox and his British and Dominions Film Corporation (B&D), and Alexander Korda and his London Film Productions, Ltd. (LFP).

United Artists in the 1930s: A Need For British Product

United Artists’ motivation in signing on these British filmmakers indicates what this unique studio required at this particular juncture as well as the role of the British market in the company’s maintenance and growth during these depression years. From the late 1920s, United Artists faced a series of product crises on and off through the next decades. By the early ‘30s, UA’s stockholder producers were making less number of pictures (like Charlie Chaplin) or facing a decline in popularity (such as Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and D.W. Griffith). Additionally, the failures of Norma Talmadge, Gloria Swanson, and later Howard Hughes in the following years added to a growing need for more pictures to combat their difficulties.²⁴⁷ Unlike the other major and minor studios in Hollywood, United Artists was a distribution-only company, thus they

²⁴⁷ For more on each of these declines, disasters, and failures, see Balio, *United Artists, Vol. 1, 1919-1950*, 82–94; 110–112.

inherently needed more producers to supplement their current product and sign them under multi-picture deals. From 1928 to 1932, Joseph Schenck and Samuel Goldwyn sustained the company until they brought others such as Walt Disney (1931) and a newly formed Twentieth Century Films, Inc. (Schenck and Darryl Zanuck) into the fold in 1933, as well as the British product from Wilcox and Korda around this time.²⁴⁸ As Tino Balio explains it, “the dwindling output of United Artists’ stockholders coincided with the worst part of the depression.”²⁴⁹ The hardest hit from the Depression came in 1932, with the culmination of their films’ decline in quantity, in quality, and in sales. The company’s world operations showed significant losses as well. Tino Balio gives the credit to Twentieth Century for saving United Artists in 1933 for delivering its full contract for the 1933/34 season of 12 films that Joseph Schenck considered the majority to be “big pictures”.²⁵⁰ Yet during that same season, the company released the significant if middling quality series of British films they had contracted to distribute for Herbert Wilcox, and most importantly, these provided them the bridge necessary for this American company to reach the profitable British market.

Furthermore, the costs and hardships of the sound transition and global depression also led to dwindling foreign market revenues by 1932. By 1926, United Artists had established a worldwide market distribution, but like the other American companies, Great Britain was their largest foreign market.²⁵¹ According to Tino Balio, the British market made up 80% of United Artists’ profits by the mid-1930s, and these “terrific profits” and the growth of distribution of UA films in the United Kingdom led to the advancement of their British subsidiary, United Artists

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 94; 116.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 120; Consider the unique aspect of United Artists as the smallest of the eight American companies within the majors and minors structure of the industry by the 1930s. UA’s prestige was its power, which according to Balio, “belied its size,” 109.

²⁵¹ United Artists’ first foreign subsidiary was set up in 1921 in England, initially named the Allied Artists’ Corporation, Limited; it reverted to United Artists Corporation, Ltd. once they verified the name was no longer in use from their previous agreement (terminated) with Morris Greenhill, London exporter in 1920. Soon after, United Artists then opened up foreign-exchange offices in France, then in various European countries, and eventually offices in Australia, South America, and in the Far East (Tokyo base only, at this time), making them a world-wide distributor by 1926. The problem with such rapid foreign expansion was the increased need for more product to distribute. In the mid-1930s, British producers would be a plausible resource. See *ibid.*, 40–41.

Corporation, Ltd during these years.²⁵² Acquiring a first-run theater in London was especially important for profits, and in 1934 UA found the old London Pavilion, their first “shop window” in the West End, a popular theater-going district in London.²⁵³ By 1935, UAC, Ltd. (the UK-based subsidiary) was able to continue acquiring theaters, buying into the Donada Circuit and into Odeon theaters, the fastest growing and the fourth-largest circuit (in 1935).²⁵⁴ Additionally, London also acquired the operations of United Artists’ Continental distribution when the burgeoning French taxes and restrictions on their exchange office in France, Les Artistes Associés, drove the company to form United Artists Export, Ltd. in 1934.²⁵⁵

Sarah Street offers a concise explanation concerning the role of the British market in United Artists’ overall financial strategy:

UA’ s consistent product shortage made the films an attractive proposition. Maintaining a good supply of British films was crucial since the company depended on profits from the British market. These could not be relied upon from its US operations since the priority was to deliver profits to producers. This had the effect of reducing domestic distribution fees and placing greater emphasis on recovering profits from Britain.²⁵⁶

As a result, in contrast with companies that produced British films in the UK (such as MGM and Fox), United Artists had the “best record of showing British films as first features to the trade.” This record “confirmed UA’ s high opinion of the quality of British films but it also reveals their importance to the company’s overall finances.”²⁵⁷

From the perspective of British producers Herbert Wilcox and Alexander Korda, United Artists provided them a ready distribution network both domestically and abroad. Tino Balio

²⁵² Ibid., 123, 128–130.

²⁵³ For more about UA’s arrangements to acquire the London Pavilion, see A.E. Abrahams, Ltd and UAC, Ltd.: Lease agreement for London Pavilion Theatre, 1933-41; UA/2A/B27/F18.

²⁵⁴ Balio, *United Artists, Vol. 1, 1919-1950*, 129. Odeon was the fourth largest theater circuit in the United Kingdom at that time, and according to Balio, they needed more quality pictures to compete with Hollywood.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 168; Functions of LAA and UAC Export after 1934 included: supervision over UA exchange offices in France, Belgium, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Spain; supplying licenses in Norway, Holland, Italy, Portugal, and Turkey; and selling films outright to the Balkans, Baltic states, and the near East.

²⁵⁶ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 56.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

deduces that UA initially signed Herbert Wilcox (B&D) in 1932 to serve “as an interim measure” and help them meet their British distribution quota, especially given the importance of the British market to their profits.²⁵⁸ Instead of just signing up a bunch of “quota quickies,” UA wanted films of higher quality to reflect the higher class status for which the studio had long been known.

From 1933 until 1936, Wilcox continued to supply UA with British product for both British quota requirements as well as a source for American market distribution, with two pictures each for the years 1933-1935 (to mixed success in the United States). Balio explains that the status of British and Dominions Films changed when Art Cinema Corporation discontinued production in 1933, making B&D a “potential source of product for the American market.”²⁵⁹ On the other hand, Balio presents a simplified explanation for the role of B&D films as British product filler and the occasional US market opportunity. Wilcox’s company, B&D: was the first British company to be contracted with United Artists; was given exclusivity in Britain, Canada, India, and USA markets; and their arrangement laid the foundations for the company’s future dealings with British production companies (and producers). Nevertheless, unlike Korda, UA never brought Wilcox in as a stockholder producer for the company nor offered a position on the Board of Directors. Without their experience with B&D, their subsequent dealings with Korda, London Film Productions, and later British companies may have transpired quite differently.

A closer look at the series of distribution agreements between Herbert Wilcox’s company British & Dominions Film Corporation and United Artists Corporation, Ltd (UK) reveals how Wilcox helped United Artists to shape their expectations and consequently their dealings with British producers and companies in subsequent years.

An initial contract for Canadian distribution served as a springboard towards acquiring a comprehensive principle agreement for world distribution of B&D’s films and exclusivity with

²⁵⁸ Balio, *United Artists, Vol. 1, 1919-1950*, 132; Balio only mentions a thirty-six picture deal with the average of £30,000 budget of each.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Art Cinema product had been the mainstay of UA releases in the late 1920s, after its formation in 1926 by Joseph Schenck to supply additional pictures to UA. For the only Hollywood studio to not be vertically-integrated, it was the closest United Artists got to having their own production studio. For more about the establishment of Art Cinema Corporation, see Balio, 66-68; 112.

United Artists. Soon after B&D's managing director Hubert T. Marsh signed a five-year contract for Canadian distribution of twelve B&D films (17 June 1932) with United Artists Corporation, Ltd (Canada), B&D was offered a separate five-year contract with the England subsidiary, United Artists Corporation, Ltd (UK) (29 July 1932) for thirty-six "British" films (to start production in 1933) for distribution in the British Isles, in addition to twelve "British" films to be finished by December 1932 for distribution in Australia, five (of the twelve) for India, and three (of the twelve) for Canada.²⁶⁰ Wilcox had recently made a name for himself as one of the first to make a series of "all singing, all talking" British films, and although Gaumont British held distribution rights for the British Isles, Wilcox was allowed to sign thirty-one of his early talkies to United Artists for distribution in other parts of the world in his Overseas Agreement with United Artists (23 November 1932). But by the end of the year, B&D annulled their distribution agreement for Australia, and instead, they established and signed directly with an Australian distributor, Mr. Turnbull of British Dominions Films, Ltd.²⁶¹ Subsequently, in August 1933, United Artists added China, Japan, Korea, Central and South America, and the West Indies to their Overseas Agreement to supplement foreign revenues.²⁶²

This principle agreement (and subsequent contracts) provided B&D with the opportunity to access the American market, but the caveats written into the contract kept the US less attainable and more far-reaching than other countries and provided UA with the control to make that decision. With the principle agreement for thirty-six films (to begin production in January 1933, one per month), United Artists would distribute these films in the British Isles, continue to distribute their American producers' films within the British market, and (per the contract) they may distribute their American films "in other parts of the British Empire, and may desire to be

²⁶⁰ Principal Agreement, 29 July 1932, UAC Ltd and B&D, License for Distribution, 1932-1937; United Artists Corp. Records, Series 2A O'Brien Legal File, Box 25, Folder 7, Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives (hereafter UA/2A/B25/F7).

²⁶¹ B&D and UAC, Canada, 1932; UAC, Ltd (UK) and B&D, License for Distribution, 1932-1937, UA/2A/B25/F6-7.

²⁶² "Resume of Distribution Agreements between British & Dominions and UAC, Ltd (UK)," List of UA Agreements with B&D from 1932-1933, UA/2A/B26/F9.

assisted with 'British' films."²⁶³ Looking to the future, United Artists considered the possibility of British film preferences among British Empire audiences if it meant increasing their own profit as well as aiding the maintenance of B&D production via overseas profit. Meanwhile, the UA parent company had the option to accept or reject any of these films for USA distribution within two months of their initial exhibition at the London tradeshow. Furthermore, if the parent company did not take an option on at least one of the first twelve films for US distribution, then the deal with US distribution as a whole would be over. Luckily, it did not come to that, since United Artists signed *Goodnight Vienna* (1932) and the following year *Bitter Sweet* (1933) for release in the USA.²⁶⁴

The "exclusivity" clause of this principle agreement established a unique position for Herbert Wilcox and B&D in the British market, one that Alexander Korda was shortly afterwards to interrupt. According to this contract, United Artists would not acquire or make any films by anyone besides B&D in the British Isles, Australia, India, and Canada for distribution (nor would it distribute any such films) in those territories from April 1933 through March 1936, or if earlier, the date of the last of the thirty-six films delivery. In exchange, B&D was not to make any films for any other third-party after January 1933 except to fulfill its previous contract with Paramount British for producing six British quota films for Paramount between July 1932 to May 1933 (which was open to extension with permission of United Artists, so long as it did not interfere with B&D's ability to continue offering first-class British quota films for UA).²⁶⁵ Overall, except those earlier B&D films that were licensed to Gaumont British, and the remainder British quota films that they produced

²⁶³ UAC Ltd (UK) and B&D, License for Distribution, 1932-1937, UA/2A/B25/F7.

²⁶⁴ Separate June 1932 agreement, List of Agreements, UA/2A/B25/F7; *Goodnight Vienna* was retitled *Magic Night* in the US. Summary of Dec 1934 Overseas Agreements, 28 Feb 1935, UA/9B/B1/F3. By 1935, UA had released two of Wilcox's early films in the USA (*Goodnight Vienna* and Jack Buchanan's *Yes Mr Brown* (1933), and four of the "14 of the 36 set" so far completed: *Bitter Sweet* (1933); *Sorrel and Son* (1933/1934-US); *Queen's Affair* (1934) (as *Runaway Queen*); and *Nell Gwyn* (1934). In 1935 they would also release *Escape Me Never* (1935) and *Brewster's Millions* (1935) per their two "special pictures" per year guaranteed US distribution. These eight special US releases are separate from UA's 1934 formation of a separate US distribution company, Mundus Distributing Corp. to release his lower budget early films in the US (and also included Korda's *Girl from Maxims* (1932).

²⁶⁵ B&D continued this contract supplying quota films for Paramount British until 1938, long after Wilcox left his company in early 1936.

for Paramount, United Artists held exclusive distribution of British and Dominions' films within the contracted territories.²⁶⁶

The contract also promised that UA distribution would deal with B&D films individually and on their own merits, and there would be no block booking of these films per UA policy—at least within the British Isles and the United States.²⁶⁷ This initial contract provided a 70/30 percent split of British Isles revenue to B&D/United Artists, with a 50/50 percent split of the revenue coming from overseas markets. Subsequent agreements in the following year adjusted and expanded upon this principle contract. The overseas market distribution would expand with the overseas agreement of August 1933 which added Central and South America, including the British West Indies, as well as China, Japan, and Korea—primarily in English-speaking areas. In December 1933, United Artists extended their contracts for B&D films for British market distribution, to extend the period beyond the initial thirty-six films to be produced, with the number of films to be delivered about or around monthly intervals after which additional films would be accepted until December 1937. This agreement would also alter clause thirteen of United Artists option to distribute B&D films within the US: it ceased to have effect, but B&D would attempt their “best efforts” with British films shot after 1934 (to December 1937, in theory), making two “special pictures” per year at about a cost of £60,000 each to be guaranteed for US distribution, with B&D's remainder films to retain UA's option to accept/reject for American distribution (except within fourteen days of London tradeshow exhibition, in contrast to the previous contract's two months allowance). Finally, these series of contracts and agreements from 1932 through 1934 were amalgamated into separate consolidating and amending agreements for the British Isles and Overseas in December 1934.

²⁶⁶ UAC, Ltd (UK) and B&D, License for Distribution, 1932-1937, p. 17. UA/2A/B25/F7. Prior to the separation of British, USA, and Overseas agreements (and the dissolution of Australia's inclusion by the end of that year), exclusive rights for these films in contracted territories included British Isles (including ships at sea); Australia (incl. Tasmania, New Zealand, and adjacent islands); Canada (Canada and Newfoundland); India (Empire of India, including British India, Native States of India, Ceylon, and Burma); and USA (including Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, but excluding Cuba and Philippines).

²⁶⁷ Their Canadian contract and other territories overseas have exceptions that allow for block booking, such as India and the Caribbean/Cristobal territory. Generally, this block booking is necessary in areas with smaller market revenues.

United Artists' preliminary optimism in acquiring what they hoped would be higher-quality British films that likewise served to meet their British quota requirements continues throughout their series of agreements with B&D (and again, later, with Alexander Korda/LFP). UA recurrently facilitated the chance for B&D to improve their product and still maintain their business. One of these methods was their agreement to provide advances based on future sales in specific (overseas) territories. For example, in their original Canadian contract, UAC, Ltd. (Canada) agreed to pay £500 advance to B&D upon acceptance of each film, to be deducted from the first monies due to the production company from the 50/50 share film rentals.²⁶⁸ Additionally, multiple loans of varying grades, from £5,000 to £20,000 were granted B&D in 1932 and 1933, with UA's recoupment of the monies being pulled from B&D's portion of revenues, most of which would come from overseas surpluses.²⁶⁹

United Artists provided this limited financing in order to help contribute to the budget of their British productions, because per the legal contract, "cost is taken between the parties as one of the criteria for establishing the quality and value of a first-class feature film."²⁷⁰ The principle thirty-six films agreement in 1932 established that these films were to cost an average of £30,000 and no less, a figure to be adjusted in subsequent years. While this monetary figure may represent a middling level of quality to these films, by the end of 1934, four (of the completed fourteen) of the "36 pictures" agreement were distributed in the United States (*Bitter Sweet*, *Sorrell and Son*, *the Queen's Affair* and *Nell Gwyn*), as well as two of their early films (*Good Night Vienna* and *Yes Mr. Brown*).²⁷¹ The consolidating agreement of December 8, 1934 clarifies that these six films' distribution in the United States garnered a 50/50 percent split of revenue (after

²⁶⁸ Clause 4 of Canadian agreement, June 17, 1932, UA/2A/B25/F6.

²⁶⁹ G. Archibald, UAC (UK) to T.P. Moroni, UA, 29 July 1933, B&D Film Corporation, June 1933-June 1935; United Artists Corp. Records, Series 9B William P. Philips files, 1921-35, Box 1, Folder 3 (hereafter UA/9B/B1/F3). Letter from G. Archibald to TP Moroni points to the monies already being deducted from the £20,000 loan from rental sales coming from New York, Canada, and the outright sales of films to South Africa. This correspondence also indicates that with the letter agreements from July 1 and 8, 1933, United Artists advanced additional £5,000 and £7,500 loans to B&D, to commence recoupment once the £20,000 loan was finished.

²⁷⁰ UAC Ltd and B&D, License for Distribution, July 1932, clause no. 5. UA/2A/B25/F7.

²⁷¹ Consolidating and Amending Overseas Agreement, 18 December 1934, B&D Film Corp. June 1933-June 1935, UA/9B/B1/F3.

recoupment of advance charges, and with incremental percentages allotted after net revenues each \$200,000). United Artists established this incremental percentage and the 50% minimum because they “don’t know which category the picture will be in ultimately”.²⁷² Yet B&D’s forthcoming films (*Brewster’s Millions* and *Escape Me Never*) held higher expectations from both companies. Produced specifically as “special pictures” for US distribution in 1935, these films were guaranteed a 75/25 percent split in revenue, which was an improvement upon previous distribution arrangements and equal to UA’s stockholder producers. Furthermore, this contract defines the value or quality of these films by delineating the minimum cost of £60,000—double the requirements from the original “36 films” agreement of December 1932.²⁷³ These two legal parameters taken together indicate United Artists’ expectations of British films if they are to distribute them in the United States, and at the same time these provisions offer a more beneficial arrangement for B&D films and Herbert Wilcox. And so, their years together were often rocky limited successes in the United States and (at least) non-English-speaking foreign markets.

At the outset, United Artists gave Herbert Wilcox and the following year Alexander Korda the impression that their films would receive equal treatment to those the company distributed for their stockholder producers. From the initial contracts between United Artists and these two British producers, legal explanation made it very clear that advertising and publicity was to be treated equally as the stockholder producers in the same “respective territories,” that UA should expend “a sum not less than that which it normally expends on an average for the feature films of” Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, and others, and that it would all be done in a first-class and dignified manner in the renting as well as publicity arrangements. United Artists promises “best efforts to the distribution and renting of each and all of the said films in the territory concerned...” United Artists is to do their best to create demand, acquire the earliest dates for release, and to provide efficient and complete distribution so that “the revenue from each of the

²⁷² Summary of December 8, 1934 consolidating agreement, 28 February 1935, B&D Film Corporation, June 1933-June 1935, UA/9B/B1/F3.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7.

said films shall be as large as is practicable but at the same time consistent with sound business policy.”²⁷⁴

This enthusiasm corresponds with the company’s general news release announcement of the deal (to its sales representatives throughout the world) in a special B&D issue of “United Artists of the World,” October 1932. In this special edition, UA provided their sales representatives publicity campaign instructions, a sample trade paper story, ideas for a contest to promote these films, etc. In the opening, UA Vice President Arthur Kelly explains why this new “international alliance” with B&D was so important to United Artists: “the magnitude and significance of this affiliation—the United Artists of the World—which is certain to earn for our company a deeper regard among exhibitors and a loftier leadership in the industry than ever before.” He continues by validating B&D stature in Britain as equivalent to that of United Artists in the USA, and that it is “both an honor and privilege” to associate with “such a powerful producing unit.” However, Kelly also warns his sales teams that:

It imposes, however, on each and every one of us a deep obligation—first, to build up for the British and Dominion stars, directors, and producers in all foreign territories the same widespread popularity that our own stars, directors, and producers enjoy; second, to create for B&D pictures a worldwide market, so as to justify their confidence in turning their product over to us for distribution. To this end, a call upon our foreign legion to enlist all its splendid manpower, all its great resources, all its boundless enthusiasm, all its resourceful and enterprising showmanship.²⁷⁵

Kelly’s “call to arms” of UA’s foreign exchange offices asks them to make the most out of this contractual affiliation. This attempt at equal treatment in terms of publicity indicates that all of United Artists’ efforts were intended to be behind these films beyond just British market exploitation. Optimism oozes from this company news release, but it also indicates the recognition that exchanges needed to create demand outside of England through their foreign branches and exchanges’ assistance.

²⁷⁴ UAC Ltd (UK) and B&D, License for Distribution, 1932-1937, p. 25-26. UA/2A/B 25/F7.

²⁷⁵ *Around the World*, vol. 1, no. 3, October 1, 1932, UA/12D/B1/F1.

The promises and plans to treat these British films with equal publicity and advertising as UA's stockholder producers is significant because in subsequent years, Herbert Wilcox, Alexander Korda, and others such as Victor Saville (British producer and director), would complain about the unequal treatment and blame UA for the limited success of these British films in the wider international market, including the United States. United Artists often transferred blame to their regional and foreign branch sales representatives for the poor turnout of some of these films. Yet in November 1933, Murray Silverstone (UAC, Ltd. (UK)) offered his own observations of B&D productions' value in view of their distribution to American and Overseas markets:

Frankly speaking, I do not think B&D are geared up at the moment to make pictures for America. They have a marvelous British Empire mentality, by which I mean they know how to make pictures that are big hits in the British Empire, particularly England, but I do not think they have as yet been able to make the type of product required by American audiences, so I really feel it would be a much safer procedure for them to get your views in advance rather than embark on a production that might subsequently be turned down by you and thus get them into financial difficulties and thereby jeopardize their being able to make more British pictures for us. It is therefore, I feel, in our own protection that we agree to Marsh's suggestion as to the procedure in regard to the option for US and would therefore recommend your approval.²⁷⁶

Silverstone supported Marsh's suggestion to alter procedure for submission of their British films for US distribution consideration to the process of submitting key production information during the preproduction stage. In doing so, he hoped UA could ensure better quality films for their US market while at the same time appeasing Wilcox's aspirations to reach it.

Regarding the non-English speaking markets' low revenues the following year, Silverstone complained to the parent company that B&D director Hubert T. Marsh:

seems to forget that the quality of the pictures he has been delivering have not been suitable for the overseas non-English speaking markets and likewise does not appreciate that it takes time to create a goodwill for his product in territories

²⁷⁶ Murray Silverstone of UAC, Ltd to Joseph Schenck, 14 November 1933, M. Silverstone, January-December 1933, UA/9B/P3/F11. While it appears otherwise, at this stage Silverstone was attempting to negotiate in B&D's stead for the alteration of US distribution procedure in order to prevent further financial issues for B&D. Marsh was concerned over the submission of B&D's films for required viewing (for US distribution possibilities) only after they were made. Getting approval during the preproduction stage would allow them to better direct their energies towards those productions recommended for American audiences.

where hereto for they have not been shown to any extent because of lack of demand.²⁷⁷

Later that same month, Silverstone denied their promise of equal management in foreign markets, and he explained to Marsh at B&D that at no time in his presence did Joseph Schenck state “that he accepted the principle that your company would have treatment equal to the stockholder producers. If he had done so, there would be no necessity for the negotiations that are now going on for a possible revision of the Overseas agreement.”²⁷⁸ Between the limited successes within both the US market and, as seen here with the non-English speaking markets, United Artists’ quality assessment of B&D films by 1934 checked B&D’s complaints concerning the treatment of their films. As much as UA seemed to be making efforts for his films, B&D and Wilcox were to infer that the quality standard of most B&D films did not meet their expectations for US distribution, nor were the films viable for non-English-speaking territories.

Despite Silverstone’s modifying Schenck’s promises, and as an example of his continued faith in B&D product after over a year’s worth of dealings, Joseph Schenck (Chairman of the UA Board of Directors) authorized concessions to B&D’s distribution contract in December 1933 to be the same terms and conditions as their Stockholders Producers’ contracts throughout the rest of the world (excluding Britain and the United States). According to Arthur Kelly, Schenck made these modifications because his trip to England made him realize that B&D was the “first English association” of United Artists, and was “contributing considerably to our English company,” and thus he felt he should help them with distribution of their films in other parts of the world.²⁷⁹ Concerning the United States, Schenck agreed to new terms guaranteeing B&D the US distribution of a minimum of two “special pictures” made between July 1934 to December 1937, as long as B&D agreed to produce and use its “best endeavors” for suitability. United Artists would require B&D to submit their preproduction materials (such as leading stars, costs, expected

²⁷⁷ Silverstone to William P. Philips, 8 March 1934, M. Silverstone, January-June 1934, UA/9B/B4/F1.

²⁷⁸ Silverstone (UAC, Ltd (UK)) to Hubert T. Marsh (B&D), 22 March 1934, B&D Film Corp June 1933-June 1935, UA/9B/B1/F3.

²⁷⁹ Kelly to Philips, 27 December 1933, Arthur Kelly June 1932-July 1935, UA/9B/B2/F3.

date of delivery, as well as script and dialogue) so that United Artists could ensure this suitability.²⁸⁰

These concessions reflect United Artists' willingness to continue offering B&D a reciprocation of sorts, one that was constricted by offering limited options for US distribution even as it maintained its full exclusivity for British and English-speaking foreign markets. Perhaps United Artists was trying to placate Herbert Wilcox after the suspension of their exclusivity clause upon the signing of a long-term, multi-picture contract for additional, "high quality" British pictures from Alexander Korda and his London Film Productions.²⁸¹ So while Wilcox was receiving a gain in access to US markets, United Artists was still maintaining strict control over it. Again, the implication is that United Artists intended their British films for' British quota requirements, and that their provision of US and worldwide distribution was merely "window dressing" to the parent company. United Artists' ultimate goal was to retain access to the British market for their stockholder producers' films in conjunction with attempting to acquire some high-quality British films. And when some films were not as great as they were hoping (not surprising, given the quick turnover of so many films), excuses could only last a short while.

With Schenck's modification of agreements, the terms concerning superimposition and dubbing would remain the same as other producers, with the production company responsible for 100% of the charges. These charges would be portrayed as part of the problem concerning foreign language market sales. According to internal correspondence at United Artists, the

²⁸⁰ Summary of Agreement, 5 December 1933, p. 7; Additionally, a letter from B&D's director to UAC (NY) concerning the particulars about *Escape Me Never* exemplifies this submission of star and director data during pre-production as regarding the release of special pictures in the USA. For UA approval, B&D submitted a copy of the play on which it was based, a short screen treatment, and an announcement of Elizabeth Bergner as female star (and consideration of Charles Farrel for the male star) and Paul Czinner as the director. B&D Director [Marsh] to UAC Secretary, 11 September 1934, B&D Film Corp. and UAC, distribution agreements, misc. and copyright material, 1933-1946; UA/2A/B26/F8-9. For more particulars concerning the "two pictures per annum" intended for the US, see also Consolidated and Amending Overseas Agreement dated December 8, 1934 between B&D and UAC Ltd, Summary, 28 February 1935, p. 6; B&D Film Corporation, June 1933-June 1935, UA/9B/B1/F3.

²⁸¹ Wilcox, *Twenty-Five Thousand Sunsets*, 158. Herbert Wilcox later took credit for getting a lift on the ban to allow Alexander Korda to acquire distribution for his film *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933). But *Henry VIII's* subsequent worldwide success led UA to sign Korda to additional multipicture deals; thus Korda's company started to tread upon B&D's position as exclusive British film provider.

overseas agreements in distributing various British films to Canada, India, and the English speaking territories of China, Malaya, and the Philippines, and then to South America, Central America, and other foreign language territories, led to controversy and increasing concerns over B&D's growing debit balance from those few films distributed to foreign markets as of May 1934. In December 1933, the non-English territories as well as Canada and India had charges for prints etc. being charged against only the B&D share of that territories' revenue, thus making it "impossible for B&D to make money in these territories." Arthur Kelly explains that "outside of Canada, B&D haven't had a dime" and a revising of the accounting will "only result in probably eliminating a lot of debit balances against their individual pictures."²⁸²

Yet B&D's managing director Hubert T. Marsh continued to complain about overseas sales (especially within the foreign language territories) and blamed United Artists for the lack of equal treatment compared to its American producers. This behavior led to increased irritation at UAC, Ltd. (UK). By April 1934, Arthur Kelly clarified that the reason B&D films failed overseas was that "on the face of it" it seems United Artists has performed disgracefully, but they had "sincerely tried" to create a market for B&D pictures all over the world. And he allows that "the debit balances would not be as bad if the B&D had had producers terms," since they would have been split between them and the distributor. Yet according to Kelly, B&D's films were not the necessary "type" for worldwide distribution:

We have sincerely tried to try and establish a market for the British and Dominions pictures all over the world, but they certainly do not make the right type of picture we can sell readily. God knows I have written to the foreign organizations enough about the position on the subjects but they just don't seem to be able to get anywhere. Unless the British and Dominions make a different type of picture to what they have in the past, I'm very much afraid that our salesforce will never be able to satisfy Mr. Marsh.²⁸³

After laying the blame upon B&D production values, he concludes with:

²⁸² A. Kelly to W. P. Phillips, 27 December 1933, A. Kelly June 1932-July 1935, UA/9B/B2/F3. Kelly is asking Phillips in accounting to cable the accounting units of South America, Australia, India, and the Far East to adjust the books for the year ending December 1933. A postscript indicates that there will be the same adjustment made with London Film Productions, once their large number of pictures contracts is signed, i.e. parallel to B&D's contract.

²⁸³ A. Kelly to W. P. Phillips, 3 April 1934, A. Kelly June 1932-July 1935, UA/9B/B2/F3.

I realize of course, that British & Dominions want to get some revenue out of their pictures and not distribute them for the purpose of breaking even, but it has been a hard battle and I am very sorry we ever took the pictures on for the Overseas market but we only did so for the purpose of showing our good faith in trying to see if we could find a world's market for them.²⁸⁴

Ultimately, an amendment to the overseas agreement in December 1934 canceled B&D's debit balance concerning the few films distributed to foreign markets as of May 1934, and in exchange, United Artists held full rights for these films per any future overseas distribution.²⁸⁵

With the kinds of films Wilcox (and Korda) were attempting to produce, United Artists supported their aim for a wider market, thus creating a seemingly mutually-beneficial relationship. At the same time, the very uniqueness of this distribution-only company hindered their efforts. For example, the company policy of *not* block booking in US distribution (unlike all their competitors) and basing each individual film upon its own merits kept them from pushing these British films through, packaged with other American-produced films, and thus limited the opportunities of building upon an initial access point within the market, and from there to creating recognizable British stars, developing their own American fans, etc.²⁸⁶ On the other hand, some individuals at United Artists would see the problem to be the films themselves, that they were not "suitable" for US and/or world distribution (or too "foreign," perhaps?). Although United Artists started with such

²⁸⁴ Ibid. Actually, this correspondence also indicates that India did have the money; India block booking, selling in advance to get the play dates they wanted there, grossed more than the average English picture shown. However, he explains, the problem was that the conditions in India were bad at the moment due to the uprisings [of this period], and thus the movie business there was suffering.

²⁸⁵ Overseas Agreement, Amended 18 December 1934, p. 21, Clause 22(a); UA/9B/B1/F3. A few exceptions of B&D films are listed concerning the First Schedule of releases. Interestingly, after these arguments concerning B&D's older product were debated and once these films' distribution revenue rights were transferred fully to United Artists, United Artists established them under Mundus Distributing Corporation, a separate company formed to distribute these films for their "double bill" possibilities. They established a company that would have no public association with United Artists, due to the perceived lower quality values of the films in contrast with UA's "prestige" quality films. Thus, United Artists was determined to keep their company and its reputation separate from this secondary US distribution company. Perhaps this strategy was intended to boost revenue from the foreign losses on these films by attempting to distribute them in the United States with the reinstatement of the double bill feature in American theaters. For more, see Mundus Distributing Corporation, New York worksheet and announcements, June 1934, British & Dominion Films, 1934-1943, United Artists Corp. Records, Series 1L Print Department, Robert Hilton Papers, 1932-53, Box 2, Folder 3 (hereafter UA/1L/B2/F3).

²⁸⁶ See Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 57, for more concerning the advantages and disadvantages of distributing through a distribution-only company on an individual film basis.

extreme optimism at the outset of their dealings with B&D, by the end of their contract many of the UA Directors (as well as those with B&D) became dissatisfied with some films' outcomes in worldwide distribution. Luckily for them, worldwide distribution was primarily intended to cater to B&D/Herbert Wilcox's goals towards an international market; United Artists Corporation's primary goal was achieved—the acquisition of (at least) decent quality films to meet the requirements of the British quota, preserve their reputation for higher-quality pictures, and allow them to maintain access to the British market.

Herbert Wilcox: Appealing to Overseas Audiences

While British producers like Wilcox and Korda felt the need to prioritize their aim for the American market ahead of the global market, this priority does not exclude the impact of their films and their intentions to achieve global success and recognition. When making the decision to exploit their films to a larger market, producers had to decide first whether their film should be similar or competitively different to Hollywood product. For example, after his first year with United Artists, Herbert Wilcox claimed to be happy with the distribution company and with his grosses coming from America, and he determined to supply a product more aptly suited and similar in high-quality to Hollywood-produced films. During a visit to United Artists' New York office, Wilcox declared himself “to be completely sold on United Artists.”²⁸⁷ He altered his future filmmaking plans to make only eight pictures per year instead of the previous thirteen per year, in order to make nothing but pictures “adapted to the American Market as well as to the British Market.” He was determined to expand his own production quality in order to facilitate more ease of access and ultimately success in the US market.²⁸⁸

In regards to the 1933 letter agreement between UA and B&D, in which B&D was guaranteed American distribution of at least two “special pictures” per year, and to assure UA that

²⁸⁷ William P. Philips to Arthur Kelly, 13 July 1934, Arthur W. Kelly June 1932-July 1935, UA/9B/B2/F3.

²⁸⁸ Richard Norton claims that his restraint upon Wilcox's profligacy helped to decrease their output in 1934 with three major films both that year and 1935, with fewer minor productions. He complained that Wilcox had been too quick to action, doing too much, too many pictures, and too fast, without waiting on returns before doing the next film. See Grantley, *Silver Spoon: Being Extracts from the Random Reminiscences of Lord Grantley*, 167; Rachael Low points to this as a clue of Wilcox's own temperament. See Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:147.

B&D produced films worthy of that concession, Herbert Wilcox and United Artists established a process to ensure that the final product would be viable. This process included getting the parent company to sign off on: the story, in both script and dialogue form; the stars to be cast in the film; the directors and key technicians to be used; as well as contacting the Hays office for censorship advice concerning the individual films. A series of correspondence (memos, cablegrams, and letters) about the preproduction in the fall of 1934 for *Escape Me Never* points to this process for B&D acquiring American acceptance from United Artists. By September, B&D had sent a copy of the play on which the film was to be based, as well as a short screen treatment, both of which were submitted to the production code authorities by United Artists. Additionally, they announced that the female star would be Elizabeth Bergner and the male star “at present under consideration” is Charles Farrel, with the conclusion that as they would be “exchanging cables with Mr. Schenck on the subject of the casting of the male lead you will signify your approval by cable at a later date.”²⁸⁹ After receiving the film’s story, the screen treatment and dialogue form, the male and female stars, and notification that the director was to be Paul Czinner, a series of cablegrams to and from Joseph Schenck asking and giving acceptance for US distribution with a 75/25 split in revenue was followed subsequently by a formalized letter stating these details.²⁹⁰ Additionally, prior to filming *Escape Me Never* in 1934, his managing director Hubert T. Marsh willingly sought advice from US censors in the Hays Office in order to ensure the film’s “safety,” or that it would have no future US distribution problems.²⁹¹ Wilcox probably also understood that he could utilize Hollywood’s global dominance to his advantage, given that the censorship restrictions would be sufficient to cover many global variables.

²⁸⁹ Letter from B&D Director to United Artists Corporation (of Delaware) Secretary, 11 September 1934, B&D and UAC, miscellaneous and copyright material, 1933-46, UA/2A/B26/F8-F9.

²⁹⁰ Correspondence of Joseph Schenck, 24-25 October 1934; 11 September 1934 to 25 October 1934, B&D and UAC, miscellaneous and copyright material, 1933-46, UA/2A/B26/F8-9.

²⁹¹ Marsh and Wilcox maintained this correspondence with the Hays Office through UA channels. For this example, Marsh corresponded through letters and telegrams with William P. Philips at UA to acquire the Hays Office’s advice concerning the script and filming of *Escape Me Never*. For example, see Marsh (B&D) to Philips (UA), 31 July 1934; Philips to Marsh, telegram, 13 August 1934; Marsh to Philips, 16 September 1934; and more through to October 1934. B&D Film Corp., June 1933-June 1935, UA/9B/B1/F3.

With these intentions, Wilcox also shaped his films for the American market by attempting to create similar efforts as Hollywood. Unlike Michael Balcon, Wilcox was more willing to be influenced by American styles in order to achieve a wider distribution and hopefully a profitable success. In his correspondence with the UA NY office about *Escape Me Never* (1934), Wilcox explains "...we are being advised in its [the film script's] final preparation by our American scenario writer, Mr. Paul Gangelin, in order that we may secure a tempo and a style that will appeal to overseas audiences."²⁹² From 1934, he openly declared his intention to adapt his films to the American market as well as the British Market, which included seeking script advice from the Hays Office censors prior to filming (to avoid distribution problems), and even at times hiring American screenwriters to finalize a script—as he did with the *Escape Me Never* in 1934. By this reference to "overseas audiences", he presumably had the American market in mind, but other international audiences were also accustomed by this time to a similar Hollywood style (given its global dominance and success). Rachael Low also mentions Wilcox's use of American technicians, such as Paramount writer Samson Raphaelson on *Queens Affair*, and Merrill White, "a leading American editor" on *Queens Affair* and "all of Wilcox's best films" to adapt his product towards American tastes, especially through script and editing styles.²⁹³ With his "special picture" *Brewster's Millions* (1934), Wilcox's use of a Hollywood international star as well as an American director highlights his hopes for it to do well in US theaters.

Herbert Wilcox grounded many of his 1930s strategies in targeting the American market upon his earlier years of experience in the film business, both in selling American films to Yorkshire exhibitors as well as the US distribution of his 1920s silent films. In hindsight, Wilcox described how his early film training taught him about audiences, their tastes and reactions. In Britain's post-World War I years, a Yorkshire film salesman could only see the cinema owners at night. From long walks from village to village and "wearisome waits to see the manager," he would sit in "smelly, smoky flea pits waiting for the boss; and it was there, with the flickering, ill-lit

²⁹² Herbert Wilcox (B&D) to William P. Phillips (UA), 18 Sept 1934, B&D Film Corp., June 1933-June 1935, UA/9B/B1/F3.

²⁹³ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:147.

screen, and the interminable solo piano accompaniment, that I learned much about audience taste and reaction.”²⁹⁴ After moving to London and making silent films of his own in the early 1920s, he quickly learned which type of films to make based on audience preferences. And after a massive public failure of his first film with a more realistic setting, followed by a successful hit with a “florid melodrama,” he understood how audience taste had altered since. “No more stark realism. Audiences have enough of that, and rationing and shortages were still with us. My objective now was escape entertainment of pleasant people in pleasant surroundings doing pleasant things, or highly colored musical romance.”²⁹⁵ This awareness of audience preferences continued to shape his objectives throughout the 1920s and the 1930s (and thereafter). From pleasing British audiences to those in America, he was willing to produce the kind and style of film to entertain the masses.

Another aspect to Wilcox’s approach in targeting the American market involved a similar star policy to the one Michael Balcon utilized (as previously discussed). In adapting his films to seem more comprehensible to American audiences, he had long understood the necessity of using familiar faces and the importance of the Star commodity. Rachael Low explains that it was his acquisition of two stars under contract by 1931, Anna Neagle and Jack Buchanan, which instigated Wilcox to break with his previous distributors (his colleague C.M. Woolf/GB) and sign with United Artists to “tackle” the American market.²⁹⁶ Sarah Street also emphasizes that from Wilcox’s start, he wanted and obtained US distribution, and for that end, he was a firm believer in the box office appeal of stars. His decision to use American star Dorothy Gish in his silent film version of *Nell Gwyn* (1925, BR; 1926, US) confirmed this belief when the film became the greatest success in the US market for British films during the 1920s.²⁹⁷ (It also helped that he

²⁹⁴ Wilcox, *Twenty-Five Thousand Sunsets*, 47.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁹⁶ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:146.

²⁹⁷ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 24.

made an exceptional distribution deal with Paramount, who controlled the largest number of theaters in the US.)²⁹⁸

The previous chapter mentions the significant role that transatlantic crossings of talent, including actors, directors, and technicians. The decision to maintain this star policy and shaping his film content to better suit American preferences reflects upon Wilcox's intent to succeed; and furthermore, unlike Balcon later claimed for himself, Wilcox was more than willing to utilize this approach and allow his films to be less ostensibly "British" for want of this international audience.

Luckily, the genre of historical pictures or costume dramas allowed Wilcox (and other British producers) the flexibility of providing distinctively British subject matter in a more Hollywood style of filmmaking. In the early 1920s, Sir Oswald Stoll discovered that his strategy of conveying Britishness through adaptations of popular literature classics by well-known British authors met with some success in the United States (especially with his Sherlock Holmes films).²⁹⁹ Herbert Wilcox a few years later would learn from his own experience with *Nell Gwyn* in 1926 that, while costume dramas were generally considered an unpopular genre, a more comedic overturning of history with humor and sex appeal subverted the genre stereotype. (This same formula would succeed also with Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* in 1933.) Street describes Wilcox's strategy as an internationalist policy with historical pictures which proved that there was no need to "stifle" national themes.³⁰⁰ By the 1930s, Herbert Wilcox understood that this same formula could be useful with his "special" pictures, including *Nell Gwyn* (1934), *Peg of Old Drury* (1935), *Victoria the Great* (1937) and subsequent films of the 1940s.

Wilcox continued to seek US censorship advice from the Hays office in order to avoid difficulties distributing in the United States. Ironically, problems would still arise, especially concerning the US release of *Nell Gwyn* (1934), and subsequently it has become an oft-quoted example by British film scholars on the difficulties of the American market.³⁰¹ But a closer look at

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 23.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 16.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 71.

³⁰¹ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*; Slide, "Banned in the USA."

how Wilcox interacted with the American PCA through their business correspondence highlights his schemes and intentions to do whatever necessary—to the point of his own disappointment and subsequent bitterness with United Artists. With his experiences with *Nell Gwyn*, Wilcox drew near the line he preferred not to cross. As much as he was willing to alter content and style to shape audience preferences in America, the PCA's requirements for shooting new scenes for the beginning and end of the film (and thus altering the story's historical integrity) evoked this response from Wilcox:

I would rather have done without American distribution altogether than perpetrate such an insult to the memory of one who still enjoys a warm place in the hearts of most Londoners. But the American distributors, who had a small financial stake in the picture, were not so sentimental or squeamish. They made most of the cuts and, after I left, shot the shocking epilogue— but not with Anna [Neagle], of course.³⁰²

Ultimately, in contrast with the film's success in Britain and elsewhere, Wilcox blamed these censorship changes for the disastrous outcome in the American market.

The film duly made its appearance on the American screen and, not surprisingly, was a failure. However, I made a very handsome profit indeed from the rest of the world, and Anna's stock as an actress of stature grew enormously. When Nell Gwyn opened in London the critics went wild. Audiences went wild. At the Leicester Square Theatre it was more like a football match than a cinema. Endless crowds waited to get in. The takings... exceeded £1,000 per day. And there it stayed for months.³⁰³

His bitterness with United Artists so readily abiding with these censorship parameters without seemingly negotiating “better” provisions for the film was an influential factor in his leaving B&D (and thus his personal dealings with UA) after 1935. Per his autobiography, Nell Gwyn's censorship reads as the main trigger, but his departure was more comprehensive concerning what he perceived as UA's overall limited support of his films in the US market: “Having been pushed into the background by my American distributors to the detriment of my own company, I decided to defy their threats, withdraw my productions from their distribution, and resign my own

³⁰² Wilcox, *Twenty-Five Thousand Sunsets*, 102.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

position as managing director of British and Dominions... I was no match for the Americans."³⁰⁴

Wilcox was disgruntled with UA and Hollywood, because he felt even decades later that he had lost about \$1 million from this early censorship enforcement in the American market.³⁰⁵ Yet he was not so upset with Hollywood distribution that he did not team up with Universal and RKO in the following years.

Alexander Korda and his International Business Approach

While United Artists signed Herbert Wilcox's and Alexander Korda's production companies to extensive distribution contracts serving their British quota agenda while providing these producers the means for reaching worldwide audiences, Wilcox's and Korda's experiences reflect their different relationships to the American company and draw attention to their different methods in targeting American and global markets. Whereas Herbert Wilcox laid some of the foundations concerning UA's dealings with British producers, it would be Alexander Korda who raised the quality bar further and commanded more respect as a producer in their developing relationship.

Within the year of signing Herbert Wilcox's British and Dominions Films Corporation, back in London, UAC, Ltd. lost their supplement deal distributing Columbia's product to the British market in 1933, and they needed more product to distribute in Britain.³⁰⁶ Tino Balio explains that the superiority of Korda's Paramount British quota picture *Service for Ladies* recommended him as a "suitable producer" for UA's roster.³⁰⁷ After Gaumont British cancelled their recent six-picture deal for Korda to make six first features (as a result of Korda's request for cash advances on the entire "programme," as opposed to just the current film in production), Korda was desperately in

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 104. He passed the managing directorship over to C.M Woolf to continue the "battle" against UA.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 102. This claim to a figure of \$1 million is impossible to corroborate with evidence. Scholars like Sarah Street have mentioned that Wilcox's autobiography has a few non-supportable and exaggerated claims such as this.

³⁰⁶ Columbia opened office exchanges in Britain, and stopped distributing through UAC, Ltd. See Balio, *United Artists, Vol. 1, 1919-1950*, 133; Mike Walsh explains that UA's deal with Wilcox violated the Columbia contract (and led to the termination of their agreement). See Michael Walsh, "Options for American Foreign Distribution: United Artists in Europe, 1919-1930," in *Film Europe and Film America: Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange, 1920-1939*, ed. Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 149.

³⁰⁷ Balio, *United Artists, Vol. 1, 1919-1950*, 133.

need of funding to finish Maxim's and make his next project with Charles Laughton. Soon after acquiring funding with Italian banker Giuseppe Toeplitz, he was able to settle his distribution plans with United Artists.³⁰⁸ Between the recommendations of Herbert Wilcox, Richard Norton Lord Grantley, and one of his own films, United Artists brought Alexander Korda into the fold, despite the legal exclusivity they held with Herbert Wilcox.³⁰⁹ United Artists originally decided to contract Alexander Korda for two pictures in 1933, *The Girl from Maxim's* and *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. The worldwide success of the latter generated excitement at United Artists and would lead to longer term contracts, multiple picture deals, and eventually a directorship on their board within two years.

In contrast to Herbert Wilcox, the first films that UA contracted from Alexander Korda were expected to be higher quality given his financial backing, and by late 1933 both of Korda's first UA-distributed films received extensive distribution targeting English-speaking territories throughout the world. UA licensed *Girl from Maxim's* (1933) for distribution in Australasia by United Artists (AUS) with their 14 October 1932 agreement; then the 1933 supplement added London Film Productions' allowance for UA to distribute (until 1 June 1937) in each of the "scheduled territories": the British Isles, British ships, Empire of India, Japan (including Korea and Manchuria), Union of South Africa and any territory mandated to it, and also (for "convenience") it includes Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika.³¹⁰ This film received the A film treatment with this global arrangement, but since Korda filmed it in a French studio, they could not register it as a "British" film to serve UA's quota requirements. So, although they still planned to release it in

³⁰⁸ Drazin, *Korda*, 94–100; See Drazin's account for more about how Korda lost his deal with Gaumont British, acquired funding through Toeplitz, and came up with his idea for the Charles Laughton feature film, *Henry VIII*.

³⁰⁹ Wilcox, *Twenty-Five Thousand Sunsets*, 158. Wilcox takes the credit in his autobiography for Korda's joining UA by releasing UA from the exclusivity clause. He relates his story of how Korda called him, begged him to leave his ban for just this one film, to which he eventually consented. Wilcox's account is also quoted in Balio, *United Artists, Vol. 1, 1919-1950*, 132–133; Richard Norton also claims ownership getting Korda's work for UA distribution after meeting with Korda (at a friend's suggestion) and convincing Murray Silverstone to give him a six-film contract; for more on his account, see Grantley, *Silver Spoon: Being Extracts from the Random Reminiscences of Lord Grantley*, 164.

³¹⁰ Digest of Agreement between LFP, UA, UAC (UK), 3 August 1933, Agreements with English production and distribution corporations: UAC, UAC Ltd. And London Films, 1930s; UA/2A/B26/F11.

Britain, perhaps UA decided to extend its distribution to make up for this restriction. Yet this initial agreement and those with Henry VIII set a precedence for Korda's subsequent films, and it probably raised his expectations that his films should receive a much wider distribution than even Wilcox achieved.

The second film in the original agreement, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, was initially contemplated as an A film alongside *Girl from Maxim's*, but United Artists decided to license it as a B film in their legal contracts when they decided it would be the first of a series of five films in a multi-picture deal. According to this letter agreement, although "being treated as a B film," it would be distributed in the USA as well as receive first-class dubbing in French for France and her colonies.³¹¹ From the start of Alexander Korda's deals with United Artists, he quickly established a broader distribution network outside of the British Isles. In the first place, United Artists had already learned in the past year with Herbert Wilcox that some British films did well enough in foreign territories to provide additional profit and still pay off his early advances. Yet in contrast to Wilcox's early pictures, Korda had already demonstrated a higher quality British quota film production (*Service For Ladies* (1932) for Paramount British), and he was already beginning to establish himself as more of a European producer with *Girl From Maxim's*.

London Film Productions' principle agreement with United Artists, 17 May 1933, guaranteed the distribution of (the first of) a series of five films with which United Artists would get production approval from scripts to stars, directors and titles, etc., and it entitled UA to inspect production at the studios, the film rushes, and more.³¹² This approval process was established about the same time B&D/Herbert Wilcox acquired his agreement for two "special pictures" per year for US distribution, which led to his own similar process granting the American company production approval. Yet with Korda's contract, this degree of required approval for all five films provided a method for United Artists to ensure an elevated level of quality, especially for those categorized as A films.

³¹¹ Digest of Letter Agreement, 3 August 1933, UA/2A/B26/F11.

³¹² Digest of Principle Agreement, 17 May 1933, Agreements with English production and distribution corporations: UAC, UAC Ltd. and London Films, 1930s; UA/2A/B26/F11.

Alexander Korda agreed to supervise and direct the B films himself, with a cost between £55,000 to £60,000 each; the three A films were to total about £90,000, with each film not costing less than £20,000. (It is interesting to note that they considered what must have been about £30,000 budget for each of these three films to equate them with A film quality, which is a surprisingly low figure in contrast with the usual minimum average of around £60,000.) The British Isles and the world would receive both A and B films, and United Artists would consider optioning (only) the A films for USA distribution—if application was made within eight weeks of being first shown in London (the two-month rule).³¹³ Interestingly, the category A films were the only ones considered viable for distribution to the US even though they had a lesser monetary requirement assigned to them. Parallel to the Majors' system in the USA, this categorization scheme places the A films as one of superior quality and higher budget.

Perhaps the price line on his category B films was higher in order to ensure that it did not turn into a “quota quickie,” but rather a “modest” picture for worldwide distribution (excluding the USA). Maintaining United artists' reputation for high quality product remained a primary objective as they signed up another British producer, and one whom they likely believed could make better quality product than they had received so far from B&D. In contrast to the American company perspective of a modest budget, British producers considered £60,000 a steep amount that necessitated American distribution in order to make any profit whatsoever. Richard Norton, who worked with United Artists at the time, explains the initial cold reaction to Korda's pitched idea for *Henry VIII* from the UA Sales Manager in New York. “It was to the effect that historical films were bad box office, and that certainly a modestly costed British one would not have the slightest chance. The word ‘modest’ meant £50,000 – £60,000, which to us was colossal, and absolutely necessitated distribution in America to recoup such a figure.”³¹⁴ This was the same budget figure that Gaumont British used to make first features for American distribution, with the same predicated necessity.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Grantley, *Silver Spoon: Being Extracts from the Random Reminiscences of Lord Grantley*, 165.

The subsequent publicized success of *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) led to increasing excitement for more films of ostensibly higher quality in contrast with any British “quickies” from other American studios to fill UA’s roster for distribution, especially within the British market itself.³¹⁵ Joseph Schenck makes this stark comparison in his correspondence during his visit to England in 1934, explaining that compared to other US companies’ “quickies” produced to meet the British quota, United Artists’ British productions were “great box-office pictures” and by selling them, “these pictures we distribute help sell our pictures.”³¹⁶ In other words, with such worldwide success with films like *Henry VIII*, these British films’ role within the mutually beneficial relationship was to help sell UA’s other, American pictures. Tino Balio summarizes it succinctly: soon after *Henry VIII*’s success, UA signed Korda into a sixteen-picture contract with a better US distribution percentage of revenue (75/25 instead of a 50/50 percent split), and then UA made him a partner (on the board of directors) in September 1935.³¹⁷

After establishing two five-film agreements in 1933, Korda entered into this additional sixteen-film agreement with United Artists in January 1934. This agreement established a new series of sixteen films to start production in January 1934, with two films delivered every eight months. Interestingly, this legal contract established that no more than two films showed be shot simultaneously in the studio, and it also designated that movie stars Charles Laughton and Maurice Chevalier were each to have a film within the next year. Korda was required to supervise and direct the first eight of these sixteen films.³¹⁸ The structure of this contract differs significantly

³¹⁵ Balio, *United Artists, Vol. 1, 1919-1950*, 134. Balio qualifies this success, stressing that coming from the US market, a British film making \$500,000 there is to be considered a success. It reached higher figures worldwide. Charles Drazin purports that as such a landmark of the British screen, some (including Alexander and Michael Korda) exaggerated the scale of their triumph. Drazin found the “real figure” in the Prudential Assurance company files for LFP, citing a box-office report of the total world receipts up to September of 1938 as £214,360—not quite as grand as Korda may have imagined; Drazin, *Korda*, 104–105. Using Sedgwick’s exchange rate calculation of \$4.5 to the pound, it would be the equivalent of just under \$1 million at that time.

³¹⁶ Joseph Schenck to Dennis O’Brien, 11 January 1934, UA/1A/B165/F3; also quoted in Balio, *United Artists, Vol. 1, 1919-1950*, 134.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

³¹⁸ Narrative Summary of Sixteen-Film Agreement, 18 January 1934 between LFP, UA, UAC, A. Korda, L. Toepfritz, Agreements with English production and distribution corporations: UAC, UAC Ltd. and London Films, 1930s; UA/2A/B26/F18.

from Herbert Wilcox's agreements. The importance of Korda as a director and scale of supervisor on these films to ensure their higher quality stature following the unexpected success of *Henry VIII* indicates an altered attitude from the distributor towards this British producer in contrast to Wilcox. Korda would continue this trajectory in establishing a stronger stature within the United Artists company. Charles Drazin describes this new agreement as effectively giving Korda *carte blanche*, where "for the first time he was free to choose film subjects without having first to secure someone else's approval."³¹⁹ Like Drazin suggests, these favorable terms reflect how UA perceived Korda's potential value.

However, this new agreement also modified all the previous agreements so that there would no longer be a distinction between his A and B category films concerning the distribution of them in the United States or as to their cost. The agreement continues: "All films to be produced and dealt with as if they were B films," and no distinction was to be made between the first and second series of five films. This modification delineated that two of every four films would be registered as British for quota purposes, and the producer [LFP] was to make their best efforts to have the remainder films registered as British films as well.³²⁰ Ironically, the all B treatment established a lower status for his British films in comparison to UA's American product within the context of their American distribution, even after Korda's achievements with *Henry VIII*. At the same time, this treatment means that UA expected at least a £60,000 value to all of Korda's films. Once they reaped the worldwide profits from *Henry VIII*, even as it was treated as a B picture in the US, their trust would seem well placed.

In some ways, it is difficult to compare Herbert Wilcox and Alexander Korda in their business relations with United Artists. United Artists intended to use both producers' films towards maintaining their access of the British market, and yet Korda quickly established a higher stature for his films within the company. Each of these men brought different levels of experience to their

³¹⁹ Drazin, *Korda*, 106.

³²⁰ Narrative Summary of Sixteen-Film Agreement, 18 January 1934 between LFP, UA, UAC, A. Korda, L. Toepfritz, Agreements with English production and distribution corporations: UAC, UAC Ltd. and London Films, 1930s; UA/2A/B26/F18.

contracts. Herbert Wilcox was a long-term and well-established British film producer dating back to the post-World War I era, and weathered the transition to sound films with aplomb. In contrast, Korda was a new arrival to the British film industry, and he managed to achieve a quick but significant success that established his name worldwide. Within three years, Wilcox left B&D and UA to start a new production company with different distribution affiliations; Korda joined United Artists' Board of Directors.

Furthermore, both producers applied different filmmaking approaches towards attaining success within the US market, therefore United Artists used these British products differently. United Artists' contractual requirement that only half of his films must be registered as British with the Board of Trade indicates that UA only marginally intended Korda's product to serve their quota agenda. Instead, Korda had less restrictions than Wilcox and B&D when it came to their British film requirements, and UA expected Korda's films to be worthy of a more global distribution, including the non-English-speaking territories and especially Europe. Given his Hungarian and European production background, perhaps they considered his films to have a more "Continental"-pleasing approach especially with planned projects with more international themes like *The Rise of Catherine the Great* (1934), *The Private Life of Don Juan* (1934), *Rembrandt* (1936), and *Knight Without Armour* (1937). The European traits to some of Korda's films allowed for a flexibility beyond distribution to primarily English-speaking territories. Additionally, given that the production company was to cover 100% the costs for subtitles and/or dubbing for their films being sent to foreign language territories, Korda appears more willing to make these expenditures in order to acquire a wider international market. For example, in a continued series of agreements between LFP and United Artists in 1935 to 1936, UA granted Korda the right to distribute particular films through agreements with other distribution companies in Europe in exchange for United Artists receiving 5% of London Films share of revenue. Specific examples given include distributors in Italy, Germany, as well as Prague, Czechoslovakia. These

particular examples are likely indicative of the changing political climate in Italy and Germany at this time.³²¹

By 1935, Korda eventually maneuvered his position in order to become a stock shareholder producer in the company, and ultimately he secured for himself the full “equal treatment” that was not afforded to Wilcox and B&D. For example, B&D’s achievement of a 70/30 split of US revenue of their few special pictures seems minimal in contrast to Korda’s long-term agreement for 75/25 percent split in revenues for all his subsequent films. Overall, B&D made many more films that were of a lesser or middle quality, and they would serve a different purpose than making fewer films of greater quality, as Herbert Wilcox learned during his few years with UA. Meanwhile, London Films based their dealings with UA on that fewer films/greater quality stasis, and Korda requested more advances, increased budgets, and higher expectations with the subsequent years. Budgets of his films jumped steadily upward during the following years, and Korda increased demands upon his financial backers at this time, Prudential Assurance, with figures over £100,000 per film and promises of abundant returns.³²² In his mind, the lavish spending and glamour onscreen was the prime method to compete with Hollywood’s output; he was not wrong, but it was a risky endeavor. Ultimately, United Artists considered Korda to be a great asset, therefore they legally required Korda to be directly involved in most of LFP’s films; this also reflects the importance of his status maintaining United Artists’s reputation. For example, this aspect of reputation is emphasized in one of their subsequent agreements dated September

³²¹ Agreement, 3 September 1935, between LFP, Korda, UAC allowing LFP to fulfill agreement with Mander Films as distributor in Italy; Draft of Agreement, 1936, between LFP, Korda, UAC allowing LFP to fulfill agreement with Rotafilm A.G. as distributor in Germany; LFP, AK, and UAC: complete file of agreements and related materials, 1934-1936; UA/2A/B29/F3. Korda also maintained a separate Canadian distribution contract with Anglo-Canadian Distributors, dating back to 1932; UA held same policy with exchange of 5% of London Films’ revenue share. Canadian distribution will be briefly discussed in the following chapter.

³²² Drazin, *Korda*, 126–127, 141, 149. *Don Juan* (1934) cost approximately £115,000, but took only about £50,000 at the box office. *Scarlet Pimpernel* (1935) cost almost £150,000, but its box office receipts were well over £200,000. By 1936, these extreme budgets met their boiling point as LFP took a major hit after *Things To Come* (1936) “swelled” to £240,000, making it Britain’s most expensive film and failed to recoup its cost. Even after Prudential reorganized their structure, Korda continued his tendency to expensive tastes, budgeting *Rembrandt* (1936) at £100,000 with an eventual cost was £142,888. For more specifics on his filmmaking methods during these years, see Drazin’s well-researched biography of Alexander Korda.

2, 1935, that his films be a first-class quality with “regard to the nature of the subject, to the best heretofore made by them, and of the same high standard and distributed through the distributor [UA], and for which they have established a unique name, celebrity, prestige and reputation.”³²³ His extravagant filmmaking approach and expensive product precisely served their purposes during these years.

At a time when the British market profits helped to save United Artists’ accounts, B&D was signed on to an exclusive contract; the allowance of Korda to break that bond destroyed not only Wilcox’s exclusivity, but in the following years United Artists never established exclusivity with another British production company, not even London Films. Instead, by the late 1930s, United Artists began signing up more British companies, often in affiliation with London Films or their Denham Studios, as the company itself was expanding their international distribution network even further abroad. As Korda’s stature within United Artists ascended, perhaps it is not a coincidence that soon after Korda became a Director in the company, Herbert Wilcox left B&D and started a new production company, Herbert Wilcox Productions, to be affiliated with a different distribution company (General Films Distributors and through them, Universal Pictures in America). Charles Drazin claims that in the aftermath of *Henry VIII*, Korda “would display a consistently possessive attitude to his relationship with United Artists. When it came to other British-based producers, he did not want any competitors.”³²⁴ Meanwhile, during the British film industry’s peak of production from 1935 to early 1937, just prior to its major economic downspin, United Artists acquired and distributed more than requisite by the British quota within Britain, especially at 47% during the 1936/37 season!³²⁵ United Artists established a successful British quota strategy that enabled them to maintain their reputation for delivering superior films.

³²³ Five-year Contract, 2 September 1935, p. 3; LFP, Korda, and UAC: complete file of agreements and related materials, 1934-36; UA/2A/B29/F3. Contract between LFP, Korda, UA establishing a five-year agreement with four to six pictures per year, but no more than six per year.

³²⁴ Drazin, *Korda*, 107. Drazin references this attitude when Korda blocked Giuseppe Toeplitz from seeking separate backing from United Artists in 1934.

³²⁵ “Product as announced and delivered,” N.D.; LFP, Korda, and UAC: complete file of agreements and related materials, 1937-38; UA/2A/B29/F4. In the 1935/36 season, twenty-seven films were announced, and thirteen films were delivered in total UA product. Four of these were considered “foreign” a.k.a.

Even so, like Wilcox, the outcome of Alexander Korda's successes in worldwide distribution was tempered by their limited achievements in the United States. Tino Balio explains that after *Henry VIII's* triumph, only one of the ten following London Films' productions could be considered to have achieved another success: *The Ghost Goes West* (1935). Balio is primarily defining this "success" in terms of the American market, and with Korda's over-spending budgets making it increasingly difficult to return a profit.³²⁶ Korda grew increasingly dissatisfied with United Artists and their handling of his product in America. According to Balio, Korda lost \$200,000 on the distribution [presumably in the US] of his films during his first year as a UA partner. Rachael Low states that by May 1936, London Film Productions faced losses of over £330,000.³²⁷ On the other hand, Sarah Street defends United Artists, explaining that "United Artists made great efforts to promote British product with varying results, the most successful post-Henry VIII films being *Catherine the Great* (rentals \$282,083; 1934); *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (\$376, 866; 1935); *The Ghost Goes West* (\$156,722, 1936, third-highest grosser); *Drums* (1938, eighth highest grosser), and *The Four Feathers* (1939, sixth highest grosser)."³²⁸ However, Street acknowledges that these were hardly "spectacular" figures, and as Korda faced many financial difficulties, he blamed his distributor for not promoting them properly. Street makes a very valid argument that his films did not earn as much as they might have, had United Artists been a vertically integrated company like the Hollywood major studios; but then, if UA had been vertically integrated, then their interest in British films might have been "less pronounced."³²⁹ Furthermore, Korda's position as a UA partner "gave him bargaining power within the central organization," but as a result, this

British films, making them 30% of films provided. In the 1936/37 season, thirty-two films were announced, and nineteen films delivered in total UA product. Nine of these were considered "foreign"—all of which happened to be produced by British companies—five from Korda's London Films, two from Criterion, one Bergner film, and one from Trafalgar Films. These British films totaled 47% of the product United Artists provided the British market that season.

³²⁶ Balio, *United Artists, Vol. 1, 1919-1950*, 144–146.

³²⁷ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:221.

³²⁸ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 55.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

encouraged high expectations of films their sales teams were obligated to promote as superior quality.³³⁰

As they did with Wilcox, the parent company immediately passed the blame for these losses onto their US domestic sales representatives. The home office lectured its domestic exchange offices:

We in the Domestic Department have not made the contribution we should. There is a tremendously wide difference between the contracts taken and the play-off on London films as against the pictures of our American producers. From now on I must inform you that this condition has got to be remedied. All alibis of salesman that the exhibitor will not contract in advance every London Films Production but will book them as and when they come along, will not be tolerated.³³¹

With subsequent seasons' losses on his high budget, high risk films, Korda claimed UA treated him unequally to the other stockholder producers and counter to his expectations, and he asked for a release from his contract; United Artists refused his request.³³² Tino Balio explains the truth from an American perspective that "United Artists found it difficult to market British pictures" in the United States.³³³ He supports this with examples of exhibitors refusing other British producers' films and producers like Victor Saville claiming poor UA marketing of his films at this same time. Saville requested and received a release from his contract in 1937, but Korda was a more important asset to United Artists, given his massive internationally-spread financial backing, recent construction of the most up-to-date film studios in Britain, and the stature of London Film Productions as the leading motion picture company in Britain by 1937. United Artists was averse to releasing him, but by the time they reorganized their company structure, it was too late to

³³⁰ Ibid., 57.

³³¹ Arthur Kelly to UA Domestic Exchanges, circular letter, 8 January 1936, UA/2A/B137/F6; also quoted in Balio, *United Artists, Vol. 1, 1919-1950*, 144.

³³² Ibid., 144. Balio quotes a cable that Korda sent from England to UA stockholders, March 10, 1937. (Microfilm 448/reel 19): "When our basic agreement was made, I was led to believe by other partners... that my companies and my own position in British market would be recognized and that United Artists would regard us as mainstay of their British interests... Also basis of our agreement was equal duties and rights for every stockholder which obviously is not case in practice, as production burden is absolutely unequally divided. Other stockholders not even giving a fair hearing to our demands as regards British market."

³³³ Ibid., 145.

rescue Korda from his massive debts.³³⁴ By the end of 1938, Korda was forced to relinquish control of Denham Studios and London Films to Prudential; in turn, Prudential gave Korda \$1.8 million to form a new company, Alexander Korda Film productions, Ltd. and half of their holding stock in UA.³³⁵

Other scholars have also discussed Korda's losses by 1937, and many correlate them to his methods of business and styles of films. Among Korda's grand plans for building his own film Empire, with the new Denham Studios being so large, Korda needed other producers to hire its use as well. Rachael Low describes Korda's films (and those few independent films he was in close association with) during this season as patriotic, high-quality productions with multinational units, "full of British clichés and sentimental patriotism."³³⁶ Bringing in producers such as Victor Saville helped to build Korda's own stature as "producer of world-class films different from that of any other producer in Britain. The more European filmmakers arrived at Denham, the more eagerly his films embraced English subjects, English history and literature, traditions and even prejudices."³³⁷ Low explains further, "he had always insisted that if a film were to succeed it had to be produced to a standard that would satisfy an international audience, and this was expensive... His way of running the company, like his lifestyle, was lavish. But the resulting films and razzmatazz had got him a better foothold in the difficult American market than any other British company."³³⁸ Charles Drazin outlines Korda's general approach to business negotiations: "First he would clinch a deal with generous terms and then, long after the contract had been signed and the parties fully engaged, proceed to whittle down its provisions as circumstances dictated. Everything was geared to action, to getting films made, but it was a risky strategy which

³³⁴ Ibid., 145–148. LFP had acquired financial backing of the Prudential assurance company and to the strongest banks in Britain, Midlands and Lloyds. Denham Studios was constructed in 1935.

³³⁵ Ibid., 154; Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:218–229.

³³⁶ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:220; including movies *Knight Without Armour*, *Fire Over England*, and *Farewell Again* in 1936.

³³⁷ Ibid., 7:221; Saville's films included *Dark Journey*, a spy thriller set during WWI, and *Storm in a Teacup*, a highly successful modest film set in Scotland.

³³⁸ Ibid., 7:221.

occasionally ended in disaster.”³³⁹ Even with the bookings that his films did achieve, it was not enough to pull his company out from under heavy debts after the Aldgate scandal and consequential collapse of British investments in the British film industry in 1937.

Like Michael Balcon, Alexander Korda hoped to boost the development of a national film industry in Britain. In regard to his goals and his internationalist method of filmmaking, scholars note his international business approach even upon his arrival in England. According to Karol Kulik, it was the film quality and the international box office potential of Korda’s *Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) that appealed to Douglas Fairbanks (on UA’s Board of Directors) when he saw a special preview screening of the film. Fairbanks immediately offered the long-term multi-picture deal with Korda that would eventually lead to Korda’s role on the board of directors in subsequent years.³⁴⁰ The *Kinetograph Weekly* trade press announcement of the LFP/UA alliance in 1933 underlines the public intentions of both the producer and the distribution company for taking up this type of film (and subsequent ones): to lure back British artists to London as well as any other international artists of importance in order to bolster the British film industry.³⁴¹

Even the production of *Private Life of Henry VIII* reflects what Kulik refers to as Korda’s policy of “Internationalism” at the core of his company’s objective (or focus)—that of using an international cast, crew, and production, and thus: “The inherently British subject had been viewed through ‘foreign’ eyes, and their vision had created an ‘international’ picture out of ‘national’ subject matter.”³⁴² Korda was already utilizing a new approach to filmmaking in order to achieve the larger goal of a successful British industry with a worldwide reach. Rachael Low also indicates that Korda “found a niche in Britain, and quickly sank himself into a British identity, proclaimed by the very name of his company and its emblem, Big Ben. Of all the producers in Britain, he was

³³⁹ Drazin, *Korda*, 115.

³⁴⁰ *Kinetograph Weekly*, 24 Aug 1933, quoted in Karol Kulik, *Alexander Korda: The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1975), 88.

³⁴¹ LFP/UA alliance Announcement, *Kinetograph Weekly*, 24 Aug 1933 quoted in *ibid.*, 88. “The aim of the new organisation will be...to bring back to England many great English artistes who have not heretofore produced in this country...[and] other artistes of world-wide importance, although not of British origin, will be invited to join and to produce their pictures here.”

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 96.

the only one thought and acted in the grand Hollywood manner, and he had considerable charisma as well as both creative and administrative ability.”³⁴³ His productions were lavish with his money and he produced a large output of films, only to accumulate increasing debts and the related struggles to maintain control of his own company.

Charles Drazin describes how Korda’s British filmmaking approach and style can be traced back to his early days in Hungarian cinema—especially his strategy for ambitious, large-scale prestige productions based on the model of Hollywood studios abroad. At the time, he felt that “re-creating Hungarian literature on the screen” for a world market would garner a higher quality film, and he based his approach on a concept of “the cinema as a development of—rather than a rival to—literature.”³⁴⁴ According to Drazin, Korda’s literary approach “would only truly come into its own with the advent of the talkies, but nonetheless the flair for social satire and observation that would become such a distinctive feature of his later films is noticeable.”³⁴⁵

By the 1930s, Korda developed this strategy aiming for international appeal through his choice of subject matter, including not only stories based upon well-known literature such as *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, but also in developing a popular cycle of costume dramas based on historical figures and monarchs. To publicize his upcoming costume pictures in May 1934, Korda wrote an article for *Film Weekly* titled “Costume Films Have Brought New Life To The Screen.” In this article, he defends his historical/costume pictures and he determinedly declares it is not a fad; he insists that is not about costume for costume’s sake, instead it is about making a good story. “In planning more costume pictures the only reason has been that I have found stories I like and want to do. That they are in costume is incidental.” He goes on to explain that “it is only by making people quickly forget that the theme is from the past—which many have a habit of

³⁴³ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:228.

³⁴⁴ Drazin, *Korda*, 31.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 43–44. Drazin’s main point here is to indicate that Korda’s film *The Private Life of Henry VIII* was not as innovative or new as many claim. At the time, instead, “it was made according to an already tested formula.” Drazin describes Korda’s first Sascha film, Mark Twain’s *Prince and the Pauper* (1919), in which there is a scene of the pauper dining in the Palace eating voraciously with edits and cuts of the courtiers’ proper behavior in contrast—which Drazin compares to a famous scene in *Henry VIII* when Henry tosses bits of his chicken behind him. .

regarding is rather stuffy—that history can be made cinema entertainment.” To accomplish this, one must provide the right atmosphere and creating a sense of intimacy with the characters and their personalities; historical exactitude is less important.³⁴⁶

Finally, like Michael Balcon and Herbert Wilcox, Alexander Korda believed in the importance of the star commodity, but he frequently focused his energies upon establishing his own stable of stars as opposed to making continual trips to borrow from Hollywood. Korda felt strongly enough about this to openly declare to newspaper reporters asking about Hollywood stars in 1935, that: he had “no intention of signing up any of the Hollywood stars for his forthcoming productions.”³⁴⁷ Instead of using an already established and more recognizable Hollywood star on a regular basis, he hoped to build his own stable of stars worthy of competing with Hollywood product. During the 1930s, he helped establish such leading British stars as Charles Laughton, Vivian Leigh, Merle Oberon, Laurence Olivier, and many others. This claim did not mean he was not willing to utilize certain movie stars from Hollywood especially if doing so would assist in establishing his films as “great” pictures on an ambitious scale. Occasionally he hired British actors with established Hollywood careers such as Leslie Howard in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, or an anglophile American actor (and fellow UA partner) such as Douglas Fairbanks. To attempt epics of grand proportions, he was willing to hire one of the biggest stars in the world at the time, as he did with Marlene Dietrich in *Knight Without Armour* (1936) for whom he paid £80,000.³⁴⁸ Keeping a bevy of his own stars and bringing in the occasional famous Hollywood face follows his general business approach of providing American and international audiences a high quality film with lavish spending and glamorous content on par with anything coming out of Hollywood.

³⁴⁶ Korda, “Costume Films Have Brought New Life To The Screen,” *Film Weekly*, May 4, 1934; found in United Artists Corp. Records, Series 11D Research Data Volumes, Reel 11, Volume 21.

³⁴⁷ “Korda Sees London As World Film Center!” *Foreign Newsflash*, August 29, 1935, Foreign News Stories, 1934-35; United Artists Corp. Records, Series 12D Samuel Cohen Press Releases, 1932-48, Box 7, Folder 1 (hereafter UA/12D/B7/F1).

³⁴⁸ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:219.

The Limited Achievements from Competing with Hollywood

By the end of the 1930s, all three of these British producers had achieved different levels of success that helped to bring greater recognition of British films to international audiences. Yet these latter years required renewed efforts to stay on top of their goals in the face of the industrial downturn in 1937, the renewal of the quota act in 1938, and the onset of war.

With Prudential's takeover of Denham Studios and London Film Productions in 1938, Alexander Korda was left with just enough to form a new company, Alexander Korda Film Productions, to meet his minimum obligations with his UA distribution contract with their approval. He determinedly put his efforts into an "archetypal British Empire story" for his first film with his new company, *The Four Feathers* (1939), and it became one of his most successful films.³⁴⁹ With the inception of World War II, Korda moved to Hollywood to complete *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940) and *Lady Hamilton* (1941; US title, *That Hamilton Woman*), both of which did well in theaters, each earning over \$1 million in US domestic rentals.³⁵⁰

Meanwhile, after leaving both his company British and Dominions Film Corporation and United Artists behind by the end of 1935, Herbert Wilcox established Herbert Wilcox Productions to make films for both the British and American markets while leasing studio space at B&D's Elstree Studios.³⁵¹ According to Rachael Low, "it was decided that economical 'popular' films were to replace the expensive ones they had been making..."³⁵² After B&D's studios at Elstree burned down in February 1936, Wilcox caved to C.M. Woolf's requests and signed with General Films Distributors; he began shooting at the newly built Pinewood Studios (to be managed by Richard Norton of B&D, the largest shareholding company). GFD was a new holding company with Woolf, Wilcox, Arthur Rank and American financiers that arranged to handle Universal

³⁴⁹ Drazin, *Korda*, 203 Per Drazin's research, box office receipts for *The Four Feathers* totaled over £300,000.

³⁵⁰ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 65.

³⁵¹ Richard Norton explains that he became production head of B&D when CM Woolf "persuaded Wilcox to leave B&D and make films directly for him." Grantley, *Silver Spoon: Being Extracts from the Random Reminiscences of Lord Grantley*, 175. Yet when Arthur Rank and CM Woolf made their initial offer to Wilcox to join them with General Films Distribution, he turned it down. Instead, he formed Herbert Wilcox Productions to lease space at B&D Studios.

³⁵² Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:150.

Pictures' films in Britain in reciprocation for Universal distributing some of GFD films in America. Rachael Low does not hesitate to point out; Wilcox "as usual had his eye on distribution in America."³⁵³

He may have returned to Woolf and his new colleagues (Arthur Rank) for distribution of his films in Britain in 1936, but the next year Wilcox split (again) with C.M. Woolf to sign a distribution agreement with RKO to make a series of films, starting with *Victoria the Great* (1937) at Denham studios under a new company name, Emperor Film Productions (March 1937). (While Wilcox claimed that he departed because Woolf was against his casting of Anna Neagle as Queen Victoria, Rachael Low claims it was more likely about using United Artists and then RKO to reach the United States, and it would be RKO that was his true breakthrough.)³⁵⁴ Success continued with his release of Victoria's sequel, *Sixty Glorious Years* (1938). Low emphasizes these years as the moment of Wilcox's achievement of his long-time goal: "and, at last, success in America."³⁵⁵ Sarah Street has described his transition as a two-prong policy, maintaining both the economical yet popular pictures for British distribution alongside a few prestige pictures intended for the American market.³⁵⁶

By the end of the decade, one can see the series of stepping stones that allowed Wilcox to build upon his global (and moreso, American) reach with his films, from utilizing his network and connections with United Artists, then to Universal Studios via GFD (and Arthur Rank's early involvement in the British film industry), to RKO distribution by 1937. His agreement with RKO was to produce three to four films a year, one of which would star Anna Neagle and be filmed in Hollywood, and all films would be guaranteed bookings in the US. Perhaps Rachael Low is correct, if the war had not interrupted his course, he may have achieved what all of them aimed at—a "real market" in America; and perhaps he would have continued this gradient to even better

³⁵³ Ibid., 7:210.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 7:248.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 7:211. His timing with his switch was efficacious; with the 1937 bust, the fallout led to the closings of General Film distributors, Pinewood studios, and others.

³⁵⁶ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 73.

things.³⁵⁷ Yet his successes with RKO distribution in the US and UK markets are put into perspective when one considers the irony that within two years he (and his Emperor Films) were bankrupt. Rachael Low concludes from this, "Like Korda, he probably found that a high budget film was not always a big profit maker even if it was a popular success."³⁵⁸ Even so, Wilcox continued to make popular films through the next couple decades, often starring his (eventual) wife Anna Neagle.

Of the British films to acquire access to America, many served on double bills and faced being trimmed in order to meet shorter running time requirements.³⁵⁹ Some British films achieved more significant releases and played more widely in various cities and primarily as single features. After the significant success of Korda's *Private Life of Henry VIII*, another boom in British production included some films of higher caliber intended for the international market. The next few years saw many of the important producers, such as Korda, Wilcox, and Balcon among others, producing proliferate number of films that they hoped did well in America via their limited access. According to John Sedgwick's calculations from a data sample of earnings, London Films was the most successful with their films like *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *The Ghost Goes West*, but he emphasizes that these films garnered an unusually large portion of their revenues from successful engagements in New York City.³⁶⁰ The same could be said of the many Gaumont British films that GB released through their own distribution company, many of which played in the Roxy theater, one of New York's largest first-run houses. But Sedgwick points to a familiar pattern that emerges, in which "the box office takings dropped markedly outside of New York City and particularly in the smaller and more provincial cities."³⁶¹ Ultimately, British films that were more likely to run for more than a one-week engagement did so primarily in large cities such as New York City, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. Sedgwick reasons, "In the

³⁵⁷ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:250; Low's estimation is also referenced by Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 75.

³⁵⁸ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:250.

³⁵⁹ Sedgwick and Glancy, "Cinemas in the United States in the Mid-1930s," 164.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 164; data sampling period does not include *The Private Life Of Henry VIII* (1933).

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

divide between metropolitan and provincial tastes, British films landed firmly on the metropolitan side.”³⁶²

And though it was not enough to keep Gaumont British production afloat, there was a period in which Gaumont British was able to release and widely distribute more British films in the United States than any other company. John Sedgwick and Mark Glancy explain that:

In doing so, Gaumont British came close to matching Hollywood’s Columbia and Universal Studios (in both total revenues and per film averages), and achieved a status that was far above the ‘Poverty Row’ level. The same cannot be said for the other British companies, including major concerns such as British International and British and Dominions...³⁶³

Sarah Street argues a more positive position for all the British producers’ attempts and limited achievements; while many British films had difficulty finding distribution outlets, some did manage it. One may contend that they achieved success in the US market, because some British films were able to “occupy a space in the highly competitive market... for a variety of reasons, often to do with timing and purely economic factors, but also because of their ability to appeal to specific American audiences.”³⁶⁴ Ultimately, Street argues that British films “enjoyed comparative success in the American market in 1933 to 1939...”³⁶⁵ While their achievements were constrained by various factors within American distribution and exhibition throughout the 1930s, some British producers were able to create a name for themselves, their companies, and for the British film industry in the international marketplace.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid., 164–165; Based on his data sampling earnings in the mid-1930s.

³⁶⁴ Street, “Stabbing Westward: The Distribution of British Feature Films in America, and the Case of The Private Life of Henry VIII,” 51.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 55.

Chapter 5

“Bonds of Empire”:

Britishness, Empire, and English-speaking Film Markets

As the previous chapters have shown, the American market was of strategic importance to British producers' aims for developing a British industry. While making higher quality and more costly films to compete with the Hollywood Studios in this primary market, British producers still relied upon distributing their films to the broader English-speaking market and hoped to achieve worldwide exposure. The remainder English-speaking market may not have provided extensive revenues for British films, but given the predominance of British cultural influence within its Empire, producers expected to do well in these areas. The following two chapters' case studies will investigate minor British Commonwealth and colonial markets; before targeting these smaller locales, it is best to situate these and the larger American and British markets within the English-speaking market as well as explore the perceptions of Britishness outside the British Isles.

Film Distribution: The English-speaking Market

The United States and the British Isles made up the two largest markets during the 1930s. During the First World War, American exporters arranged a direct means of selling to world markets throughout Australia, South America, Asia, and even Africa.³⁶⁶ As the Hollywood studio system strengthened and they produced more costly films, domestic revenues were strong enough to reimburse their entire budget; foreign revenues made up their surplus profits. The British and Empire markets made up between 30% to over 50% of Hollywood's foreign income during these years.³⁶⁷ Since Britain (and the British Commonwealth) entailed such a large

³⁶⁶ Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*, 29–34; 71. Prior to the war, Hollywood used London as its distribution center for worldwide exports. Thompson discusses the five major studios' different approaches to expanding abroad during the 1910s and 1920s; South America and Australia were the two key non-European markets during World War I; 71.

³⁶⁷ Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939*, 85, 99, 145; Ruth Vasey derives these figures from multiple sources from Paramount (MPPDA Archives) and United Artists' records. For statistics at the time of the British quota's establishment, see “Table 2: Sources of Hollywood's Foreign Income (Excluding Canada), 1927” in Vasey, 85. Mark Glancy reports that Britain alone had reached 50% of

component of the foreign market, Hollywood especially focused its efforts on English-speaking countries throughout the 1930s.³⁶⁸ A few statistics of the English-speaking countries' exhibition markets provide an example of the disparity between not only the two largest markets (US & Britain), but also between these largest markets and the remainder of the English-speaking markets. As of 1938, the United States boasted over 16,000 cinemas, and Britain had over 5,000; in contrast, the markets of Australia and Canada each held 1,371 and 1,224 respectively, New Zealand had 721, and the Irish Free State had 200 cinemas. Finally, South Africa had 300 cinemas by the end of the decade.³⁶⁹

Canada was a small market, with its box office primarily coming from Toronto and Montréal; the rest of the country was predominantly rural. By the 1930s, Famous Players Canadian Corporation (affiliated with Paramount Publix) controlled or owned all major distribution firms in Canada as well as the bulk of strategically important theaters; additionally, they were given special market treatment.³⁷⁰ 95% of Canadian distribution was controlled by the Paramount Famous Players combine.³⁷¹ The close ties between the Hollywood studios and Canadian distributors and exhibitors hindered British films from establishing a stronghold in this British Commonwealth. As seen within United Artists' files, American distributors considered Canada as part of the North American market. As such, Canadian earnings were usually included in their

Hollywood's overseas revenues by the end of the 1930s. Glancy refers to contemporary reports that "Hollywood earned between \$35 million and \$50 million annually in Britain, and that this was 50 per cent of gross foreign income and 70 per cent of the money that actually made it back to the USA." Motion Picture Herald, July 13, 1940, 12, referenced in Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain*, 20, footnote 44.

³⁶⁸ Referencing Statistics Table 2: 1938: World Theaters Compared (Countries with over 100 Cinemas). Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain*, 9. By 1938, there were over 92,000 cinemas in the world, 62,000 of which were open to American films during the 1930s. .

³⁶⁹ Since other countries (including English version territories) are not designated in Glancy's chart if they have fewer than 100 theaters, British Caribbean islands and other British colonies are not included. See Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain* for description of Hollywood's foreign markets prior to the start of World War II.

³⁷⁰ Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 28. Ian Jarvie provides one of the most detailed accounts of the Canadian market during the early 1930s.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 35; According to reports, Famous Players owned or controlled 153 theaters (with 165,000 seating capacity) across Canada in 1929. By 1945, the company owned or controlled 311 venues with reports suggesting that 2.25 million patrons visited their theaters every week. For more, see Robert M. Seiler and Tamara P. Seiler, *Reel Time: Movie Exhibitors and Movie Audiences in Prairie Canada, 1896 to 1986* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2013), 213, <http://lib.myilibrary.com?ID=444505>.

domestic earnings figures. Even with this structure, United Artists arranged to distribute most of Herbert Wilcox's early 1930s B&D films in Canada (in contrast to the limited few in the US), probably with the assumption that Canadian loyalties to the Empire (and similar tastes) might instigate better sales than elsewhere.

The similarity and geographic closeness of the United States and Canada markets has often led American distributing companies to treat them simultaneously as the domestic North American market. As a result, some British producers found themselves giving up their Canadian rights in order to acquire distribution in the more desirable US market.³⁷² While the growing influence of Hollywood films raised cultural concerns among the media elite and key Canadian government figures, the government's ruling elites took little to no action in the 1930s; no quota was put in place to protect British films.³⁷³ When the government launched an investigation into the shareholder activities of Famous Players, the resulting White Report of 1931 concluded that it was an American monopoly operating in Canada and that a combine had existed since 1926 between Famous Players, its various affiliates, Regal Films (a Canadian company), and others.³⁷⁴ However, their control was not altered as the government was unable to provide evidence that the combine was detrimental to the public interest (given that prices did not go up during the period). Overall, since there was little to no local film industry to protect, Canada served primarily as an importer of films and ultimately a "client" of Hollywood.³⁷⁵

However, a few British film companies began to develop their own overseas distribution agreements with these and other Canadian-controlled (and Hollywood-affiliated) distribution companies over the course of the 1930s, which enabled them to work around or through this distribution and exhibition monopoly. For example, Gaumont British Corporation of Canada, Ltd. distributed GB product in the early 1930s, until GB established distribution during the mid-1930s

³⁷² Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 47.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁷⁴ For a more detailed account of this investigation and its results see Seiler and Seiler, *Reel Time*, 199–203; and Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 25–40.

³⁷⁵ Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 54.

through Regal Films, Ltd.³⁷⁶ Regal Films, Ltd. (Toronto), while a subsidiary of Paramount, was known primarily as a distributor of MGM films in Canada. It was run by Henry L. Nathanson, brother of the Nat L. Nathanson, the President of the largest theater circuit in Canada—Famous Players Canadian Corporation (Toronto). With the increase of British films (of higher quality and in terms of popularity), by 1934 (if not earlier), Regal Films had added Gaumont British and Gainsborough product as well as British Lion and London Film Productions to their distributing line-up.³⁷⁷ According to reports in the *Canadian Motion Picture Digest*, the number of British films in Canada had increased from 4.5% in 1930 to 15% in 1933. Correspondingly, N. L. Nathanson devoted increased effort to broadening Canadian tastes to include British films.³⁷⁸

This distribution arrangement continued until the 1936-1937 season, when the “most important trade change during 1936 affected the distribution of British pictures,” as *Kinematograph Yearbook* reported the following year.³⁷⁹ Empire Films, Ltd. (Toronto) secured the Canadian franchise for GB pictures. Formed in 1933 by Oscar R. Hanson (former general sales manager of Tiffany Productions), Empire Films had already established a reputation as a provider of British product—specifically that from British International Pictures, Twickenham, and Associated Radio Pictures, as well as Hollywood studio fare from Republic and Monogram Pictures.³⁸⁰ Meanwhile, Regal Films continued to provide MGM pictures alongside those from LFP, British Lion, and other British releases.³⁸¹

³⁷⁶ “Foreign and Colonial Trade Directory,” *Kinematograph Year Book 1931* (London, Kinematograph Publications Ltd., 1931), 25, <http://archive.org/details/kinematographyea1931kine>; However, Pendakur mentions that Tiffany Productions, Ltd. (Toronto) distributed GB and Gainsborough product in Canada in 1930. For more, see Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry* (Wayne State University Press, 1990), 68.

³⁷⁷ “Overseas Trade Directory,” *Kinematograph Year Book 1935* (Kinematograph Publications, Ltd., 1935), 31, <http://archive.org/details/kinematographyea22unse>; *Kinematograph Year Book 1936* (Kinematograph Publications, Ltd., 1936), 32, <http://archive.org/details/kinematographyea23unse>.

³⁷⁸ *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, July 1, 1933, 2; and *Canadian Film Weekly*, June 5, 1943, 2, 10; referenced in Seiler and Seiler, *Reel Time*, 206.

³⁷⁹ “The Year Abroad,” *Kinematograph Year Book 1937* (Kinematograph Publications, Ltd., 1937), 31, <http://archive.org/details/kinematographyea24unse>.

³⁸⁰ *Film Daily, The 1933 Film Daily Year Book of Motion Pictures*, ed. Jack Alicoate, 15th ed. (New York: The Film Daily, 1933), 519, http://archive.org/details/filmdailyyearboo00film_3.

³⁸¹ “Overseas Trade Directory,” *Kinematograph Year Book 1937*, 31.

Gaumont British's transitions between Canadian distributors are reflected in their trade advertisement spreads in *Variety* and *Film Daily* during their peak period of "attacking" the North American market. As an example, see the bottom right corner in Figures 5.1, 5.22, and 5.3, for their indication of where exhibitors in either country could acquire Gaumont British films, which "tops 'em all."

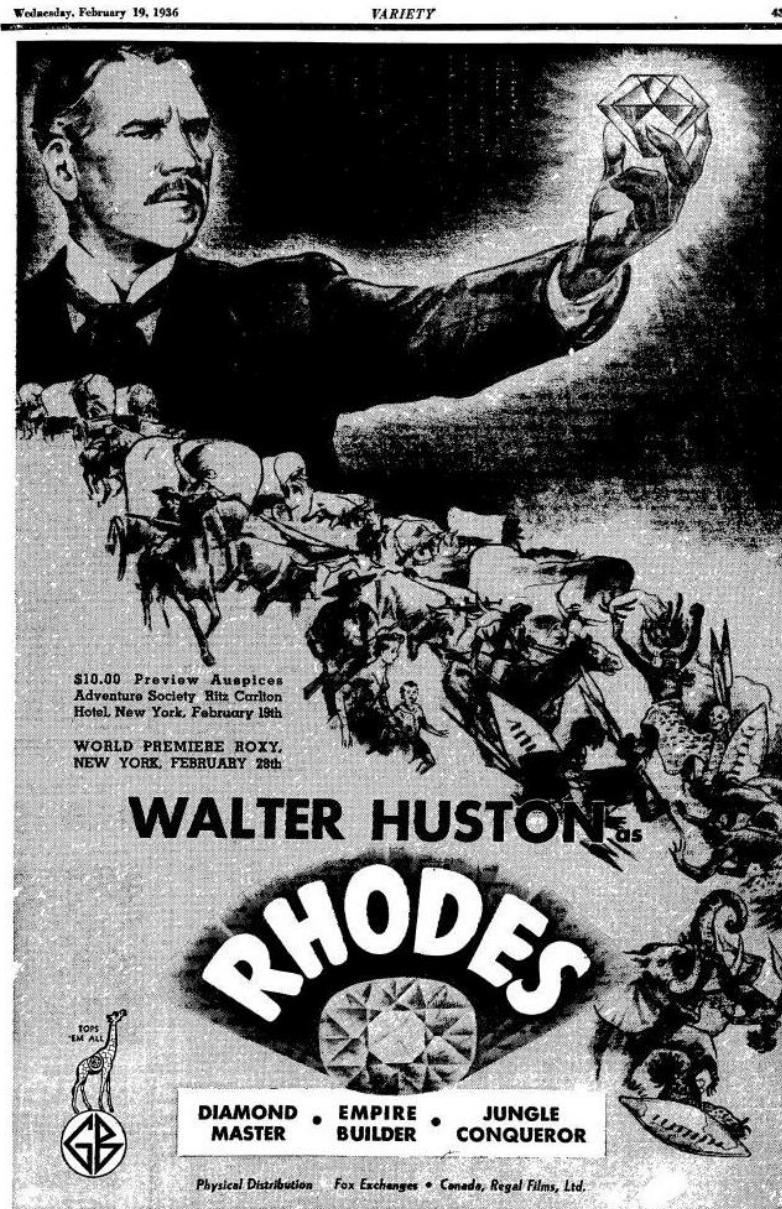


Figure 5.1 Gaumont British ad for *Rhodes* (1936) (*Variety*, 19 February 1936, 43)



Figure 5.2 Gaumont British's first pages in a Sixteen-page Advertising Spread,
(*Film Daily*, 2 June 1936, 5-6)



Figure 5.3 GB Advert, Close-Up with mention of Empire Films, Ltd. (CA)

Meanwhile, concerning lands further abroad, United Artists' Foreign Department categorized Australia and New Zealand together as "Australasia." As the numbers of cinemas indicate above, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were not particularly large as exhibition markets. But as Mark Glancy explains, their similarities with the British market made them important collectively. In the first place, their audiences were principally English-speaking and thus sound would not adversely affect the appeal of American films. Additionally, none of them had their own competitive film production industry. And the few films that were produced in these areas could be considered and used as British quota films (per the 1927 Films Act inclusion of any production filmed in the British Empire). Finally, American films continued to dominate in these markets, and they maintained that hold in the 1930s, ranging from 75 to 85% of all films released.³⁸² In these British Commonwealth markets, reports claimed that high consumer demand and increased returns offset Hollywood's export declines in other foreign territories.³⁸³ Furthermore, Mark Glancy deduced from a trade paper survey that while the British Commonwealth markets were significantly smaller than the market in Britain, collectively they had similar tastes to the British market. The survey's findings included both the popularity of British films as well as a preference for British stars that worked in Hollywood. As Mark Glancy points out, "when American film makers set out to appeal to the British market, then, they were also aiming at the wider British Commonwealth market."³⁸⁴ Just as American distributors collectively targeted these markets, British producers expected their own films that did well within the domestic British market to succeed throughout the Commonwealth.

As in their own market, British producers saw some of the same opportunities that American distributors perceived with these prospective English-speaking markets. Some British filmmakers were even able to establish direct distribution means of their films within Canada and Australia. Of the previous chapters' three case examples, Michael Balcon at Gaumont British

³⁸² Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain*, 27–28. Mark Glancy provides a good summary of those countries that were predominantly English-speaking: Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

³⁸³ *Motion Picture Herald*, 28 September 1940, 4; referenced in *ibid.*, 28.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

utilized their direct distribution method in respect to Canada and Australia. During their 1930s expansion, Gaumont British made distribution arrangements with local distributors, such as Regal Films (Toronto) in Canada (as previously mentioned) and British Dominions Films (BDF) in Australia. Outside of his contracts with United Artists, Herbert Wilcox with British & Dominions also established distribution directly to Australia through BDF films; United Artists gave them permission to continue this arrangement (although they pressured him briefly to give them Australasian rights again in 1934, but he still had several years left in his contract with BDF).³⁸⁵ However, while United Artists provided distribution of London Films' pictures to Australia, Alexander Korda kept a separate distribution contract with Anglo-Canadian Distributors, Ltd. (based out of London) for Canadian distribution of LFP films with the same provision of exclusion from United Artists' distribution until 1937.³⁸⁶

As *Variety* described British film distribution in Canada for the 1935-1936 season, although the number of imported British films had lessened in 1935, their (Canadian) box office grosses were up. Just as the article continues on to summarize the Canadian handling of British films: Regal Films distributed Gaumont British, Gainsborough, London Films and British Lion; Empire Films handled British International Pictures, Twickenham Productions, Associated Talking Pictures and Toeplitz; and as previously mentioned, United Artists distributed B&D.³⁸⁷ As these examples show, there were several options available for producers and major combines to manipulate for the wider distribution of their films within this transoceanic distribution system. Additionally, one can see how Hollywood distributing companies managed to maintain their control through the bargaining chip of access to the US market and the close affiliation of these Canadian companies with them.

³⁸⁵ Letter from Arthur Kelly (during his trip to Australia) to W. P. Phillips, 15 August 1934; Arthur W. Kelly, June 1932-July 1935, UA/9B/B2/F3.

³⁸⁶ Original Agreement between LFP and ACD, 11 October 1932, London Film Productions and Anglo-Canadian Distributors, Ltd., Distribution agreement and correspondence, 1934-1939; UA/2A/B137/F6. LFP/Korda was to be held accountable for fulfilling this agreement through 1937.

³⁸⁷ "Fewer British Films in Canada in 1935, but B. O. Grosses Up; Donat Leads All Stars at Gate," *Variety*, January 8, 1936, 19, accessed March 31, 2016, <http://www.archive.org/stream/variety121-1936-01#page/n245/mode/2up>.

Government and committee reports give us further insight into the machinations and government involvement with films in these Empire markets. While giving evidence given to the Committee on Cinematograph Films in 1936, R.D. Fennelly's report overviewed the current state of the "Export Market." Some colonies and dominions followed suit in the establishment of local quotas to promote the exhibition of British films, including New Zealand (1928 & 1934), Southern Rhodesia (1932 & 1935), and certain colonies such as Trinidad (1932), British Guiana (1933) and Barbados (1935).³⁸⁸

Given the self-governing nature of the Dominions, Australia (New South Wales and Victoria, to be specific) took an alternative path in order to assist self-promotion of film production within Australia, passing legislation in 1935 to require distributors to acquire "a certain proportion of Australian films against their foreign films though not against their British (other than Australian) films."³⁸⁹ And of those films that complied with Britain's 1927 Films Act as well, they could still be utilized for quota purposes in the UK, it was suggested. Fennelly summed up Australia's value as a film export destination in 1936, as it "hitherto" provided the "best market for British films outside the United Kingdom and so far as can be judged such films are increasing in popularity."³⁹⁰

Meanwhile, as previously mentioned, the situation in Canada's market provided such meager access and thus revenues. Fennelly summed up Canada's current market status in 1936 in two sentences:

In Canada, where, as in the case of Australia, films are a matter for the separate provinces, legislation imposing quotas has been passed into provinces, but has not been put into operation. The progress of British films has been slower in Canada than in Australia, presumably owing to the hold which United States interests have over the Canadian cinemas.³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ Board of Trade, *Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee on Cinematograph Films*, Appendix VII, 29-30. No quota legislation was passed in South Africa, the Irish Free State, or India; p.12, para. 84.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 12, para. 81.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12, para. 82.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 12, para. 83.

The Canadian market was out of their hands and beyond their control to alter. The Statute of Westminster in 1931 legitimized the *de facto* practice of self-governance of the dominions. It applied to Canada without the need for their ratification, thus immediately establishing their legislative independence as well as a common allegiance to the Crown. (In contrast, Australia, New Zealand, and Newfoundland had to ratify the statute for it to take effect, which Australian and New Zealand subsequently did in 1942 and 1947, respectively; Newfoundland never did, but joined Canada as a province in 1949.) With these changes to the imperial system of political rule, British parliament officially could no longer make laws for the Dominions, and thus were effectively rendered helpless to aid any growth of a British Canadian film market in opposition to Hollywood's monopoly. The Committee on Cinematograph Films wasted few words on Canada and films in 1936.

Concerning the Colonies and Mandated Territories, Fennelly provided a significantly more detailed explanation than Canada. Back in 1929, a Colonial Films Committee was appointed to examine available arrangements for supplying films for public exhibition in these areas as well as "to consider in what way these arrangements could be improved, with special reference to ...the desirability, on political as well as economic grounds, of encouraging the exhibition of British films."³⁹² He continued to describe how a report of the Committee in July 1930 recommended for an organization to be set up in Britain, independent of but cooperative with the concerned government departments, "to undertake the distribution of British films throughout the Colonial Empire."³⁹³ (It was also suggested that an advisory committee nominated by the government select which films were more suitable for exhibition in the colonies, although it was not intended to replace local censorship policies in place.) To assist the formation of this organization, at the Colonial Films Committee's recommendation, a number of Colonial

³⁹² Ibid., 12, para. 85.

³⁹³ Ibid., 12, para. 86.

Governments “undertook to guarantee the Company formed for the purse against loss in its total transactions in the first year up to £1,000.”³⁹⁴

From these endeavors, the Film Producers’ Group of the Federation of British Industries (FBI) formed the British United Film Producers Company Ltd. (BUFP) in October, 1931 in order to distribute British films throughout the Colonial Empire. The company’s Board of Directors contained representatives from some of the “principal” film production companies, and the advisory committee assisting the company in its “selection of suitable films” included the Secretary of State’s nominated members—“two ex-colonial Governors, the technical advisor to His Majesty’s government on Cinematography, and a representative of the Dept. of Overseas Trade.”³⁹⁵ They arranged British film distribution through local agents in the Colonies, and the Secretary of State requested Colonial Governments to aid assistance when possible. BUFP successfully “shipped large consignments of British films to the West Indies and to West Africa.”³⁹⁶ Fennelly explained the general ability of the BUFP was only possible in territories

which were not already adequately served by existing arrangements for distribution; and as such arrangements increased in scope in the Colonial Empire, so the facilities for distribution of the new company diminished. There was no clause in its articles of association making it obligatory on the part of member firms to utilize its services. In consequence the character of the Board and shareholders changed in 1933 and 1934, so that by the end of the latter year the company had come under both the financial and directing control of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation, Ltd.³⁹⁷

While a few of the West Indian colonies and British Guiana had established quota legislation, the Colonial Office and colonial governments were concerned about the future role of this company without an “adequate and regular supply of British films” being made available. (Fennelly clarified that enacting quota legislation is not possible in most African colonies “owing to international treaties”).³⁹⁸

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 12, para. 87.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 12, para. 88.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 12, para. 88-89.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 12, para. 90.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 13, para. 91.

To put it more succinctly, the British government considered imposing quota legislation upon its colonies and dominions during the late 1920s. But after the CFC's report in 1930, they compromised by renovating their system of distribution and especially in those areas not "adequately served" with British films. Rosaleen Smyth described this establishment of BUFP distribution as a short-lived attempt that "wound up after only two years, mainly because of trade jealousies."³⁹⁹ However, the 1936 Board of Trade report makes no reference to its closure. Instead, they note the shift in controlling power from its previous board of representatives from various film companies to primarily Gaumont British. (According to the British independent film trade paper *Bioscope*, the BUFP Board of Directors was "understood" to include representatives from GB, BIP, Ideal Films, British Instructional, and British Lion.)⁴⁰⁰ Perhaps with this shift of controlling power, the initial intention of having a larger variety of British films "wound up," but the distributing company appears to have continued at least until 1936.

Overall, it was not the profits from these areas (especially the more remote ones) that they considered necessary; rather, importance rested with British "prestige." Fennelly explained that

The revenue derived by United Kingdom producers from Dominion and Colonial sources is not substantial except in the case of Australia, but it is obviously necessary for the purposes of British prestige that good British films should be exhibited not only in the Empire but elsewhere in the world as widely as possible. The budget of production costs of a film must obviously depend upon the market which is to be anticipated. In the case of a film produced in this country the main market at present is the United Kingdom, and producers can estimate with some degree of certainty the revenue to be expected from a particular type of film... There are, however, limits to the revenue which can be expected from the United Kingdom and this consequently sets an upper limit beyond which producers cannot afford to go unless they have some assurance of a market outside the United Kingdom. The exhibition of British films in the Dominions and Colonies assists in this respect, but it is often stated that the production industry in this country cannot take the next big step forward unless it can be certain of finding a market in foreign countries, particularly the United States. A certain amount of progress in this respect has been made in the last few years. The Gaumont-British Picture Corporation have started their own renting organization in the

³⁹⁹ Rosaleen Smyth, "The Development of British Colonial Film Policy, 1927-1939, with Special Reference to East and Central Africa," *The Journal of African History* 20, no. 03 (1979): 438, doi:10.1017/S0021853700017400.

⁴⁰⁰ "British Films for the Colonies," *Bioscope*, October 14, 1931, 14.

United States and arrangements are understood to exist which ensure the release to exhibitors in the United States of films of other British producers.⁴⁰¹

Much of his explanation reflects discussion of the previous chapters of this study; but here you also see awareness among industry representatives and ruling elites about the limited economic support of the film industry, in spite of its concurrent growth. (This report was given in 1937 prior to the fallout from city investors and over-extended loans.) His account also reveals the expectations of the Empire market, albeit limited by the very nature of the changing Commonwealth, in these years just following the passage of the Statue of Westminster in 1931.

Finally, R. D. Fennelly's account regarded the larger picture concerning national film policy (as they were considering the expiration of the quota act and its renewal the following year). The report cited and repeated the initial reassurances from 1927 of why British films were important—but he particularly stressed the national importance from an Empire perspective of British films being shown as widely as possible. He quoted the President of the Board of Trade on Second Reading in 1927, who said:

I believe that that Resolution expresses a sentiment which is prevalent in the House and the country and throughout the Empire. It is based on a realization that the cinema is to-day the most universal means through which national ideas and national atmosphere can be spread, and, even if those be intangible things, surely they are among the most important influences in civilization. Everybody will admit that the strongest bonds of Empire—outside, of course, the strongest of all, the Crown—are just those intangible bonds—a common outlook, the same ideas, and the same ideals which we all share and which are expressed in a common language and a common literature... To-day films are shown to millions of people throughout the Empire and must unconsciously influence the ideas and outlook of British peoples of all races. But only a fraction, something like 5 per cent., of the films which are at present shown in the British Empire are of British origin. That, as I submit and as the Imperial Conference held, is a position which is intolerable if we can do anything effective to remedy it.⁴⁰²

In other words, back in 1927 the concerns as regards the “national aspect” were the cultural points that were revisited in 1936 yet again. (The economic trade aspect stressing the role of film in advertising British trade abroad was passed over in this reference to past official concerns.)

⁴⁰¹ Board of Trade, *Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee on Cinematograph Films*, 13, para. 92-93.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 13, para. 95.

This notion of “bonds of Empire” was not just a common allegiance, but rather a common outlook and shared identity that is typical of the growing rhetoric of this period with the establishment of a Commonwealth of Nations and increasing concerns about economic trade policies during these Depression years. However, as the following section will relate further, this British (or UK) perspective of Britishness and Empire was limited to certain people within certain territories—white, Christian, British-derived peoples in the Dominions and colonies.

Ultimately, Hollywood maintained their global dominance, but some audiences in these English-speaking markets would presumably discover enjoyment watching British films as well. Just as British producers experienced whenever they tackled the American market, Hollywood’s business strategies would hinder their access to the wider English-speaking market. Even so, those producers of higher quality films endeavored to reach it. The unique instances of the South African and Caribbean markets highlight these attempts and other nuances concerning British films exhibition and reception in these minor markets. Before heading into these case studies, perhaps a historiographical exploration of Britishness at home and beyond the borders of the British Isles will provide a better understanding of both the recurring attempts by British producers to exploit this larger market as well as reveal the varied local and regional identities among its cinema-going audiences.

Britishness Outside the British Isles

Britishness has been defined in various ways by numerous individuals and institutions for the last century. Efforts were made over centuries to establish an identity of Britishness into one which all component nations of Great Britain could be proud. Briton has been a term loosely used to indicate anyone who is a citizen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (after the Act of Union 1707). But as Andrew Gamble and Tony Wright remind us, that “whatever else it is, Britishness is a cluster of attributes and tendencies, the balance between them always contested and constantly being reshaped. It is the product and expression of common experience, but of an

experience that is forever on the move.”⁴⁰³ These historians point out that Britishness is not just membership of a political association or that identity or culture is something else entirely. However, while both make up aspects of Britishness, the distinction between the two is important to note. For them, it is especially important in the current debates of British nationality today. “Britishness is about both, but they are not the same... The very capaciousness of ‘Britishness’, a mansion of many rooms, enables multiple identities and loyalties to flourish within it, which is a strong argument for not trying to pin it down in a way that excludes.”⁴⁰⁴

Nicholas Canny has suggested that the first peoples to call themselves British were the American colonists from England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland in the seventeenth century New World.⁴⁰⁵ Meanwhile, some historians have seen Britishness as some form of economic or cultural imperialism imposed by English ruling elites upon Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and thus creating, for example, an “over-arching nation-state” identity as opposed to a national identity.⁴⁰⁶ However, Linda Colley’s groundbreaking work *Britons: Forging the Nation* (1992) has presented a more compelling explanation of Britishness that historians continue to engage. Colley’s argument concerns the forging of Britishness between the Act of Union in 1707 and the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 while in conflict with an external “other”. As she explains it, the 1707 unification “invented” Great Britain, and thus it was “inevitably superimposed on much older allegiances.”⁴⁰⁷ Protestant warfare and Imperial adventures over the course of time enabled the internal fractures to become less violent (though not fading away entirely). Thus by 1837, Scotland’s retention of many of the characteristics of a distinct nation was also “comfortably contained within a bigger

⁴⁰³ Andrew Gamble and Anthony Wright, eds., “Introduction: The Britishness Question,” in *Britishness: Perspectives on the Britishness Question* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell in association with the Political Quarterly, 2009), 6.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰⁵ Nicholas Canny, *The Origins of Empire* (1998) quoted in W. David McIntyre, *The Britannic Vision: Historians and the Making of the British Commonwealth of Nations, 1907-48* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 70.

⁴⁰⁶ Stephen Hassler, quoted in Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 3.

⁴⁰⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, Third Edition (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012), 381 fix date of this edition and original. look up.

nation. It was British as well as Scottish.”⁴⁰⁸ But a primary point that she stresses is that it was possible to have “dual nationalities”—that Britishness could exist as a separate identity alongside other national identities of English, Scottish, and Welsh.⁴⁰⁹ (Especially in times of danger when facing threats from abroad, it would be these moments that forged this new identity.) Colley also recommends that today’s Great Britain can be viewed in this similar dual fashion, as a “relatively new nation” as well as “an alliance of several older nations,” even as this relationship is continually debated and changing in nature.⁴¹⁰

In his account that is focused upon more recent developments of Britishness, Paul Ward asserts that the flexibility of Britishness as an identity has enabled its persistence through the last couple centuries, albeit in conjunction with the dissent of millions of people across the last 130 years.⁴¹¹ Ward describes Britishness as people’s identification individually and collectively as “being British,” in relation to the “political, economic, social, cultural and personal surroundings they find themselves in at the time they choose to think about their Britishness.”⁴¹² This empiricist approach provides a more ambiguous definition, but it allows awareness for the complexity, instability, and changing nature of identity. He explores the shifts of Britishness from 1870 to 2000 across a range of themes such as the monarchy, gender, the urban and rural, popular culture, race, political contests, and regional and national experiences. He also examines some of the processes encouraging or discouraging adherence to Britishness, via politics, leisure, and other forms of culture.

In his study of *Films and British National Identity*, Jeffrey Richards provides a thorough overview of the historiography of British national identity and its development over the centuries. He discusses the different phases of national developments from the eighteenth century and since. Among some of his key points, he explains that the reason England and Britain are still often interchangeably used is due to England’s role as the seat of power and as the “hub of the

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 382.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 5.

⁴¹² Ibid., 3.

Empire,” and thus it became the provider of the “new Britain’s character” set in the nineteenth century.⁴¹³ National literary heroes were sought after, reviving and reappraising great writers of the past such as Shakespeare—as the great English writer, as well as Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, and others. The racial origins and virtues of the English were traced to the ancient Trojans, Teutons, Saxons or Goths. The “fusion of two powerful creeds” completed the definition of the nineteenth century national character: Evangelical Protestantism and Chivalry. Evangelism was characterized by industry and missionary spirit, promotion of philanthropy and religion, duty and hard work, and the abstention from worldly pleasures.⁴¹⁴ A revival of chivalry (with its idea of the gentleman as an assimilable image for the ruling elites in Britain) based gentlemanly behavior on virtues such as bravery, courtesy, modesty and a sense of responsibility towards the weak. These ideas of gentlemanly conduct became a ruling elite image that filtered down from the elite to the rest of the population through popular culture. The cross-fertilization of these two ideologies also helped justify an Empire built and acquired for economic, political and strategic reasons. As Jeffrey Richards explains it, the missionary impulse (and desire to convert the heathen) along with an obligation to “provide justice and good government” to inferior races intertwined “with the chivalric vision of Empire as a vehicle for young Englishman to demonstrate the virtues that made them gentleman.”⁴¹⁵ Both of these ideologies stressed the importance of concern for others and ideas of personal restraint as well as duty and service; these values helped form the national character.

From the late nineteenth century until the 1950s, the rule of the British at home and abroad was a significant part of Britain’s world image. The monarchy, which continues to exist even after the fall of Empire, played a particular role by providing a way for diversity and unity to be celebrated—through the Royal family and celebratory participations among their peoples. Paul Ward suggests that the media developments of the twentieth century enabled “an increasing

⁴¹³ Richards, *Films and British National Identity*, 8.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

proportion of the population to be involved in such ritual, even if only as spectators from afar.”⁴¹⁶

From the first radio broadcasts of the King’s speech at his 1937 coronation, to onscreen representations of parades and rousing patriotic speeches and song, media representations of royal events encouraged their identification with their King, helping them through the abdication crisis. Royal events were also imperial occasions, thus “participants could extend their sense of belonging to the Empire.”⁴¹⁷ In other words, this imagined (and actual) participation was all through celebration of the entity which united them all, the Crown.

While Britishness functions to unite the nation across internal divisions, it is not a monolithic identity. Instead, Britishness is mediated by other identities, such as those of class, of place, of gender, and of religion.⁴¹⁸ Among these, Paul Ward provides an interesting account of gendered Britishness. The ties of masculinity and Empire represented a Britishness that was patriotic and masculine in nature in the late nineteenth century. But with the increased agency of women in a more public sphere after the turn of the century, from their participation in the first world war to achieving the right to vote, the interwar years:

saw a move away from formerly heroic and officially masculine public rhetorics of national destiny and from a dynamic and missionary view of the Victorian and Edwardian middle classes in ‘Great Britain’ to an Englishness at once less Imperial and more inward-looking, more domestic and more private—and, in terms of pre-war standards, more ‘feminine’.⁴¹⁹

This argument, put forth by Alison Light, summons the example of female literary authors such as Agatha Christie during this period, with her “decent, nice and essentially private” characters presenting a more “inward looking notion” of the British.

Other historians, such as John M. MacKenzie and Stephen Constantine, claim that in the interwar years, the new forms of media led to an expansion in the amount of imperial

⁴¹⁶ Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 18–19.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37. See Ward for more on these different identities.

⁴¹⁹ Alison Light, “Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism Between the Wars” (Routledge, 1991), 8; quoted in Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 44. Ward asserts Light’s use of Englishness here can be applied to Britishness generally, as is common with many historians’ use of Englishness.

propaganda.⁴²⁰ But rather than counter Light's argument, Ward asserts that the use of radio and cinema to encourage a sense of British identity "does in fact strengthen the domestication of Englishness thesis" given that they placed "greater emphasis on women and the family unit." Prior to 1914, women had largely been excluded from most mass leisure; radio and cinema "allowed access to all but the poorest and both were central to the family."⁴²¹ He continues to describe how Empire themes were still emphasized, but the "tone of the message" had altered in line with the "domestic nature" of the new mass media. He addressed this with the Empire Marketing Board's domestication of imperialism through a massive "Buy British" campaign in 1929-1931 of pamphlets, posters, films, and lectures that included paraphernalia such as the King's Empire Christmas pudding recipe.⁴²² Although he does later admit that it was a continued negotiation of identity; through the 1930s there were returns of an "elite masculinity," reflected in such films as Korda's *The Four Feathers* (1939). These contestations in cinema (as well as middlebrow literature) dealt with manly virtues of the officer class and "restoring the links between bravery and heroism" and manliness as "central to service to the nation and Empire."⁴²³

Empire and imperial values were central to British culture during the interwar years. Even the imperial definition of British films in the 1927 Films Act reflects this imperial nature of Britishness and the sense of a connected unity of this time. As discussed in chapter two, for quota purposes "British films" meant all films made within the Empire. They were not intended simply to be an outflow of films from the mother country. It was also frequently referenced as part of the "national rhetoric" in the Parliamentary debates leading up to the Films Bill's passage. For a case in point, Lord Bishop Southward invoked another "bond of Empire" in the same breath as the national "splendours" of England to urge his fellows to support the legislation.

⁴²⁰ See Mackenzie's and Constantine's contributions for more; John M. MacKenzie, "'In Touch with the Infinite': The BBC and the Empire, 1923-53," in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. John M. MacKenzie (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1986), 165-91; Stephen Constantine, "'Bringing the Empire Alive': The Empire Marketing Board and Imperial Propaganda, 1926-33," in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. John M MacKenzie (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1986), 192-231.

⁴²¹ Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 45.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid., 46.

But the pathetic, the tragic feature of the whole position, I think, is that ...there is...probably no country in the world which can afford such magnificent material for the films. There is the beauty of our countryside. There is the splendour and interest of our buildings, our country houses and our churches. There is the stirring history of our nation. [These] are some of the very ideas which have been wrought into our national character which might in some way be embodied in the best of our films. They might express to the people who see them what is best in our national life. They might form a bond of union throughout the Empire. More than that, when they passed into foreign countries they might interpret to foreign nations some idea of our institutions and the genius of our nation.⁴²⁴

The British Empire, as a major component of British national identity, validated the “superiority” of British character. This blend of Protestant evangelical values and codes of chivalry that underpinned Britishness could be propagated to audiences in Britain and America, and the box office popularity of the imperial films genre support that they found them appealing. Furthermore, these films are the specific type to address issues of an Imperial British identity from primarily a UK perspective. Jeffrey Richards reveals how this part of British character was projected in 1930s imperial films.

“The heroic individualism of the lone British officer” was a concept of British character envisaged in the Empire films produced in London and Hollywood during the 1930s.⁴²⁵ Jeffrey Richards explores these ideas of British imperial heroes, and explains that one of the reasons Alexander Korda produced his famous trilogy of Imperial dramas was because he was “a confirmed Anglophile” who saw the British Empire builders as the personification of honorable traits of “character and spirit.”⁴²⁶ According to Richards, these qualities are the heart of Korda’s imperial vision. *Sanders of the River* (1935), *The Drum* (1938), and *The Four Feathers* (1939) place character as the center to these films stories – in each of these films, “the man is the message.”⁴²⁷ As Richards submits, none of these films offer a political (or economic or constitutional) justification for the Empire except in the “strength and nature of British character and the moral superiority of the British to everyone else by virtue of their commitment to a code of

⁴²⁴ *Cinematograph Films Bill*, HL Deb (5th Series), November 28, 1927, vol. 69, cc. 292-293, accessed January 12, 2016; <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1927/nov/28/cinematograph-films-bill>.

⁴²⁵ Richards, *Films and British National Identity*, 33–34.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

behaviour which involves the preservation of law, order and justice for love of those qualities.” In these portrayals, it is the governed who consent to the British exercise of power, which is defined in opposition to “self-seeking, power-hungry native despots.”⁴²⁸ Most of the great imperial heroes were reincarnated on the screen in Hollywood or London during the peak years of cinema. Jeffrey Richards examines a number of those produced throughout the 1930s; overall he found that these heroes became “stylized into ideals” as well as “epitomes of the national character.”⁴²⁹

Britons’ Perspective of Imperial Britishness

The colonial secretary Viscount Goderich voiced in 1833 what would become a rhetorical trope heard repeatedly throughout the next century that the purpose of Britain’s imperial policy was to embed “the spirit of civil liberty” in “distant regions.”⁴³⁰ However, the British Raj in India as well as Britain’s rule over an African colonial empire was based mainly on force, so any notion that distant locales would benefit from this British “spirit of civil liberty” presumed British superiority to other peoples. David Marquand suggests that this notion of civil liberty encapsulated a myth in which British peoples could take pride; it told them “not just that they were a uniquely freedom-loving and oceanic people, but that they had *become* a people when they decided to turn their backs on continental absolutism and ‘plant the flag of liberty beyond the ocean’.”⁴³¹ Even more uplifting, British leaders such as Winston Churchill professed that their “uniquely oceanic and freedom-loving character” made them into a “world-wide family of freedom-loving ‘English-speaking peoples’.”⁴³²

Nevertheless, however active the propaganda was at promoting imperialism, the British public “never came to grips with” the principles of imperial rule, or its practice. John MacKenzie posits that they knew next to nothing about specific territories or their “administrative, ‘native’ or

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 41.

⁴³⁰ Goderich quoted in David Marquand, “‘Bursting with Skeletons’: Britishness after Empire,” in *Britishness: Perspectives on the Britishness Question*, ed. Andrew Gamble and Anthony Wright (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell in association with the Political Quarterly, 2009), 12.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 12; referencing quote from G. M. Trevelyan; author’s italicization.

⁴³² Winston S. Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, 4 volumes (London: Cassell and Co., 1956-1958) quoted in *ibid.*, 12.

economic affairs.”⁴³³ Thus, a generalized imperial vision was perpetrated as a world view that rendered fundamental elements of British patriotism as distinctively imperial during this period. Furthermore, it is this world view, rather than the intricate concept of Empire, that popular culture (including cinema) perpetuated.

However, there was a different perspective of this concept of Britishness throughout the rest of the British world. Generally, those Britishers living outside the United Kingdom included a wide make-up of expatriates, the descendants of earlier British migrants (born in their respective part of the Empire), and British subjects throughout the colonies and dominions of the British Empire. Among this wide range of English-speaking peoples, a varied and in some cases more inclusive version of Britishness is apparent from their perspective.

Histories of Britishness in the last century have been relatively limited, with a few exceptions such as Linda Colley. Furthermore, there is a tendency for British histories to focus on Englishness. Other books concerning Scottish, Welsh, and Irish identities have tended to reject Britishness as anything other than an imposition of English roots in the periphery.⁴³⁴ However, there has been a surge of interest among historians concerning the non-UK Britishness that persists in the wider “British world.”

As W. David McIntyre points out, the use of “British” as an adjective can be problematic, as it can legitimately refer to the United Kingdom, the self-governing Dominions, or even the “Empire-as-a-whole.”⁴³⁵ Through the years, historians have applied various labels when attempting to define the self-governing white settler colonies throughout the world. Sir Charles Dilke chose “Greater Britain,” but he confused the issue by including the United States, and later attempts to renew this usage were unsuccessful. James Belich has applied the term Anglo world to represent North America and Australasia, while dubbing the Old Dominions as “Neo-

⁴³³ John M MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1986), 8.

⁴³⁴ Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, 6. See footnotes 27-29 for list of suggested scholarship.

⁴³⁵ McIntyre, *The Britannic Vision*, 66.

Britains.”⁴³⁶ Even more recently, historians of the “British world” have been eager to show that Britishness persists outside Britain and past the fall of the British Empire.⁴³⁷

The trends of British migration at the turn of the twentieth century inform the construction of a wider British identity and culture: a “broader Britishness some of which was exported back ‘Home.’”⁴³⁸ Until about 1870, Canada remained the favorite destination for British migrants. While the termination of convict transportation to Australia helped reduce the negative perception associated with its free migration, it was the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 (and bigger, steam propelled ships) that enabled shorter journey times and better connections to the farther reaches of the Empire. By the turn of the century, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, bolstered by self-government and increasing economic and political self-reliance, grew more “assertive in attracting growing numbers from Britain’s ‘surplus’ population.”⁴³⁹ From 1900-1909, an estimated 1.67 million migrants left Britain, and another 1.81 million left during the 1920s, with a significant portion headed to destinations within the Empire.⁴⁴⁰ This British “dispersal” or “Diaspora” shifted away from a focus on the United States prior to 1900 towards the “white” Dominions in the twentieth century. These were huge volumes of migrants who contributed substantially to the population growth of these receiving societies. Furthermore, as Stephen Constantine has suggested, most British immigrants flocked into the towns and cities as opposed to the countryside, which must have enhanced a sense of group resettlement in British communities.⁴⁴¹ Unlike other immigration groups and Diasporas, these British peoples settled primarily within an already established English-speaking world. Consequently, they “enjoyed an apparent ease of

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 67.

⁴³⁸ Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, eds., *The British World: Diaspora, Culture, and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2003), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=122740&site=ehost-live>.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Stephen Constantine, “British Emigration to the Empire-Commonwealth since 1880: From Overseas Settlement to Diaspora?,” in *The British World: Diaspora, Culture, and Identity*, ed. Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich (London: Routledge, 2003), 20.

entry into and perhaps assimilation into British, or at least British-derived, societies and cultures, whether inside the British Empire or outside in the United States.”⁴⁴²

Additionally, emigration politics convinced British migrants of their privileged status. A supposed “virtue” of the British Empire was the freedom of movement within it. According to the British Nationality Act of 1914, British citizens were defined as “any person born within His Majesty’s dominions and allegiances”. This “apparent gesture of equality” seemed to imply a free market for people’s labor and skills anywhere in the Empire, whatever their ethnic or geographical origins. However, as Constantine explains, “global migration was taking place within a highly politicized structure, in which some British citizens were more equal than others. In practice, the politics of empire were highly conducive to ease of assimilation for white British settlers until after 1945...”⁴⁴³ Generally, British migrants *were* privileged because of their whiteness and the prevailing concepts of race (and the legislative consequences) during this early twentieth-century period. Harsh restrictions limited “Asiatics” from entering the empire’s “settler societies,” including those fellow “citizens” of Empire—even as emigration from Britain to the white settler societies was marketed as being (and felt to be) merely a “redistribution from one part to another of Greater Britain.”⁴⁴⁴ This disparity of treatment and assumption of a mobile British identity highlights the perceived “white” definition of Britishness among those in Britain as well as those within the “white” dominions or settler societies. However, this aspect of Britishness would be contested by some groups throughout the Empire as they, too, made claims to Britishness.

Neville Meaney has posited that the “British myth” has been more potent in Australia than in Britain. He claims it was “easy” for Australians to embrace membership in the British Empire and take on the character of Britishness. The artificiality of a “British race” incorporating the English, Welsh, Scots and the Irish (with their separate traditions, languages, and lifestyles) seemed more plausible in Australia. There the transplanted migrants from throughout Britain “mixed together in their new homeland and in many respects homogenized their

⁴⁴² Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 20–21.

traditions...Consequently Britishness as an idea had more relevance for Australia than the United Kingdom.”⁴⁴⁵

The “cultural glue” that held this British world together was not just shared values and sentiment or a shared concept of a “British race”; there was also a “plethora of networks” from family and community connections to trade networks, religious and profession associations, and so much more.⁴⁴⁶ Additionally, as Bridge and Fedorowich point out, beyond the core of the “ethnic British diaspora,” there was the possibility of “adopted Britishness.” Various peoples including French Canadians, Afrikaners, Cape Coloureds, Aboriginal peoples, and West Indians “laid claim to British values and institutions.” They continue, explaining how Britishness could extend to include such a wide range:

In principle, the system was colour and class blind, and often, though by no means always, it was in practice. ...The great exception, of course, was the restriction of non-white immigration into the Dominions by such means as language or dictation tests (the ‘Natal formula’), quotas, capitation taxes, and health and sanitation regulations.⁴⁴⁷

Defined succinctly by W. David McIntyre, “British subject” is the term “used in nationality, naturalisation, and citizenship laws to describe the common status of persons owing allegiance to the monarchy and the concept lying at the root of Britain’s large Asian and Afro-Caribbean population.”⁴⁴⁸ As mentioned briefly above, some British subjects attempted to negotiate a different meaning to Britishness—one that was more inclusive in terms of race and based more stolidly around Victorian notions of respectability. These values and racial distinctions varied between circumstances and geographies, as the following case studies will reveal.

After detailed investigations into the distribution of British films into these two specific British locales (one Dominion and a colonial region), the following two case studies will reflect further upon the variations and nuances of these understandings of Britishness, variations

⁴⁴⁵ Neville Meaney, “Britishness and Australian Identity,” *Australian Historical Studies* 32, no. 116 (April 2001): 82.

⁴⁴⁶ Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, “Mapping the British World,” in *The British World: Diaspora, Culture, and Identity*, ed. Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich (London: Routledge, 2003), 9.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ McIntyre, *The Britannic Vision*, 67.

between the different types of Commonwealth status, and how this appraises local cinema-going audiences. Incorporating local contexts to this British cultural and national identity at the local level, we can use this approach to deal with those audiences presumed to be interested in British-manufactured product of entertainment, supplied for their seemingly “British” tastes. How this is marketed with that intention will allow us to speculate further about these local audiences and their cultural identities.

Film and Consumer Agency

Finally, I would like to include a brief word concerning the agency of both film as a cultural commodity and audience members as its consumers. Given the nature of mass-produced popular culture as a whole, with its efforts to seek out profit maximization by appealing to a broad common denominator, an accepted national identity would tend to underpin this media. Thus, as Jeffrey Richards explains it, the “practitioners of both elite and popular culture” play a vital role in “defining and disseminating national identity, values and character.”⁴⁴⁹ However, the notion of an accepted national identity also alludes to the role of the peoples themselves, and in this particular form of popular culture, film audiences. Given the many ways film can be used to “represent” its nation and/or national character, perhaps a short synopsis of how it might relate to consumer agency is necessary to situate the following case studies’ propositions.

Cinema is but one form of promotion and dissemination of a particular national identity and character. They can be promoted by a various range of institutions, events, ceremonies, and symbols, from flags to parades, folklore and fairytales, to educational systems and military codes. As a result of this broad scope of nationality inculcation in the interwar years, audiences expected certain characteristics and attitudes to be portrayed when movies depicted the English (or British). At its basic level of interaction, popular culture thus created and fed this expectation.

For an example more directly affiliated with a film’s agency in English-speaking markets, while film (whether British or American) provided British audiences in Great Britain the opportunity to experience far-off places and shared dreams, film could also offer a reminder of those things

⁴⁴⁹ Richards, *Films and British National Identity*, 2.

about home and nation which they held dear. As a mass culture media, cinema (and radio) could reinforce national identities (or hinder them, as many ruling elites feared would occur with Hollywood films). Themes of Empire, monarchy, political institutions, as well as representations of the values and mores of British society—these could serve a “purpose” within the United Kingdom, Great Britain, and throughout the Empire, as well as present an image of Britishness to other nations.

To Empire audiences especially, film could serve as a “token” of “home,” as well as providing the *means* to maintain some sense of connection. Films could make the “imaginary” (shared identity and community) into a type of physical experience of the “homeland”—an experience both visual and (after 1930) sensory that likely provided incentive among those individuals that intentionally sought out British films.

As seen within the earlier remarks from Parliament and the Committee on Cinematograph Films, ruling elites’ concerns regarding empire were tied to (in their understanding) the duty and purpose of a national film. To many of them, British films’ function as regards the Empire was to represent the “prestige” and “genius of the nation,” which ironically was only possible with the sustained interference of legislation at that time. The ruling elites were similarly concerned about the educational role that films played with Empire audiences in particular. In 1926, the need to bolster a British industry was conceived as an Imperial idea as well. Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, President of the Board of Trade and proponent of a British quota, spoke at the Imperial Conference of 1926 of the desire that people throughout the Empire had to become more familiar with the Empire. In his talks, he references these shared visions and values:

The strongest bonds are the least definable—a common outlook, common ideals, a common atmosphere exemplified, for instance, in our common literature. If this be so, can we be content that the cinema, this new and all-pervading influence, should appeal to the most impressionable of our people (for cinema audiences

are for the most part young) always in a foreign setting and a foreign atmosphere.⁴⁵⁰

Films, then, could also provide other British subjects this experience, encouraging a similar connection to the metropole as well as educating them about themselves (from Cunliffe-Lister's perspective). It would also underline a unity throughout the British world among its peoples.

In the case of various "natives" in some of these regions, more care was exerted to ensure their limited exposure to non-British representations—by which I mean those aspects of human nature considered non-British: deviant and criminal behavior, interracial relations, foul language (or American slang), anything that presents whites in a bad light, and so forth.

It has already been established that the production strategies (especially internationalist policy) altered or shaped representations of Britishness, even if this differed per individual film. Some of the more obvious genres or cycles of films, such as biopics of monarchs or empire films of adventure, make their Britishness seem more apparent—even if Hollywood provided much the same types of material. After his success with *Henry VIII* (1933), Alexander Korda's films grew increasingly patriotic and symbolic of national (and imperial) pride as the 1930s progressed, including Baroness Orczy's *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934), *Sanders of the River* (1935), *The Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel* (1937), *Fire Over England* (1937), *The Spy in Black* (1939), and continued even after his move to Hollywood during the war, with *Lady Hamilton* (1941; US Title: *That Hamilton Woman*). All these served in various ways to enhance national identification while bringing in returns based on audience self-identification and pride in their nation and Empire.

This section has briefly sketched some of cinema's ability (or agency) to influence and interact with audiences. But as Robert James stresses most ardently, audiences are not passive observers merely absorbing whatever film producers have dictated. Instead, there is consumer agency, the ways in which the audience participates: from choosing which product to watch to contacting their local newspapers to request more provision of a certain type of film. If a consumer chooses to watch a film because it is British, as opposed to basing it solely on the

⁴⁵⁰ Quoted in Jarvie, *Hollywood's Overseas Campaign*, 62.

more common parameters of a preferred star and/or story, then in that instance the national character of film would become involved in the agency. Producers, distributors, and exhibitors all hoped that this would inherently be the situation among audiences of the British Empire. It also helps to explain the use of Britishness in the marketing ploys used to engage consumer interest, as the following case studies will explore in more detail. And once exposure to “good” British films increases (meaning, British films that these consumers like), then theoretically a familiarity and preference for certain British stars and genres can be built upon further, encouraging producers to further supplement films of similar nature.

Finally, it is necessary to briefly discuss the agency of film and consumer in regards to an analysis of cultural (and national) identity with film audiences. The case studies’ analyses on British films and audiences of South Africa and the British Caribbean hinge upon speculation and hypothesis based on suppliers’ expectations and exhibitors’ enthusiasms for particular films and repeat screenings. This approach explores how the supply side perpetrates and uses an idea of Britishness applied to these films to lure and attract consumers. The increased use of this public relations method indicates something about audience identification, albeit from the distributors’ and exhibitors’ perspectives. This will be determined utilizing industrial mechanisms: marketing and publicity, newspaper articles and advertisements, and only a few statistics to estimate British film reception in these areas. It is important to consider the factors shaping their agency, including the point of their decision to attend the cinema and the impact of advertising and promotion. Unfortunately, limited resources make this analysis less able to determine how many actually did choose to attend, and even less so to determine how and what they enjoyed. However, one can make an educated guess based on the minute resources available in local newspapers, as the following studies will demonstrate.

Chapter 6

“...and it's B-R-I-T-I-S-H! “: A Case Study of British Films in South Africa

In 1935, United Artists released London Films' *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1935) to first-run theaters in major towns and cities of South Africa with resounding success. While film profits situate figuratively low in comparison with key markets like Britain, Australia, or even America, the box office success of this film in South Africa highlights the prospect of local interest in British films—at least those of lavish spectacle, patriotic endeavors, and British (and continental) subject matter. Sir Percy Blakeney, swashbuckler, English aristocratic and chivalric hero, and international spy, could outwit and outmaneuver the bloodthirsty and ungentlemanly French revolutionary mob. Based on Baroness Orczy's popular novel (and play), this double-life masked avenger also appealed to a national identity based on Englishness and gentlemanly behavior: whether a brainless fop by London standards or clever champion of France's tyrannized aristocracy. However, as with other London Films' productions, this 1930s British film also represents the internationalist policy and Hungarian involvement on its production, including producer Alexander Korda, co-scenarist Lajos Biro, art director Zoltan Korda, and even leading “Englishman” Leslie Howard (née Steiner, Hungarian by birth but educated in England). Even so, this film version of the Pimpernel became “the definitive screen version and one of the most fondly remembered British films of the 1930s.”⁴⁵¹ According to UA's ticket sales, South African audiences agreed.

Luckily, United Artists' black books include the gross figures for certain titles released from 1934-1938 in various towns of South Africa. In the largest-populated city and most vital market of Johannesburg, the Metro theater engaged this film's longest South African first-run stint

⁴⁵¹ Jeffrey Richards, *Cinema and Radio in Britain and America, 1920-60*, Studies in Popular Culture (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010), 208. See Chapter 8, pp. 202-221 for a detailed discussion of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* from novel to its various formats as a play, as well as multiple screen, radio, and television versions throughout the twentieth century.

(eleven days) and garnered its largest gross from box office sales.⁴⁵² Earning \$4,517 over the eleven-day period, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* profited as much as (if not greater in certain towns) any other major motion picture released by United Artists during this period.⁴⁵³ In other words, a British film could hold its own against Hollywood among South African audiences, especially when it was in a Hollywood studio's best interest to utilize it within the wider English-speaking market.

As the previous chapter points out, an exploration of the English-speaking target market beyond the British Isles and America provides an opportunity to explore national and cultural identities in a transatlantic and global context. The "Diaspora" of English-speaking peoples, especially in relation to imperial trade and local consumption trends, provided connections and distribution opportunities (and expectations) for reaching this broader market with films intended for British if not global consumption. Films as a cultural commodity provide historians another tool with which to gauge national identities of British, European, and/or local nationalisms within other regions of the world.

In this chapter, the unique context of the Union of South Africa as a dominion of the British Empire is situated into a transatlantic scope of 1930s British Cinema. As the previous chapters reveal, the connections between Hollywood's and Britain's film industries were

⁴⁵² South Africa Statements, Black Books, United Artists Corp. Records, Series 1F Black Books, Foreign Statistics, circa 1935-50, Box 9, Folder 7 (hereafter UA/1F/B9/F7). UA first-run releases averaged at 6 days in South Africa for almost all their pictures. UA worked with local exhibitors (and later the major studios like MGM) to gain access to the super cinemas. The exception of a two-week run besides *Pimpernel* in 1935 was *House of Rothschild* (1934) which ran ten days in Johannesburg later that year. Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck (uncredited) at 20th Century Pictures and starring British actor George Arliss, this biopic about the famous continental Jewish banker family of Rothschild presents a particular focus upon the England branch. For statistics concerning their distribution in South Africa, see Tables 6-1, 6-2, and 6-3 later in this chapter.

⁴⁵³ Other ticket sales information is provided for the following UA-contracted titles, including continental- or British-themed stories: *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1934), *The Private Life of Don Juan* (1934), *Clive of India* (1935), *Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back* (1934), and *Les Miserables* (1935). Not all titles have ticket sale information; a few titles' rights were sold directly to IVTA (explained further later in this chapter), and UA did not hold the South African distribution rights to Herbert Wilcox's titles for UA in 1934-1935. *The Scarlet Pimpernel* beat out its (UA-only) competitors that year in both Durban and Pietermaritzburg in Natal (though the actual profit was quite minimal in Pietermaritzburg (\$269), Durban's six-day run brought in \$1,300, more than any other at that location, and more than the six-day run in Cape Town with \$1,058). This difference possibly reflects the strong Natalian identification with Britain.

intrinsically connected from their production of movies to their distribution and exhibition throughout the world. With the advent of sound technology in cinema, distribution to other English-speaking countries became especially important to both of these film industries' profits, thus this transatlantic connection also maintained a deeply embedded industry rivalry for those earnings. Additionally, as the previous chapter indicates within Australia and Canada, those markets with similar tastes and preferences as the British market would seem a more readily viable market. As Ruth Vasey has shown in her examination of the British market's influence upon Hollywood productions, Hollywood altered many of their films and genre cycles for the British market.⁴⁵⁴ Studios deliberately exported these international and British-themed films to similar markets, including Australia, Canada, and South Africa. As the number of higher quality British films rose during the span of the decade, British film companies and producers hoped to utilize these same benefits, using similar English tastes to their advantage when possible. Some British films incorporated different values and messages than those from Hollywood not only differentiating them as a product, but also (perhaps) to enable British films to connect with those audiences and peoples that perceived themselves as being British or identifying with that nationality in some manner. This chapter explores some of those connections and ideas of Britishness as they were exported via films and their publicity to the Union of South Africa and faced South Africa's unparalleled situation shaped by its geography, internal conflict, and racial and cultural differences that created a curious outcome.

By the 1930s, the United States exported a variety of consumer goods and cultural artifacts to South Africa that developed a closer affiliation between the two countries, and among these, like elsewhere, Hollywood's films came to dominate over local indigenous film production as well as European imports. Yet there is much more to the equation of Hollywood and the few Afrikaner films in South Africa, given the inherent imperial connections of the Dominion and the progress of the British film industry during this 1930s period. This study investigates the presence of specifically British films in South Africa and their connections to the English-speaking

⁴⁵⁴ Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939*.

peoples—who resided primarily in urban cities and regions of the Cape and Natal, as well as Johannesburg (in the Transvaal).

To do so, an analysis of film publicity in local newspapers as these films competed with the dominant Hollywood imports reveals how some local audiences continued to self-identify more with Britain even as South Africa was becoming a more legally independent country and attempting to unify the Anglo and Afrikaner peoples. These two groups made up the white minority of South Africans; however centuries of hostility and conflict carried over into the twentieth century's Union of South Africa. Language, education, and culture (among many other differences) continued to divide these groups and tie British South Africans (or as they came to be known by the early part of the century, English-speaking South Africans) to Britain and its Empire. The great majority of English-speaking, white South Africans were British in origin or by descent until the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁵⁵ Ultimately, this analysis illuminates that many English (i.e. English-speaking) South Africans were very much still anglicized and familiar with goings-on in England, including its film industry. “British” was a key descriptive term for films coming from Britain (and even in some Hollywood advertising, in some cases), and the local press utilized this identifier as a positive factor in marketing films to South Africans living in urban areas. Lastly, this chapter will close by tying these observations of British film distribution, exhibition, and promotion to the concept of a British South African identity still prevalent in South African society.

Context: 1930s Cinema in South Africa

Before turning to the cultural analysis of British film publicity and local identities, it is necessary to situate the film distribution and exhibition system in place in South Africa. Historiographical context, and a detailed description of South Africa's distribution structure is followed by a case study of British films released in South Africa via United Artists and MGM. After establishing the cinema context of this period, this study explores the cultural disparity of South Africa's peoples and how this impacted cinema-going among different groups. In this way,

⁴⁵⁵ John Lambert, “‘An Unknown People’: Reconstructing British South African Identity,” *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 37, no. 4 (December 2009): 599, doi:10.1080/03086530903327101.

a more educated hypothesis can be determined concerning the likelihood of which group(s) might prefer to see a “British” film over Hollywood fare.

During the 1930s, Hollywood continued to dominate the international market even after the introduction of sound and the economic crisis of the Great Depression. As the previous chapters detail, in contrast to the well-established Hollywood studios, filmmakers in Britain were struggling to make high-quality films and still profit, since the domestic market was too limited in scope to do more than possibly recoup their costs. This concern was especially important as British filmmakers were trying to create and build their own industry and national cinema. Significant British producers, like Michael Balcon and Alexander Korda, believed that targeting an international market was the only way to support the growth of a British industry. Whether making distribution deals directly with overseas distribution circuits/companies or contracting with American distributors to reach international shores, many found it necessary to look beyond the British Isles for more expansive distribution and profit. In the case of South Africa, most British production companies dealt more directly with the established local monopoly, and a few British producers used the American system via United Artists and MGM (and later 20th Century Fox) to achieve South African distribution for their films.

Parliament's enactment of the Cinematograph Act of 1927 attempted to protect British capital against Hollywood competition and the dominance of their films not only within Britain, but throughout the Commonwealth countries. The restrictions on advance- and blind-booking and other measures were among the ways the British administration could influence the British film industry, and consequently along down the line, eventually affecting entertainment in South Africa.⁴⁵⁶ The Union of South Africa, formed with the unification of two British colonies and two former Afrikaner republics, was established by Parliament as a Dominion of the British Empire in 1910. After 1927's quota act, Parliament initially expected the Union (and Britain's other dominions) to establish a quota for British films, even with the passage of the Statute of

⁴⁵⁶ Michael Eckardt, *Film Criticism in Cape Town 1928-1930: An Explorative Investigation into the Cape Times and Die Burger* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005), 1–2.

Westminster in 1931, which allowed for self-governing dominion status (making official the *de facto* practice). From then on, British Parliament could no longer legislate on South Africa's behalf, and thus any British quota had to pass through South Africa's parliament—which it never did. A local distribution and exhibition monopoly organized by American entrepreneur I.W. Schlesinger, already long-established within the South African film industry since the 1910s, was booming with American business.⁴⁵⁷ The state's role primarily revolved around citizens' concerns over the free flow of commercial films to black viewers, possibly exposing "Natives" to negative images of "White Europeans" and to immoral aspects of Western culture. In its place, the Union's passage of the Entertainment (Censorship) Act (1931) reformed the provincial censorship system in the Cape into an official Board of Censors for the Union and categorized films based on viewers' race and class.⁴⁵⁸ Meanwhile, although Hollywood's films propagated "sex appeal" and violence especially during the pre-Code years (which eases with 1934 enforcement), there was no state involvement to ensure a space in the market for British films. This lack of interest suggests that neither English politicians nor the politically ascending Afrikaner nationalists indicated a willingness or desire to do so.

Establishing wider distribution became a prominent desire for the young British industry, and while priority was the larger American market, other English-speaking countries (especially within the British Empire) were considered subsequent target markets more likely to see their films. Distributing British films in South Africa may not have seemed a large, profit-generating market due to the inherent difficulties within its geographical size, the population spread, the local film industry monopoly and American influence, Hollywood domination of film imports, and racial restrictions and other cultural differences among possible movie-going audiences. All of these factors shaped a unique experience for British film distribution and exhibition, and each restricted in some way the over two million "European" population from generating more significant

⁴⁵⁷ Canada never established a quota, but Australia followed Britain's lead within a few years, est. by 1935.

⁴⁵⁸ More on this later; also, for much more concerning colonial censorship, see Glenn Reynolds, *Colonial Cinema in Africa: Origins, Images, Audiences* (McFarland, 2015).

revenues for Hollywood, British, and other film industries in 1930s South Africa.⁴⁵⁹ Even so, British films played a significant role in local dialogue of the media and among, at the very least, English South Africans.

Historiography

A frequent topic among scholars studying 1930s South Africa is the debate over the “Americanization” or the process of rapid modernization in South Africa, and films’ role in this process both culturally and as an industry. Thus, focus has often remained on Hollywood’s dominance in the region. (In contrast with this dominant theme, a few historians have explored and debated the question of an existing national Afrikaner cinema in local production of the 1910s or later after World War II (during Apartheid), usually as a chapter in diachronic studies of South African film culture.) One of the most important South African film histories, Thelma Gutsche’s *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940* (1972) is the most complete and detailed account, but its focus is predominantly on the American and European film imports into the country, the development of a local monopoly for the distribution and exhibition of these films, and some proselytizing against the dominant and sensationalist American product. Gutsche’s assumption these films were intended for and enjoyed by “European” audiences (aka the ruling White minority) leads her to exclude discussion of “Non-European” movie-going audiences and experiences except as a one-page “miscellaneous” item.

Gutsche reiterates the links between of the rapid pace of modernity and technological changes with the importation of films and growth of the industry. Frequently she denigrates some of the negative impacts upon South African society from the rise of a faster-paced, motor-driving urban style of living that embraces the more escapist and sensationalist entertainment coming from America (as opposed to European classicism). One definitely finds an Anglophile sentiment

⁴⁵⁹ Office of Population Research, “The 1936 Census of the Union of South Africa,” *Population Index*, Vol. 9, No 3 (July, 1943), 153. Total population in 1936 was 9.589 million; of these, 21% were European [2,013,900], 69% native [6,617,100], 2 % Asiatic [191,800], and 8% mixed and other non-European, primarily the Cape Coloured [767,200]. Just five years previously the statistic was 1.828 million “Europeans.” The 1931 census was scaled down to a whites-only enumeration given the economic crisis afflicting the country. See A. J. Christopher, “The Union of South Africa Censuses 1911-1960: An Incomplete Record,” *Historia* 56, no. 2 (November 2011): 5.

and bias within her detailed and well-researched history, but there is an element of truth to her outlook as audiences dealt with the economic crisis of the Depression through escapism and the facilitated access within the growing urban areas. More specifically, the “popularization of Radio,” the “almost universal ability of the European population to drive a motor car, and the talkie cinema itself all conspired to maintain a disturbed social consciousness and a chronic desire for unintelligent distraction on the part of urban populations.”⁴⁶⁰

Additionally, there is little mention of local production, aka “South African Cinema,” such as the brief period of feature film production during the late 1910s. Gutsche sectioned off her historical overview of film production in South Africa towards the end of her study, paradoxically delegating its importance as secondary to a history of films and their importance to South African society. However, Gutsche pointed to local indigenous production long enough to highlight several key national films of the 1910s as well as the vital role of entrepreneur I.W. Schlesinger (which raises the question if his films truly represent an Afrikaner or South African cinema).

Early local indigenous production was not technically Afrikaner, British, or American although the producers and filmmakers provided a mixture of these influences. Production of films during the early 1900s-1915 consisted of erratic and varied filming of topical shorts, South African scenes, and other occasional schemes. Newsreels, such as the *African Mirror*, became part of “programmes” with the formation of Africa’s Amalgamated Theatres in 1911.⁴⁶¹ From 1913-1915, African Films Trust’s production unit served as a subsidiary department to its distributing duties and made newsreels and local scenic and educational shorts. However, Gutsche emphasizes the impact of wartime conditions upon the change that occurred in local production. With the hiatus of European film imports at the outbreak of war, Hollywood could ask any price for their product. It was not long before Hollywood flooded overseas markets (including South Africa). However, Schlesinger took advantage of this transitional moment to found African Film Productions, Ltd.

⁴⁶⁰ Thelma Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940* (Cape Town: H. Timmins, 1972), 243.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

(1916) with the aim of making “South African films for South African audiences” to fill the temporary gap in import supply and which could also be sold to overseas markets.⁴⁶²

While AFP maintained a supply of topical film shorts and newsreels for the *African Mirror*, it was their major undertaking with the historical epic *De Voortrekkers* (1916) about the Great Trek and the Battle of Blood River that garnered national interest in local production endeavors. The success of this epic feature film throughout South Africa (including a record-breaking three-week run in Johannesburg’s Palladium) exceeded the company’s expectations and inspired them to make another.⁴⁶³ *Symbol of Sacrifice* (1918) was an even more ambitious production about the Zulu Wars. It played well with South African audiences (though not as groundbreaking or as critically acclaimed as *De Voortrekkers*). These two epics, alongside other features and short fiction films, stirred interest in what was quickly becoming a nascent film production industry.

However, AFP faced increased difficulty with the rising flow of Hollywood imports. Furthermore, South Africa’s cinema-going public during this period was far too small to guarantee more than possibly meeting the costs of production; AFP relied upon overseas distribution to garner financial profits.⁴⁶⁴ Thus, with the lesser success of three feature releases in 1920, AFP increasingly turned to more documentary work in subsequent years. The last fiction feature, *The Blue Lagoon* (1923) was received well and marked the last hurrah before feature production was abandoned.⁴⁶⁵ The abandonment of feature filmmaking in South Africa after 1923 contextualizes the distribution and exhibition of the 1930s. Hollywood maintained their flood of films into South Africa; it would take enormous effort to finagle any room for other product. After the advent of sound, this became even less likely with foreign-language European films, but British films increasingly began to provide an alternative to Hollywood fare and encouraged preferences for imperial trade.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 311–312. AFP (associated at that time with African Theatres and Films Trusts) was ambitiously launched with studios built in the Johannesburg suburb of Killarney and the hiring of American film producers Lorrimer Johnston and Harold Shaw. See p. 312 for a list of AFP’s first films by AFP.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 316.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 320.

⁴⁶⁵ AFP continued production of documentary film features and shorts through the 1930s. See *ibid.*, 322–328 for more.

Lastly, in more recent scholarship, scholars are attempting to explore more deeply into South Africa's cinema culture and history. Isabel Balseiro has compiled works from several scholars to explore the evolution of South Africa's film culture before, during, and after Apartheid that situates the participation of blacks into the history and questions the existence even today of a true South African national cinema.⁴⁶⁶ Keyan Tomaselli examines South African cinema's encounters with modernity, the representations of Africa within South African cinema, and the concept of a national South African cinema dealing with Afrikaner popular memory and shifting enemies throughout the century. David Coplan's *In Township Tonight!* (2008) investigates the growth of urban black musical, theatrical, and Black Performance cultures during the early twentieth century. James Burns includes South Africa's film industry within the context of Britain's tropical empire and the development of movie-going as a type of public leisure. Most recently, Glenn Reynolds focuses attention upon colonial cinema throughout the continent of Africa—surveying production and exhibition patterns, the degree of European involvement, and the emergence of a “mass black spectatorship” with the changes of colonial film policy during the interwar years.⁴⁶⁷

Isadore W. Schlesinger

A common figure in South African film history (and one that repeatedly crops up in this chapter) is I. W. Schlesinger. Scholars emphasize Schlesinger's American citizenship and background as a supportive explanation for his vital role in bringing Hollywood films to South Africa for much of the first half of the twentieth century. However, Isadore William Schlesinger was at heart a self-made transoceanic salesman, financier, and South African entrepreneur who

⁴⁶⁶ Balseiro, *To Change Reels*, 1. For example, she raises questions such as what makes up national production: productions made by non-South Africans or even South African exiles? What about Apartheid cinema and how is that situated?

⁴⁶⁷ Keyan G. Tomaselli, *Encountering Modernity: Twentieth Century South African Cinemas*, SAVUSA Series (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, 2006); David B. Coplan, *In Township Tonight!: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008); James Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, Britain and the World (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Reynolds, *Colonial Cinema in Africa*.

remains a surprisingly elusive figure despite his stature and achievements.⁴⁶⁸ He has been credited as an innovative Jewish pioneer of mass media whose “American genius” can be viewed best in his career as a “movie mogul” as well as one who “revolutionized the entertainment world in South Africa”.⁴⁶⁹

At the age of twenty-three, this Jewish immigrant (and recently naturalized American citizen) left the United States in 1894 for South Africa. He shortly made his mark (and his fortune) in insurance after joining the American Equitable Insurance Company and eventually starting his own insurance company in 1904. The Overseas Newspaper Agency and *New York Times* obituary described his rise in South Africa as rapid: “From obscurity he rose to become a banker, entertainment leader and millionaire, originator and controller of a variety of enterprises, one of the greatest commercial financiers in South Africa and one of the country’s leading industrialists.”⁴⁷⁰ He founded and retained this one-man organization until his death in 1949, and at one point the Schlesinger Organization consisted of up to ninety companies in South Africa and overseas. In addition to insurance, he became involved in realty, banking, finance, the entertainment industry, radio broadcasting, hotels, catering, advertising, retail “drug stores,” and even agriculture and canning.⁴⁷¹

I.W. Schlesinger is largely acknowledged with establishing America’s early lead in the distribution of Hollywood films in southern Africa. The Bioscope-Vaudeville industry was struggling and failing to keep afloat, and Schlesinger was approached as a financier to help

⁴⁶⁸ Scholarship about Schlesinger remains quite limited. Besides his work in the entertainment industry (as detailed in Thelma Gutsche’s work), the more complete account of Schlesinger and his organization is in John R. Shorten, Johannesburg (South Africa), and City Council, *The Johannesburg Saga* ([Johannesburg]: John R. Shorten (Proprietary) Ltd., 1970), 631–638.

⁴⁶⁹ J. Campbell, “The Americanization of South Africa,” Working Paper, 19, accessed June 1, 2011, <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/8498>; Lawrence Elwin Neame, *City Built On Gold* ([Johannesburg]: Central News Agency, 1960), 182.

⁴⁷⁰ “I.W. Schlesinger, So. African Leader,” *New York Times*, March 12, 1949, 17.

⁴⁷¹ Shorten, Johannesburg (South Africa), and City Council, *The Johannesburg Saga*, 626; 633–635. He established Zebediela Estates as a “gigantic citrus-growing project.” In retail, he set up a chain of “drugstores” which he ran along American lines. Additionally, he established newspapers in Johannesburg and Durban in 1937, although the highly competitive and costly newspaper industry was shortly to end this involvement.

salvage the business by reorganizing it upon “practicable principles.”⁴⁷² Consolidation of interest appeared to be the obvious solution. In 1913, Schlesinger purchased controlling interest in the Empire Building Company and thus acquired the large Empire Theatre in Johannesburg. From there, he established Johannesburg as his organization’s center with the intention to distribution throughout South Africa and eventually further north. He formed African Theatres Trust, Ltd. to administer his theaters, and within a remarkably short stretch of time acquired the remainder assets (and theaters) of Empire Theatres Company and shortly after took over Africa’s Amalgamated Theatres. The Trust controlled almost every key cinema in Johannesburg and had created a considerable circuit stretching throughout the country.⁴⁷³ Establishing a circuit of theaters under a single administration was only the first step of reorganization. Schlesinger understood the importance of vertical integration and quickly negotiated a merger with the seven distributing agencies that serviced about 150 bioscopes in South Africa. Thus the African Films Trust was founded as a film importing and distributing agency under Schlesinger’s control.⁴⁷⁴ The rise in cinema’s popularity among South Africans justified his business acumen and proliferated his monopoly’s domination through the following decades.

Distribution & Exhibition

Along with the much of the world during the 1930s, South Africa experienced the explosive growth of American film distribution as well as the transition to American direct investment in South Africa’s entertainment industry. I. W. Schlesinger was already long-established as a key figure distributing Hollywood films in South Africa. After the Hollywood major studios reorganized in the immediate aftermath of the Stock Market Crash of 1929, many companies commenced an intense program of overseas expansion by building their own theaters and taking over the local distribution (when possible). South African distribution companies anticipated the forthcoming challenge and amalgamated in 1931 into two large enterprises:

⁴⁷² Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, 117.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 118–119. To clarify, this circuit consisted of the Empire-Grand bio-vaudeville theatre circuit and the bio-vaudeville theatres and bioscopes belonging to Africa’s Amalgamated Theatres. According to Gutsche, “this extraordinary feat had been accomplished within a few weeks.”

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd. (ACT) and African Consolidated Films, Ltd. (ACF). The following year brought MGM's entry and establishment of its own distribution agency in Johannesburg; subsequently MGM began to erect its own small chain of movie palaces. By the end of the decade Twentieth Century Fox also "set up shop" with its own subsidiary in 1937 that soon after developed its own chain of Fox-exclusive theaters.⁴⁷⁵ However, as the following explains, even with the gradual invasion and growth of American investment during this decade, Schlesinger's companies met each challenge with its own expansion and maintained a strong hold upon the distribution and exhibition of Hollywood films throughout the region of Southern Africa.

While Hollywood films dominated South African screens, the British film industry's own growth and flourishing (albeit briefly during the mid-thirties) also led to increasingly more British films coming to South African theaters. Whether this was an inevitable outcome of the British industry's growth or just a parallel situation, my research in the latter half of this chapter supports that exhibitors attempted to fulfill preferences of some local audiences, especially those who identified more with the British Empire. Or perhaps it is more appropriate to state that the dominant distribution and exhibition monopolistic affiliation of companies, the Schlesinger group, as well as a few important competitors Kinemas S.A. (Pty.) Ltd and MGM (S.A.), purchased (or licensed) for a specified sum the exclusive South African screening rights for both American *and* British films, and brought them to South Africa during the 1930s.

In South Africa, with African Consolidated Films, Ltd. (ACF) and African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd. (ACT), I. W. Schlesinger continued to manage the majority of distribution and exhibition and respectively (after merging with Kinemas in December 1931), throughout southern Africa for much of this decade. As a result, Hollywood studios considered South Africa an "outright sale territory," as the only way to get one's films distributed in "southern Africa below the equator" one sold the license fee for a single sum, usually within the range of \$7,500-10,000 for

⁴⁷⁵ Richard W. Hull, *American Enterprise in South Africa: Historical Dimensions of Engagement and Disengagement* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 185–186.

UA's feature films by 1938.⁴⁷⁶ Based out of Johannesburg, ACT built a variety of large-seating first-run theaters, aka "super cinemas" to slowly replace the prevalence of local "bioscopes" from years' past, in the major cities and eventually in suburban neighborhoods of South Africa (and up into Southwest Africa, Southern Rhodesia and Kenya by the end of the decade).⁴⁷⁷

But the Schlesinger group did not acquire and maintain this domination quite so easily. From 1927 to 1932, the entrance of a new distributing and exhibition company, Kinemas S.A. (Pty) Ltd., initiated a progressively-heightening back-and-forth competition and rivalry that developed a wide range of theaters throughout South Africa and provided a variety of types of films. Thelma Gutsche describes this period as the first major break of the African Theatres (AT) and African Films (AF) fourteen-year domination of the business. During this four-year struggle, the rivalry led to the extensive building of new (sound-equipped) theaters on a much grander scale in all the major cities and towns of South Africa.⁴⁷⁸ The largest of these, the "super cinemas," seated anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000 initially, and by the mid-1930s held capacity levels up to 3,000 people.⁴⁷⁹ This lavish expansion and competition continued during depression conditions (albeit with a few abandoned projects and less "spectacular signs of development" in the worst years) and indicate to Gutsche an "optimism in the face of depression [and] betokened

⁴⁷⁶ Memorandum of Agreement, 27 July 1938, UA, International Variety and Theatrical Agency, African Consolidated Films; License Agreement with UAC for Africa, 1938; UA/2A/B39/F11. License fee for Samuel Goldwyn's productions ranged on the higher end by this time, from \$10,000-19,375 for special features. The Pickford-Lasky production included in this particular agreement sold at \$7,500.

⁴⁷⁷ Terminology is based on contemporary sources; these colony's make up today's Namibia, Zimbabwe, and some cinema expansion extended north of Tanzania to parts of Kenya and Uganda. See also Arthur Kelly to Edward C. Raftery, 20 July 1937, Correspondence RE: South Africa and Adjustment of Distribution Contract with Producers, UA/2A/B38/F9 for a brief general discussion of the set-up in South African distribution as UA made plans to look for other avenues into the following years. Kelly states clearly that when UA sells to either Schlesinger or [Mr. Arthur M.] Loew (MGM), "we convey the rights for all these territories." This list of outright sale territory included Union of South Africa, Southwest Africa (Mandated territory), Mozambique (Portuguese East Africa), Southern and Northern Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, Zanzibar Island, Nyasaland, Swaziland, Basutoland, Tanganyika, Portuguese West Africa, Uganda, Belgian Congo, French Equatorial Africa, Kenya.

⁴⁷⁸ Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, 201; For more details about this rivalry and four-year transitional period, see chapter 10 in Gutsche.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 243, footnote 40. Lists published cinema capacities in Johannesburg from 1932-1936, with MGM's Metro holding 2,800; Colosseum 2,300; Plaza 2,000; Orpheum 1,950; Bijou 1,549; Palladium 1,150; and the Standard 1,046. In total, the city of Johannesburg's "super cinemas" had a capacity of 12,795 seats.

far-sighted planning, courage and confidence.”⁴⁸⁰ By 1931 both circuits held cinemas throughout the Union, with increasing numbers in Rhodesia (modern-day Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania), and as far-reaching as Kampala in Uganda.⁴⁸¹

One of Kinemas’ first strategies to counter the Schlesinger companies’ control was to supply and promote a different product from the predominantly American films shown at the African Theatres circuit—British and Continental films—a policy that was soon intercepted by Schlesinger. This strategy conveniently coincided with the surge in British productions immediately following the passage of the 1927 quota. In an early interview to the press, Sydney Hayden, the London director of Kinemas, announced a British films policy:

Since my arrival in this country some six months ago, I have been testing... the possibility of overcoming the prejudices that have undoubtedly existed against British silent productions. I am pleased to be able to say that my expectations in this direction have been very greatly exceeded. These prejudices were present, not because British films were imperfect but because the public had not had an opportunity of viewing first-class issues. That is proved by the success which has attended the consistent exhibition by Kinemas S.A... of the best of British efforts... Arrangements have been made by our London office for regular supplies not only of British but also of the leading Continental and American pictures.⁴⁸²

Gutsche explains that in addition to providing the first early sound films to South Africa, they frequently emphasized the “most pronounced feature of its policy” of showing British films. By 1928, both companies announced the purchase of a year’s worth of output from British production companies: AT with British International Pictures’ (with the local press noting the “public spiritedness of this deal and its motive of placing British product before Empire audiences”); and Kinemas announcing thirty-seven British feature films (in addition to fifty-seven American features) and their purchase of a year’s program of Gaumont British and Gainsborough films.⁴⁸³ Kinemas supplemented this purchase with a program of German films from UFA to provide additional variety of product (per their stated policy). The following year, AT continued their

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 213.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 206.

⁴⁸² *The Star* quoted in *ibid.*, 201, footnote 9.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 205.

affiliation with BIP and purchased their entire output of silent and sound films, which included Alfred Hitchcock's early talkie efforts such as *Blackmail* (1930); additionally, AF arranged one of the supposedly "biggest deals" for British films and bought the entire program of British & Dominion Films (Herbert Wilcox's early talkies) for "several years".⁴⁸⁴ These early purchasing contracts with BIP, B&D, GB, and other early British production companies established a direct importing network of outright sales that would continue during the decade between South African exhibition and companies that were to soon become key figures in the British film industry.

While in the midst of a devastating depression after years of exorbitant development and with the appearance of an outside distributing agency (MGM), African Theaters and Films merged with Kinemas S.A. in December 1931, founding two new companies, African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd. and African Consolidated Films, Ltd. Besides designating the British film industry's turnaround year (according to the press), the "magic" date of 1932 corresponds with distinct changes in South Africa's film import industry as well. Soon after the consolidation of Schlesinger's companies with Kinemas, the Depression's hardest years in South Africa were almost over. The worsening Depression conditions of the early 1930s led to the almost complete disappearance of (traditional) theatrical entertainment in South Africa. Theaters struggled against closure by opening only for short periods, and even African Theatres attempted to mix local talent performances into musical shows and created bio-vaudeville variety programs. However, as occurred in the United States, by 1932 the "Double Feature" film program had replaced these live performance acts.⁴⁸⁵ People of all classes and races were struggling, but for those that could still afford it, the lavish décor of the new movie palaces helped to create an "atmosphere" of escapism. Meanwhile, the less expensive second- and third-run neighborhood theaters sufficed for those with less money for leisure and recreational activities. Then in December 1932, South Africa was taken off of the Gold standard, and some scholars credit this (along with the return of

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 209. These direct purchases from Wilcox's company occurred 3 years prior to signing with UA, and possibly explain why Wilcox appears to have not established regular distribution of his special pictures to S.A. via United Artists.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 234.

normal rainfall by late 1933) with sparking the country's rapid recovery and end of the Depression.⁴⁸⁶

With the increase in larger movie theaters, older local "bioscopes" in suburb neighborhoods were slowly replaced during these years. However, it took a longer time before the "bioscopes" disappeared for those peoples living in the remotest rural areas. Gutsche explains that it did not take long before the country public (Europeans) "motored" the ten to twenty-plus miles to town, especially with the advent of sound film.⁴⁸⁷ Meanwhile, those working and middle classes in the cities experienced the advances in technology, communications, transportation, and other aspects of modernity as it accelerated lifestyles in the urban areas. Amidst the transitional recovery from the Depression, MGM cultivated a presence by the mid-1930s, and Schlesinger's ACT would resume building larger, "atmospheric" theaters to counter Hollywood's direct intrusion on their business. According to Gutsche, MGM was "dissatisfied with terms" for exhibiting their expensive films in South Africa, and the Hollywood major studio wanted better conditions than Schlesinger's company or Kinemas would offer.⁴⁸⁸ With the merger of African Consolidated, if Hollywood studios wanted S.A. distribution there still remained the traditional structure of outright sales to this local monopoly. MGM (S.A.) (Pty) Ltd, formed in 1930, decided to establish their own small exhibition circuit for first-run theaters in 1931 with the announcement of a land purchase in Johannesburg—the soon-to-be site for the grandest "super-cinema," the Metro, seating nearly 3,000 and intended for the exhibition of MGM's large output of films. The day following the announcement, the Schlesinger group formed Colosseum Buildings Ltd to build ACT's "main house" in Johannesburg—a "mammoth" super cinema on Commissioner Street, six streets south of the Metro (on Bree St), which opened in 1933 with the premiere of Gaumont British's *Rome Express* (1933).⁴⁸⁹ One might interpret the use of British films for such significant premiers with the opening of their largest theater to have been a strategy to counter

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 234–235.; Hull, *American Enterprise in South Africa*, 180.

⁴⁸⁷ Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, 222.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 232–234; 236, footnote 13.

MGM's Metro opening the previous year with one of their American films, a Buster Keaton comedy feature *The Passionate Plumber*.⁴⁹⁰

Prior to building additional large-house theaters, MGM attempted to build a presence by contracting Union Theatres Ltd (formed 1931) to lease non-ACT theaters for the exhibition of their films. Ironically, Schlesinger's interests controlled UT (UT's directors were directors from his companies), and thus exhibition still remained primarily in the hands of the Schlesinger group.⁴⁹¹ According to a Report on South Africa in United Artists' archives, the "Schlesinger Group" referred to ACT and UT theaters, with Union owning thirty-six theaters as of 1933.⁴⁹² Of the larger movie palaces in the three largest-population cities, Union Theatres (by 1936 at the latest) owned the Plaza and Royal in Cape Town, the Bijou in Johannesburg, and the Princess in Durban. African Consolidated Theatres owned the Alhambra and Elstree in Cape Town, the Plaza, Colosseum, and Palladium in Johannesburg, and the Playhouse, Criterion, Kings, and Alhambra in Durban. Independent owners ran the Princess in Johannesburg and the Cameo in Durban.⁴⁹³ It was not until 1936, a peak year of MGM business worldwide, that MGM (S.A.) returned to the building of additional super cinemas, one each in Durban and Cape Town.⁴⁹⁴

Shortly after the opening of the Metro, MGM appeared to comprehend local preference for some British film imports. In March 1934, MGM announced their new South Africa distribution arrangement (in addition to MGM films) with United Artists, and through them, British & Dominions Films and London Film Productions. According to Gutsche, "local public was particularly attracted by the fine British productions of London Films (especially Alexander

⁴⁹⁰ November 11, 1932 premiere; Gutsche adds that the Metro's "Mighty Wurlitzer" was said to cost £18,000, a major attraction. See *ibid.*, 235, footnote 11. MGM's *The Passionate Plumber* (1932), based on the play *Her Cardboard Lover*, was one of Buster Keaton's last MGM films to be completed on time, before his personal life took a downward cycle and his work became increasingly unreliable and erratic. For more, see Rob Nixon, "The Passionate Plumber," *Turner Classic Movies*, accessed June 20, 2015, <http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article/443505|85212/The-Passionate-Plumber.html>.

⁴⁹¹ Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, 233.

⁴⁹² Report on South Africa, 1936; Black Books, UA/1F/B9/F7. The report clarifies that Union Theatres and African Consolidated Theatres made up the "so called Schlesinger Group"; however, it lists African Consolidated Films as owning twelve theatres in addition to UT's thirty-six.

⁴⁹³ Report on South Africa, 1936; Black Books, UA/1F/B9/F7.

⁴⁹⁴ For more on MGM's business and production statistics, see Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York, N.Y.: Henry Holt and Co., 1996).

Korda's productions).⁴⁹⁵ By 1937, MGM (S.A.) imported an average of 90% of their films from the United States and 10% from England, according to a report from the US Department of Commerce and highlighting the contrast to their initial distribution just a few years prior.⁴⁹⁶ Providing this variety of high quality film product from UA made MGM a formidable competitor to ACT, especially with subsequent construction of their two additional first run theaters in Durban and Cape Town.

British Film Distribution Case Study: United Artists and MGM

It wasn't until MGM dropped into the scene that at least one outside distributor besides MGM received a percentage of box office receipts as opposed to exclusively selling their films to ACT. United Artists established a series of agreements and distribution contracts from 1934 through 1937 with MGM (SA) for a number of their prestige pictures, many of which especially included separate contracts for UA's rising star British producer Alexander Korda and his London Film Productions. Soon after the worldwide success of *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), which South Africa also received that same year, Alexander Korda's next films in the planning were included blindly (the only unnamed films listed) in United Artists' March 1934 contract with MGM (S.A.) and incumbent upon UA's decision to include LFP in the agreement.⁴⁹⁷ The blind inclusion of room for the addition of Korda's films (and the follow-up of their actual addition) points to an awareness on UA's part towards local tastes. In this roundabout way, these actions support Gutsche's claim that audiences particularly preferred LFP productions, probably due to the excitement stemming from the popularity of *Henry VIII* (it was re-released in Cape Town in 1934) and frequent newspaper publicity about the improvements within the British industry.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, 236.

⁴⁹⁶ Report on South Africa, 1936; Black Books, UA/1F/B9/F7.

⁴⁹⁷ Memorandum of Agreement between UA, MGM (S.A.) and Culver Export Corp., 9 March 1934, "Culver Export Corp., South Africa – Agreements 1934-37 and Correspondence," Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Films and UAC, South America [& S.Afr.] distribution agreements; UA/2A/B81/F6. An added note to the document stated that with inclusion of LFP films, UA must notify MGM (S.A.) within fourteen days after its execution.

⁴⁹⁸ The contract for *Henry VIII*'s South African distribution is not included in LFP's files with United Artists, but it is indicated in local newspapers by an ad giving credit to MGM, so they at least held rights for re-releasing the film in South Africa, and presumably in 1933 as well. *Cape Times*, 25 August 1934, 11.

This UA and MGM (S.A.) agreement, signed with Culver Export Corporation (New York) as its surety, included a specific list of films for the 1934/35 season from UA producers in Hollywood: Samuel Goldwyn, Twentieth Century Pictures, Walt Disney Productions, and four (at that point untitled) London Films pictures.⁴⁹⁹ This initial contract granted a first-run showing at their Metro theater and granted MGM the sole and exclusive right, license, and privilege to exploit and distribute the films throughout the South African territory including those areas mandated to it. This contract specifies certain titles receiving different percentages of the box office receipts ranging from 25% to 40%; London Films' pictures were provided a more complicated calculation, getting 33.3% of the gross box office up to £1500, then 50% split for those revenues above £1500, for each six-day period at the Metro. This contract also stipulated that MGM (S.A.) would take care of all advertisements in newspapers in South Africa and indicated the schedule from May 1934 to February 1935. Films were to be delivered within eighteen months of activation of the agreement.⁵⁰⁰

Given the lavish budgets and Korda's choice of internationally-appealing, often European (if not British) subject matter, the 1934 contract was fulfilled with LFP's *The Private Life of Don Juan* (1934), *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1935), *Moscow Nights* (1935; 1936, S.A.), and *The Ghost Goes West* (1935; 1936, S.A.). An amending letter agreement later that same year notified the home UA office that MGM "now have a franchise with Union Theatres" for eight "key" cities and for whom they will supply fifty-two programs per year: Johannesburg; Pretoria; Pietermaritzburg; Durban; Cape Town; Bulawayo, Bloemfontein; East London. In addition, Metro had franchises with two theaters in Kenya as well as one each in Zanzibar, Dar-es-Salaam, and in Kampala,

⁴⁹⁹ Memorandum of Agreement between UA, MGM (S.A.) and Culver Export Corp., 9 March 1934, UA/2A/B81/F6. Included in this early contract: Goldwyn's *Cynara**, *Nana*, *Kid From Spain**, and *Masquerader**; Howard Hughes' production of *Scarface*; Reliance Pictures, Inc.'s *I Cover the Waterfront* and *Palooka*; Art Cinema's *Secrets*; Twentieth Century's *The Bowery**, *Broadway Thru a Keyhole*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Gallant Lady*, *Looking for Trouble*, *House for Rothschild**, *Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back*, *The Firebrand*, and *Head of the Family*; Walt Disney's 2nd series, from the 1933-34 season including 13 Mickey Mouse (Black & White) and 13 Silly Symphonies (Colored). *Indicates those UA pictures to receive 40%, the highest percentage of gross receipts.

⁵⁰⁰ Memorandum of Agreement between UA, MGM (S.A.) and Culver Export Corp., 9 March 1934, "Culver Export Corp., South Africa – Agreements 1934-37 and Correspondence," Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Films and UAC, South America [& S.Afr.] distribution agreements; UA/2A/B81/F6.

Uganda.⁵⁰¹ These agreements provide evidence of MGM's already amassing reach in 1934. The extreme popularity of the *Scarlet Pimpernel* and *The Ghost Goes West* led MGM (S.A.) to contract additional agreements for the following years, each establishing the distribution of an additional six LFP films.⁵⁰² All three MGM (S.A.) agreements, including the two exclusively dealing with London Films' pictures, required delivery of all films within eighteen months and granted six-day minimum first runs at their "super cinema" Metro theater to all his pictures (and allows for the same at the possibly "soon to open" Metro theaters in Durban and Cape Town). Moreover, MGM (S.A.) granted LFP (through United Artists) separate contracts from UA's other top producers, which was probably due to Korda's change in status as a UA partner in 1935. Again, it is interesting to note that MGM was expected to provide an equal quality (to their own productions) of the usual advertising, and they guaranteed that London Films' production name (in addition to the usual credits of stars, producers, and directors) was presented in paid advertising. UA ensured that publicity reflected the augmented status of their British partner. Finally, from December 1935, the geographical coverage of this distribution was extended to "Africa South of the Equator" including Kenya and Uganda, and thus these agreements offered a broader range of Africa (albeit very few theaters) for LFP's additional pictures.

Korda's success with more European and British subject matter as well as the predominance of these types of films for their first runs in South Africa's super cinemas can be seen during the 1935 season in South Africa with his film *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1935) (delivery of which contributed towards fulfillment of 1934 contract) . A comparison of two UA producers'

⁵⁰¹ T.P. Mulroney (UA Foreign Sales Manager) to Paul D. O'Brien (UA), Letter Requesting New Amendment to March 1934 Agreement, 11 Sept 1934, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Films and UAC, South America [& S.Afr.] distribution agreements; UA/2A/B81/F6; The Kenya franchises are with the Capitol or Empire Theatre in Nairobi, Kenya and a theatre in Mombasa, Kenya.

⁵⁰² Memorandum of Agreement, 28 December 1935; and Agreement, 11 February 1937; Agreements with MGM Films, Culver Export Corp., Loews, Inc., and London Films, 1935-37; UAC Agreements for South African distribution; UA/2A/B81/F10-13. These separate contracts are no longer "blind." The first six-film contract December 1935 included: *Things to Come**, *Man Who Could Work Miracles*, *Cyrano De Bergerac*, *Conquest of the Air*, *The Revolt in the Desert*, and *Elephant Boy*; the February 1937 agreement included *I Claudius**, *Knight Without Armour*, *Fire Over England*, *Troopship*, *Men Are Not Gods*, an untitled Rene Clair production, and *Dark Journey*. Additionally, the agreements stipulate that a \$10,000 guarantee was to be paid as an advance against United Artists' share of the gross. *Indicates UA's 40% take of gross receipts.

top-grossing films of the 1934-1935 exhibition season in South Africa indicates a comparable similarity in popularity with local audiences for these films that both dealt with British subject matter. Had Twentieth Century's *The House of Rothschild* (1934), a Hollywood biopic of the English branch of the famous European banker family, been released in theaters the same week as *Pimpernel* (instead of at opposite ends of the season), these two films' gross receipts would resemble a neck to neck battle at various first-run and second-run theaters throughout the major cities. United Artists' archives include that season's statistics of six-day (and up to eleven days) runs and gross proceeds, which indicate that by the season's end *Pimpernel* often outshined *Rothschild* (except the few times *Rothschild* was carried over for longer runs). (See Tables 6-1 and 6-2 for *Pimpernel's* and *Rothschild's* grosses at various theaters in South Africa.)⁵⁰³ Other films listed that season, not doing nearly so well at the same theaters, included many literary adaptations or European subject material, such as Twentieth Century's *Moulin Rouge* (1934; 1935, S.A.), *Les Misérables* (1935), and *Cardinal Richelieu* (1935).

Table 6-1 MGM (S.A.) Distribution of London Films' *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934) in South Africa

CITY OR TOWN	PROVINCE	RUN	NO. OF DAYS	GROSS	PLAY DATE	THEATER
Johannesburg	Transvaal	1st	11	4,517	3/25/1935	Metro
Johannesburg	Transvaal	2 nd	6	495	7/15/1935	Palladium
Pretoria	Transvaal	n/a	6	687	6/24/1935	Grand
Bloemfontein	Orange Free State	n/a	6	247	8/5/1935	Grand
Durban	Natal	1 st	6	1,300	5/6/1935	Criterion
P'Maritzburg	Natal	n/a	6	269	3/13/1935	Excelsior
Cape Town	Cape	1 st	6	1,058	4/22/1935	Royal
Port Elizabeth	Cape	1 st	6	629	4/5/1935	Astra
East London	Cape	1 st	6	253	6/10/1935	Gaiety

⁵⁰³ Sold or Played Pictures Report, 1934-1938, Black Books, South Africa; UA/1F/B9/F7. Number of Days indicates length of run at the contracted theater. Note that currency type not indicated, but presumably in South African currency given the common use of local currencies in UA's Foreign General Ledgers (Series 5C). However, UA received these figures from MGM, so these figures are possibly US dollar listings.

Table 6-2 MGM (S.A.) Distribution of Twentieth Century's *The House of Rothschild* (1934)
in South Africa

CITY OR TOWN	PROVINCE	RUN	NO. OF DAYS	GROSS	PLAY DATE	THEATER
Johannesburg	Transvaal	1st	10	4,806	7/30/1934	Metro
Johannesburg	Transvaal	2 nd	6	394	11/19/1934	Palladium
Pretoria	Transvaal	n/a	6	644	12/17/1934	Grand
Bloemfontein	Orange Free State	n/a	6	246	4/1/1935	Grand
Durban	Natal	1 st	6	1,029	1/7/1935	Criterion
P'Maritzburg	Natal	n/a	6	258	1/14/1935	Excelsior
Cape Town	Cape	1 st	12	1,890	10/1/1934	Royal
Port Elizabeth	Cape	1 st	6	938	8/6/1934	Metro
East London	Cape	1 st	6	293	2/11/1935	Gaiety

The following years would see even more productions of British and imperial stories and literary adaptations exhibited in MGM-affiliated theaters. Like his *Henry VIII* did for historical costume dramas after 1933 (followed by *Scarlet Pimpernel* (1935), *Fire Over England* (1937), and other patriotic English narratives), imperial stories came into vogue with Korda's productions of *Sanders of the River* (1935), and especially in the late 1930s with *Elephant Boy* (1937), *Drums* (1938), and his successful *The Four Feathers* (1939). Across the pond in Hollywood, David O. Selznick's success with Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1934) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935) while he was at MGM started a parallel craze for more English literary adaptations. Selznick formed his own company, Selznick International Pictures (to distribute through United Artists), and proceeded to continue making expensive productions of these types of British stories, including *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1935) and *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1937). Thomas Schatz explains that in 1934, MGM was vehemently opposed to lavish literary adaptations, especially those of a more highbrow nature like Charles Dickens: "period pieces and costume dramas that were not only costly but were deemed a bit much for the average viewer."⁵⁰⁴ After taking on

⁵⁰⁴ Schatz, *The Genius of the System*, 167–168.

MGM's New York office, he convinced them to let him handle a high budget (est. \$1 million), lavish production with new English discovery Freddie Bartholomew as the lead. Not only did *Copperfield* gross nearly \$3 million, but it did extraordinarily well in the overseas market. Weeks before its release, Selznick informed the NY sales office that it would "roll up an enormous gross in the British Empire, which will more than justify its production cost."⁵⁰⁵ He was correct. According to Schatz's statistics, 25% of the \$2.8 million gross came from Commonwealth countries (vs. 54% in USA/Canada and 21% from "other foreign". And this trend would continue with *A Tale of Two Cities*, taking 31% of its \$2.4 million gross from the Empire.⁵⁰⁶ With this continuing vogue for British stories among Empire audiences, by late 1936 United Artists provided MGM the additional option in their contracts for their other British production companies, subject to MGM's interest.⁵⁰⁷ Meanwhile, MGM continued to steadily build their own network during this mid- to late-1930s period by (finally) finishing their plans to construct their first-run Metro palaces theaters in Durban and Cape Town.

British & Dominions continued to sell its films either to African Consolidated Films through their London- and New York-based agents International Variety & Theatrical Agency, Ltd. (IVTA), or in the case of its "special picture" *Nell Gwyn*, through MGM. Unfortunately, UA's archives do not reference any B&D contracts concerning South African distribution aside from one letter about advances being recouped from foreign sales that included a figure from S.A. sales (of a minimal amount). No files affiliated with B&D are available for MGM (S.A.), but according to newspaper ads, MGM (S.A.) distributed Wilcox's *Nell Gwyn* (1934) to its Union Theatres, such as their Royal movie palace in Cape Town in January 1935.⁵⁰⁸ United Artists' black books for South Africa indicate that UA did not hold the rights to distribute some of B&D's special pictures in S.A.,

⁵⁰⁵ Letter from Selznick to MGM New York office, quoted in *ibid.*, 169.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ Supplemental Agreement, November 1936, South Africa, Black Books; UA/1F/B9/F7. MGM was allowed to choose twelve of sixteen productions listed, including those of Criterion, British Cine Alliance, Trafalgar, Pall Mall, and a few Victor Saville productions. Based on UA's Black Books for South Africa, most of these were sold for a lump sum to IVTA or in a few cases, to MGM (dollar amount not indicated in UA's black books' spreadsheets).

⁵⁰⁸ *Cape Times*, January 7, 1935, 7.

specifically *Escape Me Never* (1934) and *Brewster's Millions* (1935), and they do not list *Nell Gwyn* at all. Generally, United Artists did not distribute much B&D product to South Africa; given the listing of films in their black books, it is most likely that Wilcox chose not to hand over the rights for this region. Similar to his distribution arrangement with the local agency BDF in Australia, Wilcox (B&D) probably continued selling most of his films to IVTA/ACT.

Meanwhile, MGM (S.A.) provided other UA prestige producers distribution for their films during the mid-30s, such as David O. Selznick (1935-1937, with top-grossing films such as *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1935), *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1937), and *A Star is Born* (1937)), and Joseph Schenck's Twentieth Century productions. See Table 6-3 for the top-grossing UA pictures released through MGM (S.A.) in Johannesburg from 1934-1938. *House of Rothschild* (1934) took in the largest gross receipts that particular year in MGM's Metro theater in Johannesburg, only fractionally larger than Korda's *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1935) later that same season. In addition to Korda's films, most of these top-grossing (in Johannesburg) productions also dealt with British stories and literary adaptations and frequently starred English actors (including Ronald Colman, Robert Donat, George Arliss, Freddie Bartholomew, Colin Clive, and Boris Karloff). Also indicated in UA's financial books are those UA-contracted films that United Artists sold outright to IVTA (and thus no indication of gross receipts or profit). These include such American productions as Samuel Goldwyn's *Kid Millions* (1934) with Eddie Cantor and *We Live Again* (1934) with Fredric March, and British productions like Trafalgar Film's *Dreaming Lips* (1937) with Elizabeth Bergner, and Korda's *Storm in a Teacup* (1937) with Vivien Leigh and directed by Victor Saville.

Table 6-3 Top Twenty Grossing United Artists' First Run Releases at MGM's Showpiece METRO Theater in Johannesburg, South Africa, May 1934 to May 1938⁵⁰⁹

FILM	PRODUCTION CO.	No. of Days	Total Gross	Play Date
<i>The Prisoner of Zenda</i> (1937)	Selznick International	6	5,386	11/12/1937
<i>House of Rothschild</i> (1934)	Twentieth Century	10	4,806	7/30/1934
<i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i> (1934)	London Films	11	4,517	3/25/1935
<i>Garden of Allah</i> (1936)	Selznick International	6	3,614	1/29/1937
<i>The Count of Monte Cristo</i> (1934)	Reliance Pictures	7	3,136	1/18/1935
<i>Kid from Spain</i> (1932)	Samuel Goldwyn Co.	8	2,969	5/9/1934
<i>The Ghost Goes West</i> (1935)	London Films	6	2,961	3/11/1936
<i>Clive of India</i> (1935)	Twentieth Century	6	2,773	5/3/1935
<i>Les Misérables</i> (1935)	Twentieth Century	7	2,759	8/2/1935
<i>100 Years</i> (retitled: <i>Things To Come</i> , 1936)	London Films	6	2,695	5/28/1936
<i>Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i> (1938)	Selznick International	6	2,523	5/13/1938
<i>Nana</i> (1934)	Samuel Goldwyn Co.	6	2,505	5/18/1934
<i>Little Lord Fauntleroy</i> (1936)	Selznick International	6	2,411	6/12/1936
<i>Congo Raid</i> (retitled: <i>Sanders of the River</i> , 1935)	London Films	6	2,398	7/5/1935
<i>Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back</i> (1934)	Twentieth Century	6	2,185	1/5/1935
<i>Elephant Boy</i> (1937)	London Films	6	2,146	6/30/1937
<i>The Mighty Barnum</i> (1934)	Twentieth Century	6	2,133	2/28/1935
<i>The Last Gentleman</i> (1934)	Twentieth Century	6	2,107	10/3/1934
<i>A Star Is Born</i> (1937)	Selznick International	6	2,059	12/3/1937
<i>Last of the Mohicans</i> (1936)	Reliance Pictures	6	2,008	10/28/1936

In the following years, United Artists looked for other mediums besides MGM and IVTA for South African distribution. Initially, UA's vice president Arthur Kelly visited South Africa in 1937 (around the same time as representatives from 20th Century Fox), to investigate the possibilities of establishing their own branch office. Apparently Kelly also met with the visiting Fox reps, and UA decided not to pursue their own S.A. distributing agency; by 1938 they were in talks with

⁵⁰⁹ Sold or Played Pictures Report, 1934-1938, Black Books, South Africa; UA/1F/B9/F7. Number of Days indicates length of first run at the Metro Theater. With the exception of *Rothschild* and *Pimpernel* with nearly two-week runs, the remaining titles held one-week runs at this showpiece palace. Note that currency type not indicated, but presumably in South African currency given the common use of local currencies in UA's Foreign General Ledgers (Series 5C). However, UA received these figures from MGM, so these figures are possibly US dollar listings.

Fox.⁵¹⁰ Twentieth Century Fox formed their South Africa distributing agency in 1938 and “joined forces” with United Artists

to franchise independent exhibitors who were willing to build theatres and out of this arose a circuit of theatres operating in opposition to the so-called Schlesinger theatres... The circuit was completed and operated fairly well until it was discovered that the Schlesinger interests had acquired certain of the theatres and refused at the expiration of the franchise to renew those franchises...⁵¹¹

Again, the Schlesinger group unrelentingly continued their fight to maintain control of the S. A. film industry, from Kinemas, then MGM, and on to Twentieth Century Fox in later years. Fox used their circuit for their own films, all of which had not been made available in South Africa for many years—including their most popular films with Shirley Temple—and therefore raised serious competition for Schlesinger’s interests. United Artists, in the meantime, signed a ten-year franchise agreement with Twentieth Century Fox (S.A.) in 1938, guaranteeing exhibition of their films at first-run theaters in key cities.⁵¹²

Overall, South Africa (and ultimately the Schlesinger Group) was primarily an importer of films, predominantly those from Hollywood (like much of the world). Unlike Canada, South Africa had a brief period of its own production industry with indigenous film production during the 1910s, but by the 1920s this had fizzled out and Hollywood films maintained their dominance in South Africa’s entertainment. By the 1930s, Hollywood and the British film industry perceived South Africa as a remote outlet, one that was a significantly small market in relation to other British dominions in key English-speaking markets. British producers generally sold their films and film

⁵¹⁰ “RE: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Agreement South Africa, Comments on Mr. Kelly’s Memorandum of July 27, 1938,” Report, 28 July 1938; Twentieth Century Film Corp. as Agent for South Africa and producer/distributor agreements of 1938 with various UA producers, 1937-38; UA/2A/B38/F8. In a report commenting on an internal memorandum by Arthur Kelly the previous day, author indicates that UA chose to not set up business in S.A. for tax purposes.

⁵¹¹ Letter from UA (S.A.) to Secretary of the Treasury (South Africa), 5 October 1949; UA/2A/B38/F8. Letter regards the new government law limited portion of film rentals remitted during 1947. This letter describes the initial intent and process of their affiliation with Fox in S.A.

⁵¹² Memorandum of Agreement between UA, Twentieth Century Fox Films (S.A.) (Pty) Ltd., 2 December 1938; UA/2A/B38/F8. In this agreement of December 2, 1938: specific to one theater, 2,000 seats, twenty weeks of playing time total of UA pictures per season, six-day runs of each, for a license fee of 40% of gross receipts of each and every film (except Charlie Chaplin’s films, at 50%). Supplemental agreement listed Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria.

programs outright to ACT (whether directly through ACT's New York/London agency IVTA or via a Hollywood distributor intermediary such as United Artists). Unlike the traditional method of renting films through one of their own distribution exchanges (as was Hollywood's distribution setup in most countries worldwide), even American companies were required to sell the licenses to their films for a designated fee instead of receiving a gross of the profits. Films were not rentals provided by Hollywood distributing agencies to exhibitors for a limited time of viewing, with a percentage of gross receipts going to the studio; instead shorts (ranging \$200 to \$300 per UA in 1933) and average- to "specialty" films (roughly \$2,500 to \$10,000 per UA in 1933) were sold to a representative agency of ACF, International Variety & Theatrical Agency, Ltd. (IVTA) acting on their behalf (in New York and London).⁵¹³ It was this method of business in South Africa that led MGM to invest in establishing their own base of operations.

Others were willing to continue this method given the exorbitant costs and geographical distance which set South Africa on the periphery of the film export business. Additionally, UA's Report on South Africa claims that by 1933, Schlesinger's distributing agency ACF purchased 30% of their imports from England (and 70% from the United States).⁵¹⁴ When the boom in British film production occurred in 1934, South Africa's market was ready for any increased supply of British films. Thus, ACT influenced much of the advertising in newspapers and local film publicity, although MGM's fledgling circuit (with Union Theatres acting as liaison and arranging for non-ACT theaters to exhibit MGM films) and a few independent exhibitors competed for their audiences.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹³ Digest of Contract made with IVTA as Agents of ACF, 7 June 1933; International Variety and Theatrical Agency, agreements and correspondence for South African distribution, 1925-40; UA/2A/B159/F10. The range of prices for the outright sale of these films' rights in this territory include: Disney's Mickey Mouse shorts at \$202.50 each; average Samuel Goldwyn features (early talkies) anywhere from \$2,200 to \$4,500, and "special pictures" at around \$9,000 and up to \$11,250. By the end of the decade, the license fee for London Films' productions ranged from just over \$2,000 up to \$5,000 for (in respective order of price, low to high): *Forget-Me-Not* (1936, US-release retitled *Forever Yours*), *Conquest of the Air* (1936), *The Challenge* (1938), *Paradise for Two* (1937, US release retitled *Gaiety Girls*), *South Riding* (1938), and *Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel* (1937). LFP's special pictures *The Divorce of Lady X* (1938) and *Over the Moon* (1939) were each sold at \$9,130 and *Drums* (1938) at \$18,180. For more prices from other British company UA releases, see Memorandum of Agreement between UA, IVTA and ACF, 2 March 1939; UA/2A/B159/F10.

⁵¹⁴ Report on South Africa, 1936; Black Books, UA/1F/B9/F7.

⁵¹⁵ Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, 235.

Generally, ACT controlled the majority of the exhibition of both Hollywood and British films, and thus the competition between the two industries seems less combative (in this final marketing stage, not during the distribution contractual deals). All of these factors must be considered when investigating 1930s' South African publicity of British films which follows further below.

By 1937, the British film industry's hiatus subsequently corresponded with a drop in supply to South Africa. However, it is interesting to note that these major companies (the Schlesinger Group, MGM (S.A.) and even later with Fox) were continually willing to provide a portion of British fare to its audiences without the necessity of an official quota. No quota was established in South Africa to create a demand (as had occurred in Britain); instead, by the mid-1930s, British films (whether using UA/MGM (S.A.) or IVTA/ACF) developed their own market demand as they steadily improved and responded with increased supply. Throughout these years steady product was provided from Gaumont British, British & Dominion Films, British International Pictures, and of course, London Film Productions. This chapter's study of British films' publicity in South Africa will explore this further and look at the key selling points considered most likely to attract moviegoers' interest. Before heading into the case study, let us take a look at the economic conditions, geographic spread of populations, and the peoples generally considered by distributors and exhibitors as potential audiences (and those that were not).

Audiences: Cultural Disparity & Movie-Going

While this study focuses upon English-speaking peoples of South Africa, it is necessary to mention the context in which they live and the probable extent to which more people than just the white ruling minority were exposed to British commercial films in theaters. The cultural disparity of this country is one of its primary distinctive qualities, and thus the diversity of South African movie-going audiences and their situations influences the understanding of the small core group of English South Africans.

Since the arrival of European settlers at the Cape in the 1650s, and then with the evolution of the land's use as a refueling port (for the Dutch East India Company and, after the British take-over in 1806, merchants en route to Australia and India) into an established

settlement, centuries of conflict arose and continued through the nineteenth century. Britain encouraged further settlement and expansion of territory, conflicting and partially driving out of the colonial territory the earlier European settlers (the Boers, a mixture of primarily Dutch, and Flemish, French, German settlers) and continuing wars against various Bantu-speaking peoples (including Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho groups). It was during these years of conflict over land (and its minerals) and interaction between groups that a social hierarchy distinctly South African became established by the twentieth century.

It is important to understand that much of the conflict has stemmed from both land acquisition (first for its fertility, later for its minerals) and cultural divisions. Tensions grew between the various groups of Khoi, San, and later Bantu-speaking peoples as white settlers expanded in the search for more fertile lands, and this white expansion eventually destroyed many local indigenous and Bantu-speaking peoples.⁵¹⁶ The expansions of the white migrant farmers especially during the nineteenth century set in motion conflicts of land use and control to the north and east of the British Cape Colony gradually growing in these directions.⁵¹⁷ The similar economic lifestyles of the Xhosas and the *trekboers* using a mixed farming system led to increased tensions, competition, and eventually conflict, sparking nine wars between the

⁵¹⁶ The varying environments within the Cape led to difficulties for permanent settlements and any creation of commercial agriculture. By the sixteenth century, San and Khoi peoples inhabited the Cape. With the arrival of the Portuguese and the Dutch, the initial economic interdependence and eventual struggles between these groups over land control initiated European dominance and indigenous subordination. The free-burghers, the first to permanently settle and begin farming outside of the VOC's "refreshment station" at Cape Town, quickly discovered the restrictions of the environment. Emile Boonzaier explains how the Khoi social hierarchy, which was dependent on their livestock and pasturelands, created an inability to adapt to a more commercial understanding of stock ownership. The loss of their pastures and their livestock to the Dutch settlers forced Khoi to adapt and accept a lower-class status. For more on these early African societies, see Emile Boonzaier et al., *The Cape Herders: A History of the Khoikhoi of Southern Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996), 32; 71–73.

⁵¹⁷ By the eighteenth century, bantu-speaking peoples such as the Xhosa dominated the Eastern Cape down to the Great Fish River. The Xhosa created a mixed farming system with crops such as sorghum and millet along the lowland coastal areas. They used the *zuurveld* (sour-grazing land) grasses for their herds. These crops would not grow in areas with winter rainfall, so these black African farmers did not migrate further west of the Great Fish River. Eventually, arrival of the Europeans spreading eastward led to conflict over control of this highly fertile land. *Ibid.*, 29.

European migrant farmers and the Xhosa over the nineteenth century.⁵¹⁸ Thus, the highly nutritional value of these grasslands and the fertile soils of the coastal valleys created further desire for white (and especially newly arriving British) settler expansion and conquest.

Roger B. Beck ties this British entrance to its long-lasting effects in South African history.

Unlike previous settlers,

they did not assimilate into the Afrikaner community as previous European immigrants had; instead they maintained their cultural differences. They considered themselves more civilized and culturally superior not only to Africans but also to Afrikaners. This division between Afrikaner and English has lasted through the twentieth century. Only their common need to stand united against the much larger African population has brought them together.⁵¹⁹

By the 1830s, overpopulation in the Cape region led to limited land capacity for Afrikaner's livestock practices, their large families, and the new British settlers. Additionally, Afrikaners became increasingly desirous of escaping the augmented British control and domination, which was limiting Afrikaners' political voice as well as denying them frontier protection from African attacks (as the Sixth Frontier War of 1834-35 proved), as well as the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833. All of these factors spurred the Great Trek during the 1830s and 40s, when about 15,000 Afrikaners (men, women, and children) went in search of land further north of the Orange River to establish an independent Afrikaner republic.⁵²⁰

Finally, the discoveries of diamonds in Kimberley in 1867 and shortly thereafter of gold in Witwatersrand in 1884, triggered a "Mineral Revolution," and European South Africans intensified their efforts to maintain control over indigenous peoples. The "Mineral Revolution" converted the overall balance sheet of South Africa's economy from agricultural to industrial, and consequently transformed its society from rural to urban (with nonetheless a significant segment of white rural

⁵¹⁸ Aran MacKinnon, *The Making of South Africa: Culture and Politics* (Upper Saddle River NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 39–40.

⁵¹⁹ Roger B. Beck, *The History of South Africa* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), 49–50. With the importation of British settlers from the 1820s, part of a larger British government plan to export surplus population and ease social unrest and unemployment at home, cultural divisions became distinct between the earlier European settlers and the newly arrived British and these differences eventually led to the Great Trek in the mid-1830s. Roger B. Beck describes this plan as a failure from the start, and that these newcomers were not prepared for life in a "volatile frontier zone," and few were farmers.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 64–65.

communities and a few but dominant metro areas). Additionally, mining gold cheaply impacted local labor costs and conditions, and thus directly influenced race relations on the mines. The Witwatersrand, a synonym for the gold mining band of towns with Johannesburg at its center, implemented the earlier Kimberley “color bar,” which prevented Africans and Coloureds (mixed-race) from staking claims and “created a racially divided labor force.”⁵²¹

Following the discovery of gold, thousands of foreigners (*uitlanders*), usually English-speaking, urban male “adventurers” from Britain, Europe, Australia, and North America, flooded the then still independent Boer Republic of Transvaal to work in the mining industry. By the mid-1890s, they outnumbered Afrikaners in the region and had transformed the Witwatersrand into a hub of commercial wealth (with Johannesburg as its center).⁵²² Subsequently, the struggle for control over land containing these minerals, especially gold, would lead ultimately to war between the British and the Transvaal along with its more rural Boer sister republic of the Orange Free State by the turn of the century.⁵²³ The mine owners continued to see Africans primarily as a cheap labor supply, and after the war, conditions worsened for urban Africans. Many were forced to work the railways and roads, and for those returning to the mines, they discovered their wages reduced. Pass laws were strengthened.⁵²⁴

Meanwhile, after the war, many in the British government believed that they would be unable to maintain their South African interests without Boer support, and they set out to establish

⁵²¹ Ibid., 78–79; Kimberley was the diamond mining center. Beck summarizes the color bar in the mining compounds: “Well-paid Whites moved about freely, lived with their families, and received subsidized housing. Africans came to the mines alone, lived in all-male compounds, and slept in dormitories with dozens of men to a room. They had to carry passes and were closely watched by their supervisors. They could advance only so far before encountering a color bar. White protests led to higher wages, job protection, and better working conditions. African protests were violently crushed.” These mining industries also consequently developed secondary industries in transportation (such as railways and ports), and it reinforced economic activity in other areas, including agricultural production and the establishment of a migrant labor system bringing in migrant African farmers from areas beyond white control to supplement the labor shortage.

⁵²² Ibid., 89. Also, Afrikaner is a term of self-description for whites with a Boer background.

⁵²³ The South African War (1899-1902) was essentially a white man’s war with the British and Afrikaners fighting over who would rule South Africa (and its minerals). Most Africans and Coloureds supported the British, who used them for support services (like some Afrikaners did as well) and gave them firearms. Even so, little was done to help African farmers after the war, and the British allowed many Afrikaners to be re-located back to their pre-war farms.

⁵²⁴ Beck, *The History of South Africa*, 95.

a compromise to enable the unification of their two old (British) and two newly-acquired (formerly independent Boer Republics) colonies.⁵²⁵ The 1910 constitution of the Union of South Africa effectively limited political power and representation of Africans, Coloureds, and Indians, and solidified power for a small and privileged White minority of Anglos and Boers.⁵²⁶ As one can see from this brief summation, these conflicts over land and minerals led to implications of a social hierarchy, which was to become a strong part of South Africa's history and shape the South African movie experience of the 1930s.

Unlike its other "White Dominions," where whites were in the majority in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, in South Africa (while being treated in the same category as these dominions) the experiences of British settlers were markedly different. Unlike these other dominions, English-speaking South Africans (Anglos) were the minority within white "European" society, which in turn was the minority within South Africa's wider population. Furthermore, by the 1930s, Afrikaners numerically dominated the white population in three of the four provinces, which led to their increasing political power and eventual marginalization of English South Africans. And as with other major industries, the film industry was focused primarily upon this small minority as its target market. According to the United Artists' General Report on South Africa (which United Artists' executives used to guide their foreign sales decisions), by 1936, 1.978 million Europeans (Anglos and Afrikaners), including the majority already there living in the few metro areas, were "well scattered over the territory, making motion picture distribution a problem."⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵ The British government granted nominal independence with the South African Act of Union in 1909; and English and Afrikaner South Africans worked together to establish a Union of South Africa, which upon royal sanction created a self-governing dominion under the crown in 1910.

⁵²⁶ For the purposes of this chapter, I am using contemporary terminology as commonly applied within state documentation that categorized those of mixed race heritage as Coloureds and Cape Coloureds. This usage varies slightly from the similar group of peoples in the British Caribbean, so my following chapter utilizes reference to the contemporary colloquial term of "coloureds." This difference may appear as an internal inconsistency in this study, but in fact remains a reflection of the common usage within each region at the time.

⁵²⁷ Report on South Africa, 1937, Black Books, South Africa; UA/1F/B9/F7. This report pulls figures from the US Department of Commerce and various South African census information from the years 1904, 1921, and 1931, and provides estimates for 1936. The 1931 Census was carried out as a whites-only initiative

This report, intended for film exhibition use, highlights that distributors' interest was primarily in the English-speaking (and wealthy) European population minority situated in urban areas—those peoples they assumed would be more conveniently located to theaters and interested (and permitted) to see their films. For example, Johannesburg is described in the report as the “largest city in the Union” whose “people are bi-lingual and both English and Afrikaans are taught in the schools. While the English language predominates all along the Witwaters, there is a growing population of African ancestry which is usually bi-lingual.” Cape Town, the second largest city, is more succinctly described; “Exclusive suburbs and well-to-do communities of Europeans, mainly bi-lingual, are to be found here. Afrikaans and English are taught in the Capetown schools.” Lastly, the report briefly describes Durban, the third city (in size) and situated in the Natal province. “Durban...is of great importance both because of its industry and maritime trade. Durban is also an important holiday resort, widely patronized during both summer and winter by the up-country residents in Natal, Transvaal, Orange Free State and even Rhodesia. Durban's European population is essentially of British stock.”⁵²⁸

This last detail of “British stock” points to the distinctive population of English South Africans that dominated the province of Natal—the Natalians. While this trade report merely indicates the general region alongside particular urban areas as English-speaking, according to John Lambert's study, Natalians were a tight-knit group with a long British heritage and who developed a distinct concept of white racial and British “cultural supremacy in contra-distinction to both the African and Afrikaner presence in South Africa.” Nourished by their British myth of settlement, they “reinforced pride in British antecedents, and celebrated British values and

given the economic crisis of the time; it enumerated the white population at 1.828 million. In contrast, the 1936 census conducted a full enumeration of 9.589 million total population, a significant rise from 1921's calculation of 6.928 million total. See Christopher, “The Union of South Africa Censuses 1911-1960,” 5–6. However, these figures largely differ from UA's Report which estimates only 2.869 total population (European and Non-European) for 1931 (and estimates 8.72 million for 1936, a closer approximation).⁵²⁸ Report on South Africa, 1937, Black Books, South Africa; UA/1F/B9/F7. General report on South Africa with inclusion of statistics and data from US Department of Commerce on film companies as well as general information on South Africa's population, peoples, cities and towns, education, religion, agriculture and manufacture, and so forth.

institutions.”⁵²⁹ However, their embrace of social-Darwinist concepts of whiteness and Britishness developed a more extreme and violent form of racism than most other British South Africans, and much more akin to that of Afrikaners. Overall, Natalians resisted the loosening of imperial ties as they occurred elsewhere in South Africa as the century progressed. In the 1930s, “unlike their British compatriots in the other provinces who were cautiously accepting a common South Africanism uniting English- and moderate Afrikaans-speakers, the Natalians became more stridently British.”⁵³⁰ Imperialism was pervasive among them and shaped their attitudes, and even their newspapers remained independent of newspaper consortiums elsewhere in the Union, and continued to be “the bulwarks of Imperialism and Britishness.” Furthermore, the popularity of British films celebrating British culture highlights the continued presence and strength of this identity into the 1930s. The particular success of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1935) in Natal’s cities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg reflects these British cultural preferences among the movie-going tendencies of Natalians.⁵³¹

Returning to UA’s report on South Africa, a brief additional paragraph concerning spoken languages clarifies for movie studio businessmen that: “In the province of Natal and in larger cities of the Union, English is the commercial language [although] beyond the city boundaries Afrikaans is the mother tongue. The people are, however, bi-lingual, speaking both English and Afrikaans.”⁵³² However flexibly the language demographics were interpreted, these summaries indicate the key population data that the company considered necessary to determine potential cinema-going audiences—English-speaking populations, who in South Africa were predominantly the Europeans, mostly Anglos and some Afrikaners.

However, the report also emphasizes the importance of the urban areas (which was convenient for the establishment of large super cinemas) by focusing upon the extent of the white

⁵²⁹ John Lambert, “‘The Last Output’: The Natalians, South Africa, and the British Empire,” in *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas*, ed. Robert A. Bickers, The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 154.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 160; 165.

⁵³¹ **DELETE FN or Insert statistics** of box office sales for Durban and Pietermaritzburg in contrast with House of Rothschild and others.

⁵³² Report on South Africa, 1937, Black Books, South Africa; UA/1F/B9/F7.

population in South Africa's larger cities and towns and looking specifically at the "only 13 towns having a white population of over 10,000." Of these, there were about 713,400 Europeans (and 656,000 non-Europeans) estimated living in urban areas in 1931.⁵³³ With this population estimate, the remainder 1.26 million White Europeans were scattered in the country and towns of less than 10,000 throughout South Africa.⁵³⁴ These individuals would be the most difficult and problematic to reach as a film market and thus were not further detailed in the report.

In contrast, this focus on uncovering the presumed target market base left out specifics concerning the large majority (and variety) of peoples living in the country. Based on the 1921 census, the total density of population per square mile in the Union was 3.22 Europeans to a 14.67 total of all peoples. This report presents a distinguishing ratio of few (White) Europeans to numerous Non-Europeans with no indication of the Non-European diversity between the Cape Coloureds, Indians, and the various Black African groups. The brief description of natives and other non-Europeans merely supplements an occupational clarification that those "natives and other non-Europeans in the cities of the Union are employed as bus operators, laborers, tradesmen's helpers, and those who are educated usually speak English as one of their languages." In contrast, those working in the gold mines were drawn primarily from their tribal reservations, and with a small exception, they used their tribal languages.⁵³⁵ As the following will reveal, ultimately the political, economic, and racial structure of South Africa, as well as the perspective from those within the film industry, contained the potential for more widespread movie audiences.

⁵³³ Ibid. The two largest European-populated cities were Johannesburg with 203,300 and Capetown with 151,000. The remaining cities (including Pretoria, Durban, Port Elizabeth, East London, and Bloemfontein) each contain a population falling within the range from 14,000 to 86,000 White Europeans. The total population (European and Non-European) in these 13 towns make up about 1.37 million of the 2.67 total population of Union of South Africa.

⁵³⁴ Due to reasons of economy, the 1931 census limited its enumeration to Europeans; this appears to have skewed the figures for Non-Europeans in United Artists' report, indicating a total union population of Non-Europeans as only 711,278 in 1931; yet it indicates 1904 having over 4 million non-Europeans, and estimates 6.74 million by 1936. Henry J. Dubester and Library of Congress, *Population Census and Other Official Demographic Statistics of British Africa: An Annotated Bibliography*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 58.

⁵³⁵ Report on South Africa, 1937, Black Books, South Africa; UA/1F/B9/F7.

Nor is this report's summary necessarily incorrect in assuming urban-living and English-speaking peoples would make up the majority of movie audiences. The white "European," English-speaking peoples lived and worked in the cities as capitalists and wealthy farmers as well as professionals and tradesmen. This small minority dominated the twentieth century political economy, and with their continued ties of language and kinship to Britain, reinforced by their economic self-interest, they retained many aspects of their British cultural identities. Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido claim that this kinship with Britain kept the English from embracing a South African nationalism that for them was "alien and unnecessary ideologically." Thus, despite sporadic South Africanism, their "sense of English speaking identity was based on far more diffuse notions of racial and political identity."⁵³⁶ These were the audiences that film studios and their distributors presumed were their target market in South Africa. Who else but those who understood the English language in these films as well as could afford regular attendance, at least on a weekly basis?

In contrast, the Afrikaners (or the white "Africans"), the Afrikaans-speaking peoples, lived predominantly in rural areas, most of which were poor farmers or displaced farmers living in cities in this post-war setting. United Artists' general report even includes an additional note concerning the White South African population that an "important element" of it is formed by "poor whites" in the rural districts. Yet Afrikaners' numbers were steadily growing, especially in Johannesburg and other cities of the Transvaal. By the 1930s, they were gaining political control with increased interest in attaining power via state and nationality instead of capital. With Afrikaner nationalism came a distrust of capitalist influences, especially those from either Europe or America. And by extension, this included British and American films projecting this capitalist, consumerist perspective.

However, those Afrikaners living in the Southern Cape were better off economically, and an internal division among Afrikaners grew during this period. Keyan Tomaselli's study exposes

⁵³⁶ Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, *The Politics of Race, Class, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (London: Longman, 1987), 2–3.

this division as it was reflected in the growth of Afrikaner Press. After the First World War, those Afrikaners in the Cape had more numbers of wealthy farmers, urbanized or more prosperous professionals and were thus viewed as “smooth,” “Cultured,” “Affluent” Afrikaner nationalists in contrast to those rougher, poorer and less culture conscious *Transvaalers*—a predominantly rural base of people proletarianised or urbanized in the first decades of the century and ultimately creating a large, white, destitute working class in the northern regions of South Africa.⁵³⁷ While mines continued as S.A.’s greatest income source in the 1920s, there was a decreasing reliance on white labor as owners sought to cut costs by hiring lower-wage black African workers. Tomaselli clarifies the available work these men could seek out; with the implementation of a “white preferential labour policy in the public sector, ...large numbers of Afrikaners [flooded] into railways...and state-created concerns like ISCOR (the Iron and Steel corporation).”⁵³⁸ In this way, a large and somewhat poorly-paid Afrikaner working class became established by the 1930s in the Transvaal.

Another significant but “Non-European” group dominant within the Cape were the Cape Coloureds. These mixed-race peoples were descendants from the earlier Khoi and San peoples whom over the centuries mixed with Europeans. In terms of racial classification this mix with European blood categorized them higher than Black Africans in the social, political, and economic hierarchies of South Africa. For example, in Cape Town, Coloureds were allowed in the city without need of “night passes” unlike the “Natives.” For the most part, Coloureds made up a majority of the Cape’s working class, alongside some immigrant Jews, Britons, Italians, and very few Africans.⁵³⁹ Prior to WWII, Coloureds had more options concerning accessibility to various cinema venues—from their local neighborhood “bioscopes” to the palaces such as the

⁵³⁷ Keyan Tomaselli, Ruth Teer-Tomaselli, and Johan Muller, *The Press in South Africa*, Studies on the South African Media (London: Currey, 1989), 119.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵³⁹ Bill Nasson, “‘She Preferred Living in a Cave with Harry the Snake-Catcher’: Towards an Oral History of Popular Leisure and Class Expression in District Six, Cape Town, 1920-50,” in *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality, and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa*, ed. P. L. Bonner et al. (Johannesburg, South Africa: Witwatersrand University Press, 1989), 285.

Colosseum and the Alhambra in Cape Town.⁵⁴⁰ But more frequently, these working class people usually were not interested in paying the costlier prices of the first-run picture houses or participating in British or American cultures. With the exception of urban Cape Town's distinct "British" character with more Cape Coloureds gravitating towards Anglo culture, Coloureds predominantly affiliated with the Boer/Afrikaner culture. Much of this relationship extends from years of domestic service and labor to Afrikaners and resulted in speaking Afrikaans and assimilating some aspects of their culture.

And as regards the expense, Gutsche's brief overview of Non-Europeans (with little class or racial distinction made) rationalized that low wage levels made it impractical for them to attend the special cinemas, so theater owners' "general practice" was to admit them "regardless of race" to the gallery of bioscopes or the front seats at low charges (when they had no gallery).⁵⁴¹ Furthermore, some "coloured" cinemas were built in most of the Coloured-concentrated neighborhoods—certain "quarters" of Cape Town (and especially in Cape Flats area)—and these cinemas had a "definite identity as such" with programs consisting almost entirely of "Wild Westerns" and musicals. The "tickey bioscope" of the suburbs were soon popular among Non-Europeans. Finally, Gutsche briefly highlights class difference among Non-European audiences; the "special provisions" of the Censorship Act of 1932 for the types of films they would not be permitted to see created "resentment among the better-class Cape Coloured and Asiatics." Gutsche relates (somewhat derogatorily) that Non-Europeans' behavior at the ordinary bioscopes was "extremely vociferous," but worth exhibitors' while to reap their "very small profits," especially in catering to Cape Coloureds and Natal Indians.⁵⁴²

Providing a more detailed examination of Coloureds' neighborhood movie experiences, Bill Nasson looks specifically at Cape Town's District Six and the communal role of local "bioscopes," especially with this vibrant community of working class audiences. His research reveals a regular attendance, often weekly, in which movies provided Coloureds an escape from

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 286.

⁵⁴¹ Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, 385.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

their routine lives in service. Nasson points to the very names of cinema buildings reflecting this escapism—often glamorous or imperial names such as the Star, the Empire, the British Bioscope.⁵⁴³ He describes the working class' tastes in films and preferences for genres such as gangster dramas, epics, and especially serial Westerns. The District Six's movie "experience" included not only feature films, but the Bioscope was also used for a variety of entertainments, including filmed boxing matches (especially famous bouts in the U.S. or elsewhere) and local events.⁵⁴⁴ In the movie theaters, seating was co-ed; there was also a "hierarchy of cinemas and internal class differentiation within auditoriums."⁵⁴⁵ Owners implemented this hierarchy via differences in admission prices, hard vs. soft seating, whether food was made available (or not) within the theater, the extent of imposed order, and even program content (between the different venues)—and especially in comparison to the larger palaces.

Promotion and advertising for Cape Coloured cinema-goers would primarily have been via word of mouth or streetside promotions (from street buskers to posters and various gimmicks). These extemporary and transient methods of publicity inherently negate their use as historical analysis tools for determining local culture, except for the very nature of the publicity as a whole. As Nasson argues, in this particular district, an autonomous popular recreational and cultural life existed primarily in the streets. Local bioscopes would promote the current and upcoming films showing, using a variety of methods.

The one issue that Nasson does not address in his coverage of this "coloured" neighborhood movie venue is the issue of language. After a century of low-level service for Afrikaners that predicated language influence upon the Khoisan and others that worked for them, most Coloureds in South Africa by the 1930s were predominantly Afrikaans-speaking. Some received a limited education and thus became somewhat bilingual with English. The one example Nasson relates that even hints at the difficulties this might create in watching English-speaking

⁵⁴³ Nasson, "'She Preferred Living in a Cave with Harry the Snake-Catcher': Towards an Oral History of Popular Leisure and Class Expression in District Six, Cape Town, 1920-50," 266–267.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

films comprises a theater owner speaking Afrikaans to his audience, indicating a majority in attendance were Coloureds.⁵⁴⁶ In terms of this current study, this language difference also means that the following English newspaper publicity analysis is limited in its scope of any consideration of the larger, mixed-race target market. The newspaper advertisements probably reached only a small minority of educated or English-speaking Coloureds, and thus complemented the necessity for physical and vocal promotions on the street.

South Africans perceived Indians as “aliens” in all respects, in origin, religion, language, and race. This minority was located dominantly in Natal (the eastern region of SA), and most maintained their links with India. Indian South Africans also included a sizeable number of Muslims from what today is Pakistan and Bangladesh. Thelma Gutsche mentions that in addition to watching American and British films at local bioscopes alongside other “non-Europeans,” some “coloured bioscopes” and other “special cinemas for Natal’s Indian population” showed specially imported films produced in India and presented in either Hindustani or Tamil languages. Generally, Gutsche tries to explain, the exhibiting companies’ attitude towards the non-European public “was dictated largely by the lowness of their spending power, [but] genuine attempts were made to cater for the educated and socially-aspirant classes.”⁵⁴⁷ They had a stronger middle class among them who identified with India’s nationalist movement; thus they provided a kind of international “leverage” for some degree of protection.⁵⁴⁸ But class divisions internally allowed for less cohesiveness as a South African minority group.

Black Africans, or “Natives,” were much more restricted than any other group of peoples, even as they made up the majority in the country. Some still lived on tribal reservations, others worked and lived in mining compounds, and most still spoke their native tribal language. Yet by

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 294. Nasson describes how the families that owned and controlled cinemas in this area related to their audiences with an “easy-going sociability and shrewd cultural identification with audiences.” He gives an example of one recollection with the Union’s “impresario” who would speak in Afrikaans to keep order and make room for additional viewers.

⁵⁴⁷ Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, 385. Not until World War II and the loss of the European market did the need to secure this public become more essential, and in time, more non-European cinemas were built throughout the Union for this purpose.

⁵⁴⁸ Mahatma Gandhi lived and practiced law in Natal for twenty-one years before returning to India as an already seasoned civil rights leader in 1914.

the 1930s, there was a growing number of urban, working class blacks (“petty bourgeoisie”) due to the rapid industrialization of South Africa since 1870s and the discovery of diamonds and gold. This swift development led to growing (White) concerns in the rapidly-expanding cities like Johannesburg and to the establishment of Night Passes in 1923 with the Natives (Urban Areas) Act.

While Whites (i.e. Europeans) were the target movie-going market in the Witwatersrand, there were some opportunities for this small petty bourgeoisie as well as for those working on the mining compounds to see American and British films. Perhaps ironically, it would be Christian missionary presence that would lay the foundation for a black film culture during these years. The poor conditions of urbanization in the Rand led to increased social control efforts that included recreational initiatives. Bhekizwe Peterson gives credit to the American Missions Board (AMB) and Ray Phillips’ efforts for the spread of film popularity among Africans in following years, by providing a “pictorial education of the native”.⁵⁴⁹ Ray Phillips’ *Bantu in the City* (1936) presents a “survey of leisure time activities at present within reach of Africans on the Witwatersrand,” and he includes those “organizations originating or directed by missions” such as the Bantu Men’s Social Centre (BMSC) and the AMB’s cinema enterprise to reach “the sixty compounds of the gold mines.”⁵⁵⁰ Phillips stresses the importance of cinema in reaching the Natives, citing the *Interdepartmental Committee Report on Native Education in South Africa in 1936* that given the illiteracy of the vast majority of black Africans (at 90%), cinema was “a more potent instrument than either the school or the press.”⁵⁵¹

The BMSC was visualized by AMB for “urban Natives” in Johannesburg, which was “unfortunately, in the centre of the city—not much influence to people living in the suburbs.”⁵⁵² As

⁵⁴⁹ Bhekizwe Peterson, “The Politics of Leisure During the Early Days of South African Cinema,” in *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, ed. Isabel Balseiro (Detroit Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 38.

⁵⁵⁰ Ray E Phillips, “The Bantu in the City: A Study of Cultural Adjustment on the Witwatersrand” ([Lovedale Press], AMS Press, 1938), 292, 302–303.

⁵⁵¹ *Interdepartmental Committee Report on Native Education in South Africa in 1936*, p. 615-616 referenced in *ibid.*, 305.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 303.

Couzens points out, the rural areas did not come within Phillips' missions territory, and "rural blacks hardly seem to have come in for any 'moralized leisure time.'⁵⁵³ It also required a yearly membership fee (ten shillings), thus the club was intended for (the very few) middle- and working-class black Africans.⁵⁵⁴ The BMSC had a 1,000-seat hall for a variety of leisure uses, with monthly "Guest Nights [bringing] members' families" including dances, concerts, lectures and addresses, athletic games, and cinema films.⁵⁵⁵ Peterson designates Phillips's work with the AMB as a "groundwork" laid for a growing "black film culture." He agrees with those histories by Gutsche and Tomaselli that "cinema was targeted almost exclusively at white audiences," but that the spread and growing popularity of screenings among Africans "can be traced back to the 1920s" with these early AMB efforts.⁵⁵⁶

Outside the cities in the mining compounds was a unique situation. There were large numbers of black African laborers, but again this was a distinctive group of working people that were often illiterate (thus AMB focused on presenting silent films, for they were easier for them to comprehend), and organized and censored by "Others" aka the White European ruling minority (or the American missionaries themselves).

Previous to 1936, regular weekly exhibitions of selected films were provided gratis to open-air audiences in the Native locations at Springs, Benoni, Randfontein, Krugersdorp, and, in co-operation with the Johannesburg municipality, at the Eastern and Western Native Townships at Johannesburg. These were arranged by the American Board Mission as the result of its co-operation with the Transvaal chamber of Mines in a cinema enterprise reaching the sixty compounds of the gold mines... Free weekly shows were also given to the hundreds of Non-European children in the large hall at the Bantu men's Social Centre and to the boys' club at the Western Native Township. With the change to talkie films in 1936, it was found impossible to continue this free service. Regular programmes are now given at the Eastern and Western native

⁵⁵³ Tim Couzens, "'Moralizing Leisure Time': The Transatlantic Connection and Black Johannesburg, 1918-1936," in *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture, and Consciousness, 1870-193*, ed. Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (New York: Longman, 1982), 322.

⁵⁵⁴ Working-class black Africans in 1930s South Africa is established proletariat, but not petty bourgeoisie or (lower) middle class; but there was a tiny black middle class.

⁵⁵⁵ Phillips, "The Bantu in the City," 302-303.

⁵⁵⁶ Peterson, "Politics of Leisure," 38.

Townships and at the Springs Municipal Location, at the expense, in each case, of the Municipalities.⁵⁵⁷

Unlike the confined spaces of cinemas (whether Bioscopes or even the city movie palaces) and the European behavior of sitting quietly as a large audience watching a film together, the movie experience on the mining compounds was the antithesis. The mining compounds had up to 4,000 males in each (and totaling 200,000); in the early evenings after dinner, an open-air screen was set up surrounded by thousands of laborers.⁵⁵⁸

From the early 1930s, officials grew increasingly concerned about the laxity in censorship and the presentation of any film that “depicts any matter that prejudicially affects the safety of the State.”⁵⁵⁹ The 1931 Entertainments (Censorship) Act replaced the local Cape Town Censor board with an official board of Censors for the entire Union and shifted censorship focus towards film classification that distinguished between “different classes of individuals”:

Certificate A: Approved for general exhibition to anyone, without age or colour restrictions.

Certificate B: Approved for European audiences only.

Certificate C: Approved for Europeans and Non-Europeans, but excludes Natives.

Certificate D: Approved subject to any condition or restriction as to age or sex of person before whom such film may be exhibited.⁵⁶⁰

And with an amendment to the bill in 1934, the showing of any films anywhere in South Africa became prohibited without explicit authorization of the Board of Censors.⁵⁶¹ Yet some theater owners were lax in employing this law, and a few filled their front rows or segregated their large theater houses' balconies with Coloureds and black Africans.

⁵⁵⁷ Phillips, “The Bantu in the City,” 303–304.

⁵⁵⁸ Couzens, “‘Moralizing Leisure Time’: The Transatlantic Connection and Black Johannesburg, 1918-1936,” 321.

⁵⁵⁹ Reynolds, *Colonial Cinema in Africa*, 102, footnote 91.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.* footnote 89.

⁵⁶¹ Reynolds and Burns both give more detailed accounts of colonial censorship concerns in the Rhodesias and other British African colonies in contrast to what colonial officials perceived as a laxity in South Africa, including themes of the depiction of violence, white women, and the race question itself. For example, in Kenya, films were either designated for non-natives only, banned completely, or given certificates for all audiences. See *ibid.*, 102–103.

By 1936 there were four “Non-European” theaters in the Rand, while other theaters included segregated galleries to provide for this restricted class of patrons. Of “Other European Origin and Direction,” “Commercialised Cinema” and “Theatres” included four Johannesburg cinema theaters “with licenses for showing to Non-Europeans, [which] cater to African patrons. At three of these show-houses Africans constitute a large proportion of the audience.”⁵⁶² According to Ray Phillips, among the films shown at these theatres were those banned from African viewing by the recent Censorship Act of 1932. Phillips fixates upon presenting the more “desirable aspects of European life,” and explains the censorship in SA, targeting non-Europeans especially.⁵⁶³ As Reynolds also points out, Phillips discovered that many exhibitors “failed to post the compulsory notice ‘Natives are Not Admitted to the Performance,’ and that Africans frequented the establishments.”⁵⁶⁴ Reynolds also sites a proprietor that confirmed this occurrence: “This censorship is a farce. We don’t exclude anybody. The educated native is a better patron than many Coloured or Poor Whites.”⁵⁶⁵ Furthermore, neither posted signs nor printed programs for showings at the few non-European bioscopes designated between those films passed or banned from African viewing. Besides these four “non-European” theaters, some bioscopes provided Africans with segregated upper-gallery seating for those films passed with Certificate A (General Audiences including Natives).⁵⁶⁶ Bhekizizwe Peterson correlates that the limited number of commercial theatres for Africans reflects “the financial instability of the enterprise since admission had to be set at a level commensurate with the low wages paid to Africans”⁵⁶⁷ Recent scholarship is increasingly attempting to uncover more about the black South African film culture. So far, scholars have discovered that a few working and middle class Africans were willing to pay and watch movies for entertainment; some, often the semi-professionals, were educated to some

⁵⁶² Phillips, “The Bantu in the City,” 308.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 316–318.

⁵⁶⁴ Reynolds, *Colonial Cinema in Africa*, 103.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 103, and footnote 103.

⁵⁶⁶ Peterson, “Politics of Leisure,” 39.

⁵⁶⁷ Cites Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940*, 379; in Peterson, “Politics of Leisure,” 39.

degree and English-speaking, so talkies were not necessarily a limitation (unlike the sometimes-enforced “native” qualification and censorship).

Primary Sources

The primary research of the following analysis is limited to film publicity within three newspapers (*The Cape Times*, *The Natal Witness*, and *The Rand Daily Mail*) and pulled from among an assorted selection of months and years from 1928 to 1937. The entertainment sections of these leading regional newspapers include various types of publicity: “What’s On” listings, small theater advertisement blocks, occasional film reviews, and studio and film industry news reports and gossip columns.

There are a number of limitations and biases that pervade my selection of newspapers. Foremost, these three leading newspapers are English language, and thus the readership is limited to only English-speaking readers. Obviously, this limits my findings by leaving out many among the other key groups, including the Afrikaans-speaking peoples, as well as those less-educated, like those among the Cape Coloureds and the various African groups. The diversity of possible South African audiences is what initially attracted me to this region, yet the focus on these English language primary sources for practical reasons somewhat narrows my analysis more specifically to literate, primarily white, English-speaking residents living in these major cities in the more anglicized Cape and Natal regions as well as the mining region of the Transvaal. However, as the earlier report in United Artists’ files demonstrated, these were the same demographics that shaped film businessmen’s market expectations and aims. And like the United States and other countries with a large geographical spread, urban audiences more frequently attended the movie theaters and had greater access than those in rural and country areas.

Secondly, the editors themselves play a dominant role in their choice of advertising, disseminating Anglo culture and propagating the social and economic ties with Britain. While Afrikaners and Blacks experienced imperialism as a “conquering, destructive force,” British South Africans viewed it as “a positive expansion of imperial rule throughout southern Africa,” an outlook

that was reinforced in most of the English newspapers.⁵⁶⁸ Alongside editors' desire to promote British cultural and imperial ties, they apparently felt it necessary to keep audiences updated with British film industry news as well as promote British films' importation and audience attendance.

During the 1930s, there were numerous English-language newspapers throughout South Africa, and only a few Afrikaans newspapers (though they were slowly growing during this period, as the National Party grew in political power).⁵⁶⁹ Given the limited number of Afrikaans-language daily newspapers, the English press was read by many Afrikaners and a small but growing number of literate Blacks. However, they "catered essentially for English-speakers..." and thus these English newspapers serve as a "significant barometer of British South African society," according to John Lambert.⁵⁷⁰ From the nineteenth century and into the 1930s, South Africa's English press continued a tradition of hiring and recruiting editors and senior journalists from British newspapers and patterned their papers on their British counterparts, seeking to maintain British press tradition. Concerned more with domestic issues, Afrikaans newspapers were more inclined to denigrate the effects of both British and Hollywood films on their community than to promote film news from abroad.⁵⁷¹ The English press catered to their readers, and the Afrikaans press spoke for theirs; taken together, they can reflect the currents of tensions and cultural differences between these two communities, the British and the Afrikaners.

However, three leading English newspapers are utilized for the purpose of this analysis. Cape Town's *Cape Times* represents the long history of British-oriented news affiliated with the Reuters British news agency, and it can serve as a general example of many English newspapers for larger, urban British communities maintaining a continued loyalty to Empire. Pietermaritzburg's

⁵⁶⁸ John Lambert, "'The Thinking Is Done in London': South Africa's English Language Press and Imperialism," in *Media and the British Empire*, ed. Chandrika Kaul (Basingstoke, Hampshire [U.K.]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 39.

⁵⁶⁹ As late as 1950, there were only four Afrikaans-language daily newspapers to the thirteen English-language dailies, thus many Afrikaners continued reading the English press. The English S.A. press provided all South Africans with most of their news and remained the "most important vehicle of communication." See Lambert, "'The Thinking Is Done in London': South Africa's English Language Press and Imperialism."

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁷¹ Eckardt, *Film Criticism in Cape Town 1928-1930*, 7.

Natal Witness exemplifies an independent English-language newspaper with extreme British and Imperial sentiments, just like the Natalians dominating the province. Lastly, the *Rand Daily Mail*, founded in 1902 and controlled from 1904 until 1940 by mining magnate Sir Abe Bailey, serves as an example of the many urban newspapers under the control of mining capitalist interests (or Randlords) and based in the same mining region and the country's largest-populated city.

However, as John Lambert points out, these were shrewd businessmen that understood that these newspapers could not survive without advertisers' support and "that advertisements were aimed at what the reading public wanted."⁵⁷² Thus, these mining magnates gave their editors "considerable leeway" in order to satisfy English-speaking needs while still promoting their own interests.

Finally, to explain my selection of newspaper advertisements for analysis, understand that film reception studies has been one of the weakest fields in scholarship because film reception is the most difficult component of film history to analyze. At its basic level, watching a film is a personal activity during which one pulls from one's own experiences to understand and interpret the movie. Film historians' traditional primary sources such as box office receipts and film industry statistics are extremely difficult to find for British films (and for some years, they are non-existent), and this is even more-so the case for those exhibited in South Africa. Audience responses, personal memoirs, and other means can be even harder to find. Recent scholarship in this field has grown, especially concerning British film in the British Isles. Meanwhile, only a few have been able to uncover South African cinematic experiences; most histories or analyses have focused instead upon the industry or the colonial involvement in predicating what others (primarily non-Europeans) have access to watch. Access does not necessarily equate attendance; and response and reviews in newspapers will be confined to the media elite, editors, and other educated English-speaking contributors. As Ian Jarvie warns historians attempting to use "newspaper evidence to estimate popularity" of films, "newspaper reviewers and commentators

⁵⁷² Lambert, "'The Thinking Is Done in London': South Africa's English Language Press and Imperialism," 46. Like the *Cape Times*, the *Rand Daily Mail* was partnered with the Reuters British News Agency, until both newspapers switched to the South African Press Association in 1939.

were the embryo of a media elite that consistently expressed [in the case of Canada] nationalist and anti-American sentiments.”⁵⁷³ Considering the role of American entrepreneur I.W. Schlesinger behind the South African film distributors and exhibitors funding the newspaper advertisements, South Africa’s industry was not so vehemently against American films; although some newspaper contributors definitely fit that bill of nationalism and patriotism towards mother England, and any film reviews and comments takes this possibility into account, as this analysis shows.

Advertising Context

Advertising in South African newspapers is quite similar to that found in America and Britain. With the rise of a consumer culture following the industrialization, urbanization, and (to some) Americanization within its cities, the journalism ties become apparent with the inclusion of similar styles of advertisements, articles written by film “gossip” correspondents in London or Hollywood, and the gradually increased inclusion of film reviews and commentaries. In South Africa, publicity utilized Hollywood’s approach of film star identification, pushing the film genre, flashy titles, and recognition of distributor and producer names. The legal clarification in United Artists’ contracts with MGM (S.A.), which designated specific names and recognition with MGM’s paid advertising, illustrates the reasons for this similar structure to American publicity in their case. One can assume that other Hollywood and British companies used similar designations in their contracts with African Consolidated Films and Theatres.

Correspondingly, distributors intended these movie ads to inform readers of what is “British,” and therefore some of these recognition points inherent served as identifiers of “Britishness” one could quickly spot in an ad. Consider your familiarity with movie star names like Marilyn Monroe, or for today’s stars like Johnny Depp, Meryl Streep, or Jennifer Lawrence. Each of these names might have just brought to your mind a distinctive type of acting style, film genre, character stereotype, or series of films, right? In 1930s Britain it was Gracie Fields, Jessie Matthews, and Charles Laughton; and these actors are not to be confused with British actors who

⁵⁷³ Jarvie, *Hollywood’s Overseas Campaign*, 91.

re-located to (and remained in) Hollywood, such as Ronald Colman and Clive Brook. Producers' names built up recognition as well, and after the rousing success of his *Private Life of Henry VIII* in 1933, Alexander Korda and his London Film Productions became synonymous with the British film industry (and to some in the press, ultimately instigated the rise in British production the following years).⁵⁷⁴

The film industry also used other methods of advertising to reach different types of people. As previously noted from Bill Nasson's study, popular recreational life for Cape Coloureds in District Six was amid the streets of the community, thus street buskers and gimmicks would attract attention. From posters and lobby cards to much more, exhibitors could purchase movie paraphernalia from the individual film's producers or studio; press books would provide price listings and various materials for them to order. Even British films distributed by UA, as seen in their contracts with Wilcox and Korda, 100% of costs for print/ad materials was to be provided by the producers; paid advertising was frequently covered by the local distributing agency. Thus, the publicity and its "targets" originate with the producers' perspectives, and are then filtered through exhibitors' and newspaper editors' selections. Press books would also include stories and possible newspaper articles (pre-written!) related to specific productions, its stars, or goings-on at the studios in order to garner interest for their films. Local distributing and exhibiting companies (especially with the Schlesinger group) could pick and choose from options what they considered more likely reach the target market for their area. The larger, first-run theaters would have more invested in these films, and they (primarily ACT) would purchase larger spaces in the newspaper for promotion, offer other amenities in their theater, set up contests and giveaways, and use any other promotions to fill their seats.

Publicity Research Findings

As we know, even if a movie is promoted as "Wonderful!", "Brilliant!", or "Delightful!", it does not signify or portend that audiences agreed and indeed received it in that manner. But one

⁵⁷⁴ To get a good sense of how Korda was portrayed in the press, see for example Alexander Korda file, United Artists Corp. Records, Series 11D Research Data Volumes, 1932-39, Reel 11, Volume 21.

can look at aspects of that publicity to determine what local press considered “positive” selling points to attract local audiences; thus, their perspective of local audiences ultimately derives my findings. To discuss my research findings, I have separated my timeline into three key periods: the late silents and early talkies during the transition to sound (1928-1932), the rise and peak of British ‘30s filmmaking (1932-1935), and the decline of British film productions for this timeframe (1936-38). Generally, British film exports to South Africa reflect this structure, and with the rise of British filmmaking came increased differentiation and publicizing of a film’s “Britishness” in South African newspapers. Major film pictures (the more high quality and expensive ones) were exported simultaneously or soon after (depending on the various distribution contracts) their premieres in England. South African distributors acquired other British films with a short delay extending up to a year for special pictures (and possibly longer for lesser-known films), but rarely an extended period except in cases of silent film showings to black Africans on mining compounds (as previously discussed). Overall, the amplified push of Britishness as a positive marketing strategy by the mid- to late-1930s underscores the role that national identity played among South African audiences and suggests that many among the English South Africans continued to relate more as British citizens in direct divergence from increased American commercial influences and Afrikaners’ rising South African nationalism during these years.

1927-1932

As the Silent Era of filmmaking wound down to a close, Hollywood’s distribution in South Africa was already well established. Given the nature of silent films, language was not a barrier for audiences; thus, Hollywood’s competition came primarily from established filmmakers in Europe (especially UFA in Germany). Continental films like Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927) were exported to South Africa and promoted in similar fashion to those from Hollywood—with their titles, stars, directors, and storylines promoted in brief advertisement blocks for specific theaters.

Cinema was not as dominant in the advertising of this period; most entertainment sections kept the ads limited to a minimal amount of information of what’s playing and where, alongside ads for various entertainment events, including vaudeville and theatre, and even nightly

dances at St James Hotel and municipal orchestra performances.⁵⁷⁵ These venues' movie listings included not only those for theaters in the city-centers (usually at or near the top of the page, each getting its own outlined block), but also the numerous suburban bioscopes. For example, in the *Cape Times* it was common to find "Suburban Bioscopes" section of blocks (with movie titles, and sometimes the stars, production company, and a one-liner plotline) including theaters such as the Regal Wynberg, Marine Cinema, the Palace at Salt River and others.⁵⁷⁶

With the popularity of cinema-going continuing rapidly to overtake other forms of entertainment, it was still common to find combined "Bio-Vaudeville programmes." For example, in an advert for the opening of the Astoria Kinema at Woodstock a special "bio-vaudeville programme" lured readers to "...come and see IVOR NOVELLO and Isabel Jeans in THE RAT...Greater than 'The Triumph of the Rat' (for the first time in Cape Town)..." before continuing on to outline the various acts also included in the show.⁵⁷⁷ The acts are not necessarily described in full unless they include a famous performer or group; often these one- and two-liner advertisements give just a fragment to describe the combined screen and stage performances. African Theatres' Tivoli advertised in October 1928 a "Bio-Vaudeville...Three Brilliant acts and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's BRIGADIER GERARD."⁵⁷⁸ In this particular example, the most important information concerning the film appears to be its basis upon a well-known British author's work. It is interesting to note that the advertisement does not indicate which or whose version of this story is to be shown. The previous year, Cecil B. DeMille released a Hollywood version under a different title and starring major Hollywood star Rod La Roque, neither of which was noted in the ad (if this was the version). Most likely the British author recognition was the most important selling point for this film, as opposed to the usual focus on Hollywood's elements.

⁵⁷⁵ *Cape Times*, September 1, 1928, 12.

⁵⁷⁶ *Cape Times*, September 1, 1928, 12; and September 28, 1928, 10.

⁵⁷⁷ *Cape Times*, Mon, October 22, 1928, 8.

⁵⁷⁸ *Cape Times*, October 27, 1928, 12. There is no indication which film this is, *Brigadier Gerard* (1915, BR) was a British silent directed by Bert Haldane starring Lewis Waller; if this was the selection, then AT was mixing a very old silent film with variety acts. Based on the screening date, it seems most likely it was Cecil B. DeMille's 1927 silent version, released as *The Fighting Eagle* (1927, US), a DeMille Pictures Corp. production starring Rod La Rocque.

After the first boom of filmmaking following the Quota Act, British films appeared to improve but were not yet proliferate, probably due to the costly transition to sound production. Nor are there many indications of a film's British origins in these newspaper advertisements during these years. There are a few exceptions, such as Herbert Wilcox's 1926 silent version of *Nell Gwyn*, the "most famous sweetheart in English History" which was "Actually Produced in London," by British National Films in 1926. *Nell Gwyn* was making a later run at a suburban bioscope, the Marine Cinema in 1928.⁵⁷⁹ But generally, it was difficult to find British-identified films in late 1920s ads. From this, one might conclude that being "British" had yet to earn its accolades and positive association. Instead, buried amidst films from Hollywood and Europe, they become one among many and only stand out with their music or movie stars.

If audiences had recently seen *Triumph of the Rat* (1926) or its successor *The Rat* (1926, 1928 SA release), they may have recognized rising British star Isabel Jeans and made their own assumptions as to the film's Britishness (if basing their knowledge solely upon these advertisements). The Astoria Kinema's advert for October 27, 1928 of "The Further Adventures of the Flag Lieutenant featuring Henry Edwards and Beautiful Isabel Jeans" makes no mention of the production company nor that it is a British film.⁵⁸⁰ The stars, who happen to be British, were the draw in these ads. Occasionally a series of ads indicate a well-known producer/director, such as promotions of Herbert Wilcox's production of *Mumsie* (1927) as it paved the suburban circuit to different bioscopes.⁵⁸¹ A month following their run of Wilcox's *Nell Gwyn*, the Marine bioscope advertised "Pauline Frederick in MUMSIE (A Herbert Wilcox Production) A Story of a Mother's love towards her cowardly son." A week later, the Premier on Main Rd, Rondebosch promoted their screening of "Pauline Frederick In the Powerful Wilcox Drama, M-U-M-S-I-E".⁵⁸² These ads and others imply that this British producer Herbert Wilcox's name was both identifiable and a

⁵⁷⁹ *Cape Times*, Friday, September 28, 1928, 10.

⁵⁸⁰ *Cape Times*, October 27, 1928, 12.

⁵⁸¹ *Cape Times*, October 19, 1928, 10.

⁵⁸² *Cape Times*, October 27, 1928, 12.

selling point in South Africa cinemas. Wilcox had made a name for himself and traded on this recognition throughout the rest of his career.

In contrast to the more blatant designation of a film's Britishness within a few short years, the noticeable difference alludes to a lack of audience demand, underlines a limited need for the recognition of these films' Britishness, or perhaps even suggests an avoidance for fear that the British industry's negative reputation might hurt local profits. Later years' articles about the improvement of the industry from 1932 would support the latter possibility. On the other hand, given the British films policy announced by Kinemas in 1928, perhaps they were more concerned about providing a quantity and variety of films (from Britain, Europe and America) that the individuality of the films mattered less in their publicity. Eckhardt's research and analysis explains it within the context of these years of competition between the major chains: "There was almost no selection made to distinguish between films that were worth seeing and those that were not, the reviews usually did not contain opinions, and the obligation of advertising films was clearly expressed in the 'quantitative strategy'."⁵⁸³ Film reviews were "placed close to the cinema adverts from 1929 onwards. There was a preference for previews (advance publicity) and film short reports in the beginning (1928-1929)," and it was only "with fewer films to review (from 1930) [that] slightly longer reviews were given preference."⁵⁸⁴

Whether coming from America, the Continent, or Britain, many of the films advertised in the *Cape Times* reflected stories of an international flavor or twist. For example, showing one week at the Alhambra in Cape Town: Warner Bros.' *Old San Francisco* (1927, US) provides a "Background of Romantic Spain and the Sinister Orient" even as it was set in California; and Cecil B. DeMille's *The Volga Boatman* (1926, US) tagline was "an Epic Story of Modern Russia."⁵⁸⁵ The popularity of international subject matter continued from the silent years into this transitory period. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927, Germ.) was already in its second and third runs in suburb

⁵⁸³ Eckardt, *Film Criticism in Cape Town 1928-1930*, 83; Eckhardt's analysis is specific to *Cape Times* during these years .

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵⁸⁵ *Cape Times*, Tues, October 9, 1928.

bioscopes like the Globe, Woodstock, and others in October 1928.⁵⁸⁶ This trend also ties into with African Theatres' competition with Kinemas, whose policy included the provision of British and Continental films. Overall, these advertisements reflect the international nature of the market during the silent era, as well as indicate an international awareness and interest within the British Empire that would endure.

As previously discussed, the African Theatres chain controlled most cinemas during this period (and throughout the 1930s). The 1928 ads reflect Schlesinger's dominance in the market, but with Kinemas' entry (with their own venues such as the Astoria Kinema in *Cape Times*) at the end of the year, and with continued opening of more cinemas in 1929 to 1930, competition between the two chains reached an apex in 1930.⁵⁸⁷ Kinema Theaters Ltd was able to compete with ACT because they "obtained the distribution rights" to new sound films (in which public's interest was increasing). New sound technology was added to the first-run circuit houses, while silents (those already circulating) were "relegated to the lower-rated cinemas and cont'd to play a role in their income."⁵⁸⁸ According to Eckhardt's study, independent theater owners (such as Wolfram's Bioscope in Cape Town) struggled to compete, and increasingly were forced "to enter into contracts with the dominant chains, functioning merely as extensions of their second or third circuit" while the dominant chains were able to get the premiers of films for first-run circuits.⁵⁸⁹ Meanwhile, by the start of 1931, most of African Theatres' non-first-run houses were equipped for sound. As Eckhardt found in his quantitative survey, the competition btwn the two chains led to an increased number of new releases in 1929 and subsequently the newspapers, wanting to keep the public informed of all releases, focused their more detailed reviews upon topical films only.⁵⁹⁰

Typically, the most important aspects these small short advertisements promoted are the story and star. Some of the films advertised are British, but few make an effort to advertise them

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ For example, consider the example of Cape Town specifically, in Eckhardt's research and analysis. Eckardt, *Film Criticism in Cape Town 1928-1930*, 79.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.; Gutsche, *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa, 1895-1940* also describes this in chapter 10.

⁵⁸⁹ Eckardt, *Film Criticism in Cape Town 1928-1930*, 79.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., 79–80.

as such. Even ACT's short-lived competitor during these years, Kinemas Theatres, Ltd, exhibited a number of well-received (in Britain) films such as *The Rat* (1926), building Ivor Novello into a popular British star, and Herbert Wilcox's *The Blue Danube* (1932). In their newspaper advertisements for these films in October 1928, the ad blocks make no mention that they originated in Britain unless one inferred it solely from prior knowledge of the stars or producer. Few made an effort to advertise them as such until about 1932, when you see a definitive shift.

1932-1936

The period of 1932 to 1936 shapes the bulk of my research. Here are some of the key trends found in these three newspapers. From 1932, I found newspapers making more effort to define English films within advertisements by blatantly announcing it or implying it within the leading ad components of the film's stars, producers, or story. The tendency in these ads is that if a theater was exhibiting a British film, the ad somehow tells readers that it is British, and a positive connotation is implied (as it is trying to sell the commodity). Some common head- and tag-lines in these ads are "A Brilliant British Musical!", "An all-British Picture," and "a Superb British film!" One might consider that the frequent use of these tags ambiguously implies either that it is great because it is British, or its own brilliance uplifts the Britishness.

Advertisements also aggrandized British stars: "Monday Next – Book! The Talk of Filmdom: 'England's Queen of the Stage and Screen Evelyn Laye & John Boles in 'One Heavenly Night' a musical adventure—IMMENSE."⁵⁹¹ And of course, if it came from British & Dominion Productions, London Film Productions, British International Pictures, or Gaumont British studios, the advertisement blocks during this period frequently indicated the film's production or distribution company and thus its British origin with those very names and presumably indicating the films' higher quality by squashing any fears it might be a "quota quickie."

By 1932, South African English newspapers developed their publicity beyond advertisement blocks and movie showtime listings. With each successive year, more articles and film news reports start to appear in the "Entertainment" or "Amusement" sections. A "Pick of the

⁵⁹¹ *Cape Times*, April 16, 1932, 9.

Week” blurb might feature Gracie Fields and describe how she “without any question is the greatest English entertainer of today.”⁵⁹² British star Gracie Fields was especially popular in South Africa during these years. Her brand of star represented another “everyday” or “ordinary” Englishwoman to whom female Empire audiences might better relate. Her distinctive Lancashire accent became one of her key traits, alongside the characterizations of strong, working class women. One can observe the rise in her popularity in South Africa through a series of newspaper publicity. Between releases of her early films *This Week of Gracie* (1933) and *Looking on the Bright Side* (1932) in theaters in July and August 1934, ads and articles showcased plenty of excitement.⁵⁹³ “The Adelphi, Sea Point, will release ...this week a new Gracie fields comedy called ‘This Week of Gracie’. It is bright entertainment. There is Gracie Fields and all she has to offer; there is comedy; there is romance; a hint of drama and a story which is well suited to the life of the star and her Lancashire humour.” An ad block for this movie further over the page clearly states: “First South African PRESENTATION of England’s Greatest Entertainer – Gracie Fields!...”⁵⁹⁴ *This Week of Gracie* must have been well-received by local audiences, because the following month ACT screened Fields’ prior film *Looking on the Bright Side* at their special cinema the Alhambra in Cape Town:

Gracie Fields at Alhambra--‘Looking on the Bright Side’ next week—Gracie Fields; with her inimitable songs; her really *precious* Lancashire dialect and her clever, witty and amusing sayings, is paying another ‘visit’ to Cape Town. ACT have secured the great comedienne’s latest and best, ‘Looking on the Bright Side’ which will be seen at the Alhambra next week. There is sure to be a big rush, so the management has arranged for booking to open at the theatre tomorrow.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² *Cape Times*, Wed, July 18, 1934, 7.

⁵⁹³ Basil Dean produced both of these films as part of a deal to supply British quota films for RKO Radio Pictures. RKO and Dean distributed these a year or two following their releases in Britain, most likely with Empire audiences in mind as likely spectators.

⁵⁹⁴ *Cape Times*, Mon, July 16, 1934, 7.

⁵⁹⁵ *Cape Times*, Wed, August 15, 1934, 7. Emphasis on precious is mine.

By October, Johannesburg received her newest film *Love Life and Laughter* (1934) using her name as the primary selling factor in local newspaper ads.⁵⁹⁶

Brief film reviews are also among the types of articles becoming more prevalent in all three of these South African English newspapers. Functioning as publicity, a positive film review might be presented, such as one in September 1933 that described how successfully Gaumont British's *The Good Companions* (1933) was at putting "England on the Screen:"

For a long while it has been a standing plaint that the English studios have seemed reluctant to put England on the Screen despite the unending opportunities for rich film material that are offered. Yet mixed with this grievance for the cinemagoer there has been a fear of what the film people might do to England – England, My England splashed across the Billboards and mangled as only film people can mangle what are, after all, the ordinary emotions that ordinary people like you and me keep tucked away. But the cinemagoers request has been satisfied and fear allayed in production of the Good Companions, the Priestley novel that is going to put full houses in the Alhambra every day this week. It is no adverse criticism to say that the film doesn't translate fully the Rich Colourful detail of the novel... Impossible task to do in space of two hours... but the film is nevertheless one of the fullest and most satisfying that have been made...⁵⁹⁷

This anonymous reviewer aimed at its English readers by connecting with their everyday sense of sentimental patriotism, valid and true yet subtle among expatriates and British subjects of the Empire by their "ordinary emotions that ordinary people like you and me keep tucked away." What makes this review further intriguing is that within the film itself, multiple regions of England, different regional accents, and various classes of people make up the story and structure and ultimately create a larger unity and definition of Britishness.⁵⁹⁸ Empire audiences probably easily

⁵⁹⁶ *Rand Daily Mail*, Tues, October 23, 1934. After Basil Dean finished with RKO, he formed Associated Talking Pictures. He continued to focus on his star Gracie Fields with productions such as *Love Life and Laughter* (1934), directed by Maurice Elvey.

⁵⁹⁷ "A Magnificent Film – The Good Companions at the Alhambra – England on the Screen," *Cape Times*, September 12, 1933, 7.

⁵⁹⁸ Based on a 1929 novel by English author J. B. Priestley, the story follows three individuals from different walks in life: a discontented Yorkshire-man (played by Edmund Gwenn), an independently wealthy spinster (played by Mary Glynne), and a private school teacher (John Gielgud's first film). After seeking adventure on the road and various hijinks along the way, the three meet at a tea room in middle England and there encounter a small, traveling music hall troupe called the "Dinky Doos." Refloated with the spinster's financial backing, the troupe with its "new" members travel around England as one of the "Doos," Susie Dean (played by Jessie Matthews) gets increasingly popular as the troupe face difficulties and a sabotaged performance.

comprehended this presentation of more heterogeneous delineation of what it meant to be English, albeit still within the confines of England. In any case, based on the ad block on the same page, audiences were already clamoring to purchase tickets and filling the Alhambra in Cape Town: “Endless Queues last night... yarn of the Rolling Road... Good Companions A G-B picture with Jessie Matthews.”⁵⁹⁹

In the *Cape Times* and in the *Natal Witness*, London correspondents frequently gave write-ups on news from the studios and films currently in production, gossip on the British movie stars, and details on London Premieres of films...all of which would have guided English South African opinions based on a *London* audience’s reactions and opinions. Film Gossip was a rising area of publicity, and it informed readers: what they might expect to come to South Africa, what other Englishmen think of the films, and what might interest them in the future. For example, a “Talkie Talks” article in July 1934 describes the London Premiere of *Evergreen* (1934). “Without exception, all the critics gave it their reportorial blessing, but the crowds, seemingly, received the picture with mixed opinions...” The correspondent continues his discussion of *Evergreen* by providing his own professional opinion of the film’s British star Jessie Matthews, and how working with director Victor Saville has been “her greatest help in arriving on the green.”⁶⁰⁰ A “Stories from the Studios” article gave elaborate description of the pageantry and royal salutes at the premiere of *The Iron Duke* at London’s Tivoli in 1935.⁶⁰¹ Apparently, even American movies needed validation from the hub of the motherland... or so it seems; for example, RKO’s *A Bill of Divorcement* (1932, US) is based on a Clemence Davies play “which ran for over four hundred performances in London.”⁶⁰²

Perhaps distributors were trying to convince viewers that British filmmaking quality was getting better and of a higher quality, so they should come see them. As seen with United Artists, quality in distribution contracts was enumerated by minimum budget costs. Why else mention

⁵⁹⁹ *Cape Times*, Tues, September 12, 1933, 7.

⁶⁰⁰ *Cape Times*, 4 July 1934, p. 7.

⁶⁰¹ *Cape Times*, Wed, January 9, 1935, 7.

⁶⁰² *Cape Times*, Mon, July 9, 1934, 7.

production costs in advertisements except as an indicator of value, such as the ACT's Premier theater ad for "the £100K British Film City of Song." Additionally, they indicate the technical improvements within the industry (and the general excitement over sound films) with how good the sound dialogue is in the "ALL-British" *Almost Attorneyman* showing at the Lyceum (ACT), featuring "...Bright funny and clearly spoken dialogue."⁶⁰³ By 1932 more British filmmakers (after Herbert Wilcox's and Alfred Hitchcock's early talkies) had completed their transition to sound, but the tininess and other negative aspects of early Hollywood talkies were still to be improved.

Comparing Publicity: The Cape, Natal, & The Rand

Among my selection of newspapers, the Cape and Natal newspapers more regularly distributed London updates than news from Hollywood. This frequency is interesting given that South African theaters showed more Hollywood films than British ones, so why give less publicity spread? This tendency is where the role of the media elite may have come into play with their role in the selection process of publicity. The Hollywood "hoopla" that is prevalent in American newspapers and fan magazines is surprisingly limited in these entertainment sections of the *Cape Times* and *Natal Witness*. There are many ads for Hollywood films, but the articles supplied are more British-centered, especially during the peak years of 1933 to 1935 in the *Cape Times*. The primary exceptions came from "Prestige Pictures" or "Superproductions" from either industry—and advertisers used plenty of publicity for these. In the *Natal Witness*' Saturday "Amusement Section" spread, there was occasionally a bit more Hollywood news, but these articles also discussed or mentioned anything with a British or English angle, such as an English actor's conquering of Hollywood.

Interestingly, Johannesburg's *Rand Daily Mail* printed Hollywood gossip and news more frequently than the Cape or Natal papers, but the advertisements still clarified when a picture was British. In local context, this makes sense given that there were more Americans (and other *uitlanders*) tied to the Johannesburg area, ever since the discovery of gold and diamonds in the 19th century when many came in to work as mining engineers and helped to build the city into a

⁶⁰³ *Cape Times*, Wed, April 27, 1932, 9.

center for finance and industry in the Thirties. And perhaps there was more American news and influence due to the fact that ACT (who chose to import so many Hollywood movies) was based out of Johannesburg, and any films under contract would get significant promotion either way. If they had more distribution gossip available to give the local paper, maybe that avenue was utilized more effectively for Hollywood distribution. Even so, Britishness was still used as a sell-point, and ad blocks consistently stated if a film was British, and even over-emphasized it in numerous cases. For one example (among many), ACT's Plaza theater in Johannesburg held two screenings of British films: "Today at 3 and 8.15 – The BIG BRITISH success: Michael & Mary (A Gainsborough production) with Edna Best and Herbert Marshall – Booking opens to-day for next week – Sunshine Susie the World's greatest musical Screen Success – and it's B-R-I-T-I-S-H! Book at Plaza & Reef Theatres..." (ACT).⁶⁰⁴ Likewise, the *Rand Daily Mail* still kept their readers updated on London studio news.

As I mentioned earlier, the newspaper editors are aiming these films to an English South African audience, and these ads reflect that target market by their use of Britishness as a way to sell a film that is in direct competition with the numerous ones from Hollywood. Furthermore, they appear to think it necessary to keep audiences updated with British films. For example, a "London Film Gossip" column (by a London correspondent) in September 1934 briefly discusses Cecil B. Demille's *Cleopatra*, British & Dominions' central focus upon upcoming feature *Brewster's Millions*, and British filmmaker Basil Dean's on-location filming of *Lorna Doone* at Exmoor and use of Devonshire dialect experts to coach the correct accents. Then the correspondent informs readers that *Evergreen* and *Cup of Kindness*, "...both of which have been shown in the Union, have now been generally released here. There is no doubt that, so far as British films are concerned at any rate, South Africa is kept well primed with the latest and the best."⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰⁴ *Rand Daily Mail*, Thurs, September 29, 1932, 8.

⁶⁰⁵ *Cape Times*, September 12, 1934, 7.

1936-1938+

From 1936, as more of the new British film companies started to flounder or downsize, the number exported to South Africa and advertised in local papers reflects the decline in the number of British films made. There is still no deviation from designating a film as British; advertisers still considered it a key marketing ploy even as Hollywood strengthened their hold on the local exhibition. Then 20th Century Fox entered the South Africa scene in 1938, and between MGM and Fox's enlarged exhibiting presence alongside the dominance of Hollywood product with African Consolidated Films, Hollywood's hold on the S. A. market was stronger than ever as the years headed into wartime. Even with the commencing decline in the number of British movies available, there was still a continued effort to publicize the more popular and expensive British titles.

In fact, Hollywood (or at least S.A. advertisers) employed their own version of utilizing a Britishness marketing scheme to target English South African audiences—by exploiting British elements of their films. Much of the Hollywood film product distributed in South Africa frequently dealt with international subject matter and stories. These newspapers' advertisers used a British emphasis whenever possible to sell these films. A reader would recognize a star listing of any well-known British actors in a film's ad, whether the actor was on loan to Hollywood like Laurence Olivier or Merle Oberon, or a relocated actor like Clive Brook or Ronald Colman. An ad that definitely targeted potential audiences interested in or identifying with Britishness pushed Warner Bros' picture *British Agent* (1935, US); it publicized the British author of the story, the British actor Leslie Howard, and emphasized "British" by repeating the title six times in the ad. And just perhaps, with the addition of the tagline "he defied the armies of an empire," those few (bilingual) Afrikaners could read into their own experience fighting against an "Empire" just a few decades prior.⁶⁰⁶ Spectators in 1936 encountered a number of Hollywood productions about British stories and themes, including those about royalty or based upon famous British literature, such as Katherine Hepburn's rendition as *Mary of Scotland* (1936) and or Selznick's productions of

⁶⁰⁶ *Cape Times*, Wed, January 30, 1935.

Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935) and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1936). Hollywood advertisements directed these pictures towards their international English-speaking audiences and especially within the Commonwealth, as the earlier anecdote of Selznick's motivation supports.

In 1934, a journalist quoted Mack Sennett, famous director and innovator of slapstick comedy, concerning his opinion on the trending cycle of historical films in an article titled "US Likes Historical Films—Mack Sennett's advice to British Producers":

When Mack Sennett...was asked [by reporters] during a holiday in London: What America wants to see in British films, he answered with one word: 'History.' He continued, 'We in the United States want to see the things that you have got in this country that we haven't... Those famous old buildings of yours, like the Tower of London and Windsor Castle, are what we come to see as visitors. They are what we want to see in your films.' It was the atmosphere and the scenery of England which helped, he said, to make the success of 'Private Life of Henry VIII' and which would probably make the success of 'Nell Gwyn.' 'If they are well done, Americans can take as many films of this type as England chooses to produce. What about the story of Will Shakespeare? He was quite a world fellow at times or of Lord Nelson or Lady Jane Grey? The field is all yours. In this country you have both the history and the background lying ready to hand.'⁶⁰⁷

From 1936 there was a growing popularity in Hollywood for these kinds of stories, whether they were filling in a gap left by the decline of production in England, or attempting to compete and force them out. In any case, Hollywood filmmakers realized that historical costume dramas could be profitable, and the latter 1930s found this genre expanding in America, and consequently targeting international English-speaking audiences. Hollywood could afford to supplement this genre and utilize the available target audiences that enjoyed costume dramas. With less British film productions during these latter years, and alongside the growing number of British actors travelling to California in an attempt to expand their stardom and salaries, opportunities opened for Hollywood as many British producers' prospects began to close. After the new provisos were added to the renewed quota in 1937, the flexibility of quota requirements allowed for more of these types of films to come from either California or British-based Hollywood studio subsidiaries

⁶⁰⁷ H.G.W., "Film and Film Favourites," in *Rand Daily Mail*, Mon, October 29, 1934, 7.

like MGM British, WB British, and Fox British. And with the onset of war, Hollywood took precedence with this genre, though its popularity waned.

Film and Identity in South Africa

Generally, after 1932 I found a consistent effort in these English-language newspapers to distinguish between the two industries (Hollywood and Britain), and advertisers utilized any British aspect to sell the product. When did being British come to mean the product will sell? A visible shift appears to come with the advent of sound and as certain British filmmakers attempted to produce a higher-quality product by targeting a global market. Identity became a selling point in South Africa, and perhaps the country's unique situation and context lends itself to support this marketing strategy. In the English vs. Afrikaner context, situated just twenty years after the Union of the country, and thirty years after the Anglo-Boer War—perhaps there is a stronger identification with Britishness than in other former British colonies and Commonwealth countries, as these individuals define themselves counter to the rising Afrikaner nationalism.

A British South African Identity

Perhaps the findings of this publicity research and the inherent nature of the South African industry targeting “white European” audiences during these years make the existence of a self-identifying English (or British) group among Empire audiences seem an obvious observation. Yet what this chapter truly aims to provide is a link between a commercial culture and the different groups it encounters in order to better comprehend the nature of that national identity. During the interwar years, the antagonism between the different peoples of South Africa co-existed with a diversity of cultures. The cultural commodity of film, from its business structure within the region to its methods used to attract mass spectatorship, helps us to place British nationalism and imperialist identities within the context of (in this case) South African studies and hopefully within the larger Anglophone world.

John Lambert, in part of a wider biographical project of South Africans of British origin or descent, traces the evolution of their identity for the past two centuries in an attempt to fill the weak historical scholarship about this minority group in South Africa. Lambert explains that

despite their political dominance in the nineteenth century, and their remaining cultural and economic dominance into the twentieth century, “their rich and diverse experience as a group has been marginalized by the historiographical emphasis placed from the mid-twentieth century upon Afrikaner and African nationalisms and upon socio-economic studies.”⁶⁰⁸ As Lambert points out, only since the 1990s has aspects of South African Britishness been examined by historians such as Andrew Thompson, Saul Dubow, and Jonathan Hyslop, among others.⁶⁰⁹

English-speaking South Africans, as they came to be known during the twentieth century, may have identified with their “country of settlement,” but many of them considered British their primary identity.⁶¹⁰ It was not a “single” British identity, but rather a continuation of separate British identities that they brought with them: English, Scottish, Welsh, or Irish. Given the numerical majority of English among them, as well as the “dominance of Anglo-Saxon values and interests meant that even Celts often referred to themselves as English.”⁶¹¹ Lambert looks at various aspects that shaped these British identities: regional origins, local conditions, place of birth, and some taking on multiple identities. The popularity of these regional societies in South Africa can attest to the importance of regional origins, especially those from Cornwall, York and Lancashire. The variances influenced by local conditions are exemplified by those of the mining magnates in Johannesburg in contrast with the liberal traditions in the Cape. There was also the possibility of outright abandoning one’s English identity, or taking on multiple identities.

And let us not forget that these identities were fashioned in relation to those identities with which they interacted, essentially Afrikaners and Africans. The bonds of whiteness in the face of a numerical majority of black Africans did tie the English South Africans to Afrikaners, but Lambert posits that generally, most bonds linked them to Britain and thus prevented a “cohesion

⁶⁰⁸ Lambert, ““An Unknown People,”” 599.

⁶⁰⁹ Andrew Thompson, “The Languages of Loyalism in Southern Africa, C. 1870-1939,” *The English Historical Review* 118, no. 477 (June 1, 2003): 617–50; Jonathan Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist: J.T. Bain, a Scottish Rebel in Colonial South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2004); Saul Dubow, “How British Was the British World? The Case of South Africa,” *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 37, no. 1 (March 2009): 1–27, doi:10.1080/03086530902757688.

⁶¹⁰ Lambert, ““An Unknown People,”” 600.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 601.

as South Africans.”⁶¹² Language, Religion, Culture, and Crown Loyalty: Lambert explores each of these in detail, and argues that it is with these shared bonds that a more “hegemonic identity” surfaces, with certain characteristics common among most of the group.⁶¹³ A common Protestantism is foremost, as churches maintained close ties to their parent churches in Britain. English language, literature, and history strengthened their self-awareness. According to Lambert, the hegemonic identity was “essentially male and middle class,” but by the 1930s had absorbed much of the working class and British women buying into the identity. Since the Victorian era, British culture connected sport with masculinity, Christian values, and adventure. And they surrounded themselves with social structures and institutions based upon British models that reinforced this bond with Britain, including their schools, clubs, churches, libraries, theaters, museums, and more.⁶¹⁴ This modelling on British equivalents included newspapers, which “sought to cultivate Britishness and protect British interests in South Africa.” And given the role that the mining magnates of Johannesburg had in controlling most English newspapers, newspapers “followed a pro-British line and played a disproportionately large role in maintaining Britishness.”⁶¹⁵ Lambert also credits radio with this same level of importance, and only briefly credits both British and some Hollywood films with reinforcing British stereotypes. However, the newspapers’ movie advertisements and promotion analyzed in this chapter definitely fit into this scheme and played its own role in drawing upon their readers as likely audiences for British-made films (which many presumed also represented Britishness in their content).

I summarize many of Lambert’s main arguments here because I want to address how the consumption of films from Britain easily fit into the loyalist tradition that continued during this period and reinforced a British South African identity. Yes, they reinforced stereotypes. They also provided visual reminders of their “home”: from English landscapes and set locations to the mannerisms and speech of British actors. Films brought to life the stories and literature with

⁶¹² Ibid., 601–602.

⁶¹³ Ibid., 602.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 603–604.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 604–605.

which these British South Africans were reared. Likewise, British film publicity reinvigorated the need to see them *because* they were British, not just in the stories and presentation, but in the inherent make-up of the productions—that they were a “British” commodity. Hollywood viewed the success of certain British films like those about the monarchy, and strove to fulfill this need among both British and Empire markets. By the end of the 1930s, between both of these film industries, there were even more films based on famous English literature and history as well as a rising trend in “Empire” films.⁶¹⁶ Overall, for most of the 1930s, the marketing strategy emphasizing a film’s Britishness within its South African distribution highlights this role of national identity and its reinforcement among South African audiences and suggests that many among the English South Africans continued to identify more as British subjects in contrast to Afrikaner’s nationalism, the majority of black Africans, and even counter to the increased American commercial presence (for the moment).

⁶¹⁶ For more on Empire films in the late 1930s (including the series of Korda’s adventure films), see Richards, *Films and British National Identity*, 31–84; Chapman and Cull, *Projecting Empire: Imperialism and Popular Cinema*; chapter three of Landy, *British Genres*, 97–139; and chapter two of Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *British Cinema and Society, 1930-1970* (Barnes & Noble Books, 1983).

Chapter 7

“Rich but easily digestible...”:

Spices Augmenting a British Caribbean Film Diet

Based on the recently published memoirs of Marthe Cnockaert, the British dramatic thriller *I Was a Spy* (1933) tells the story of a Belgian woman who passed secret intelligence to the British while working as a nurse for German soldiers during the First World War. In Britain, readers of *Film Weekly* voted it the Best British Film of the Year 1933 and Madeleine Carroll (as Cnockaert) as the year’s Best Performance.⁶¹⁷ When *I Was a Spy* reached the shores of Jamaica in the fall of 1934, local advertisers for Kingston’s Palace theater proclaimed its arrival in the preceding weeks’ lead-ins as “Britain’s” and “England’s Greatest Contribution to the Screen...”⁶¹⁸ These advertisers recognized the interests of their reading public for a quality film that was specifically British-made. One contributor writing to the *Gleaner’s* editor mentioned that *Spy*, “which appropriately heads the list [of forthcoming British films], is one of the few pictures on which critics seem to be unanimous in their praise, and it has the additional recommendation of being founded on fact.”⁶¹⁹ In addition to indicating local interest in British films, this kind of exuberant enthusiasm of local newspapers and its readers to the eventual importation of British films in the mid-1930s also hints at the struggles of Caribbean islands to acquire this particular British commodity.

While South African film distribution provided the opportunity to enjoy a British film for a significant minority of English South Africans, other British subjects throughout the Empire

⁶¹⁷ “‘I Was a Spy’: Voted Best 1933 British Film,” *The West Australian* (Perth, West Australia), June 15, 1934, 3, accessed March 26, 2016, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article32944140>. Only those films generally released in Britain in 1933 were considered, leaving films having only premiered in 1933 such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) for the following year’s poll. Listing of past *Film Weekly* fan polls in various newspapers of subsequent years available in National Library of Australia’s Trove of online digitized newspapers, such as “Film World,” *The West Australian* (Perth, WA), August 12, 1938, 4, accessed March 26, 2016, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article32944140>.

⁶¹⁸ *Daily Gleaner* (Kingston), October 18, 1934, 4. Similar taglines were also used in *I Was a Spy* advertisement blocks in editions from October 16, 1934, 3; October 17, 1934, 4; and during its first run at the Palace, October 19, 1934, 4; October 20, 1934, 4; October 22, 1934, 4; and October 23, 1934, 4.

⁶¹⁹ K. R. Abrahams, letter to the editor, *Daily Gleaner*, October 11, 1934, 12.

experienced various opportunities to view British films in their local theaters. The nuances between the different colonies and dominions provide us an opportunity to explore the role of British films on a broader scale, and this chapter particularly explores British film distribution and exhibition within the less profit-making but still significant British colonies of the Caribbean. Whether British films of the 1930s may or may not have been especially successful among British colonial audiences, what I have been able to determine is that the idea of a strong national British industry was welcomed by those British subjects beyond the British Isles.

Based on new research, the business of film distribution shaped which islands and urban centers received the various productions from the different film studios and how the films were publicized. This study does not counter the oft-remarked fact that the largest percentage of films came predominantly from Hollywood studios, as in most countries throughout the world. Instead, what this chapter explains that even as Hollywood was the dominant source of film product, a British Cinema industry was promoted and supported by Caribbean exhibitors, some local individuals, and even government officials. During a time when quota quickies were establishing a negative perception of British filmmaking, the importance of a distinctly “British” product alleviated some individuals’ minds, but also helped to fulfill what some believed the broader Caribbean public (among others) wanted. Given the manner in which exhibitors’ ads targeted these local colonial audiences, one can suppose that some of these spectators wanted a good-quality British product to at least add some spice to their film diet (as shown in the following). From requesting specifically British films to local exhibitors’ use of Britishness as a marketing ploy in various regions of the Caribbean, one can presume that even as the sun was about to set on the British Empire, there were still some Caribbeans who continued to identify with Britain and/or the British Empire.

To address some of these questions, the general structure of this chapter follows the transatlantic process of distribution and exhibition of British films from Britain to their arrival in the British Caribbean. Chapters three and four provided a brief exploration of British producers’ intentions, which initiated this process with concern towards broadening their market access.

Additionally, these case examples have exemplified how a few independent British producers were able to utilize Hollywood's established global distribution network to reach American and Commonwealth markets. For this current chapter's purposes, this Hollywood network also included the British West Indies, while there was at least one attempt by a British film studio to institute a more direct distribution into the Caribbean as well as government efforts to ensure British films reached their Caribbean colonies. An analysis of their publicity and portrayal in local Caribbean newspapers helps to reconstruct the British films' arrival and their probable reception in various islands of the British Caribbean. Lastly, with this analysis, one hopes not only to garner a better understanding of the transatlantic process at work within the British film industry, but one can also unearth perceptions of the various Caribbean audiences that may have viewed these films. This study provides an opportunity to observe the cultural, national, and racial identities in this region during a major time of transition—not only within the film industry, but also within the British Caribbean. This observation then enables an opportunity to situate British Caribbean peoples in the context of a British identity making up a larger "British World" including both colonies and dominions.

Caribbean Distribution, Exhibition, & Historical Context

Overseas Distribution in the British Caribbean: United Artists and British Films

After Herbert Wilcox and Alexander Korda signed exclusively with United Artists by 1932 and 1933 respectively, UA agreed to work with these independent producers to target an international market. As the previous chapters explain, the most logical step alongside an American market distribution would include the targeting of other English-speaking territories. In some cases, this coincided with foreign-language distribution, such as UA's distribution to the British Caribbean situated within their Latin American network. English-speaking areas such as Jamaica, the Bahamas, British Honduras, the other islands of the British West Indies, British Guiana, and Trinidad and Tobago made up only about 20% of their (UA) overseas revenue

coming from their distribution office in the port city of Cristóbal in Colón, Panama.⁶²⁰ UA's Cristóbal "Exchange" distributed films throughout Central America, the Caribbean, the Panama Canal Zone, and the northern coast of South America. Thus, it was considered predominantly Spanish-speaking and categorized as a "Foreign Market" by United Artists offices.⁶²¹

The international potential of high-quality British films, especially in the wake of Korda's success with *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), emphasized UA's need for British product to enable access and secure profits in England, as well as any other English-speaking territories. In Walter Gould's Instructions to the Cristóbal office, he warned the Exchange especially to appreciate Alexander Korda, for "without his pictures we would have difficult sledding in England, the *other* English speaking countries, and the continent, and London Films therefore means a considerable lot more to United Artists than is ordinarily believed by our men in the field."⁶²² Thus, even for UA's Latin American distribution network, it was important for UA's sales representatives to understand the importance and role that British product played within their company. His warning also reflects the significance of their British films even within the less profit-making areas of English-speaking territories like the British Caribbean. If anything, as we have seen from

⁶²⁰ This 20% statistic of UA overseas revenue is repeated various times throughout company correspondence concerning this "foreign" market territory. For example, see the discussion about the overseas revenues for LFP's *The Rise of Catherine the Great* (1934) in George Archibald (secretary, UAC Ltd) to W. P. Philips, 2 May 1934, London (UA Corp., Ltd) January 1934-May 1935; UA/9B/B2/F7. Another example comes up in the negotiations and correspondence concerning B&D's contract in 1934. "Concessions asked by B. & D. – Foreign Markets," 16 April 1934, p. 2; British and Dominions Film Corp., June 1933-June 1935; UA/9B/B1/F3.

⁶²¹ The question of what is "English-speaking" territory was raised in a series of correspondence between UAC, Ltd's George Archibald (UA secretary) and William P. Phillips concerning Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.'s revenue share in English-speaking territories from his film *Catherine The Great* (1934). This was resolved by establishing a blanket zone in which UA declared Cristóbal distribution as predominately Spanish-speaking territory. In a 2 May 1934 letter, George Archibald explains that "only 20% of the total revenue from this area is on the average English speaking." Thus UA planned to consider the entire Cristóbal territory as non-English with the advantageous result that they would *not* have to pay Fairbanks, Jr. a percentage coming out of Cristóbal, especially as Cristóbal distribution was not a significant profit-maker as it was. G. Archibald to W. P. Philips, 2 May 1934, London (UA Corp., Ltd) January 1934-May 1935; UA/9B/B2/F7. This particular debate stretched back to 1933, when according to contractual agreement between LFP and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., "all English-speaking territories" included the UK, Ireland, and "British Dominions Colonies Protectorates and mandated territories..." thus initially defining it more expansively. HGM to W. P. Philips, 26 October 1933, London Film Productions, Ltd, October 1933-March 1935; UA/9B/B2/F8.

⁶²² "Cristobal – W. Gould's Instructions," Cristobal report; Cristobal, Black Books; UA/1F/B2/F6. Emphasis mine.

correspondence concerning Wilcox's British & Dominions Film Corp. (B&D) in the previous chapters, UA's directors expected the foreign territory sales representatives to do their best for UA's British producers in reciprocation for the profits they provided UA from the British domestic market alone.

To clarify further, Overseas Agreements for UA-contracted producers such as Korda and Wilcox were separate contracts from those they signed for distribution to America and to the British Isles, and each contract usually covered a listing of specific films (including those yet to be made). Since the Caribbean lay within United Artists' "foreign market" distribution (their Latin American network), it is difficult to distinguish from their files to what degree of financial success their English language films made in this region. Yet in 1935, one instructional report from the home office to the Cristóbal Exchange berates the office's inadequacy and insufficient revenue halfway into the year. He specifically points out the lack of revenue (for *all* of UA's films) coming from two of the three English-speaking units: Jamaica and Trinidad. Given the sporadic nature of the region's business, the value of each territory was hard to establish even then, but W. Gould estimated 14% of total revenue to come from Trinidad and 3.5% from Jamaica, and these were the areas of more English-language opportunity.⁶²³ As regards Jamaica, the most valuable island within the British Caribbean, UA's hold on distribution was more tenuous; Paramount appears to have had stronger influence over local distribution.⁶²⁴ Yet by October 1936, the general report on Cristóbal notes that in Jamaica, "Business is still good in this territory. Metro still intends to build a new theatre in Kingston."⁶²⁵

While there are few contracts or statistics in UA's archives to confirm the following for the earlier period, UA garnered short-term distribution deals in the mid-thirties through either Paramount's or local distributing companies to reach exhibitors such as Audley Morais' Jamaica

⁶²³ "Cristobal – W. Gould's Instructions," Cristobal report; Cristobal, Black Books; UA/1F/B2/F6.

⁶²⁴ Jamaica's prominence for most valuable region for distribution in the Caribbean was asserted in a report from the British United Film Producers in 1934, quoted in Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, 153; According to Burns, the Saenger company owned movie houses throughout the southern U.S., Puerto Rico, Haiti; soon after investing in Morais' Jamaican Theatres, Saenger sold his business to Paramount and thus bringing the major studio's "efforts at vertical integration" to Jamaica.

⁶²⁵ Cristobal Report, 1936; Cristobal, Black Books; UA/1F/B2/F6.

Theatres, Ltd. (Jamaica) or William P. Humphrey's British Colonial Film Exchange, Ltd. (Trinidad) to strengthen their access to this English-speaking region in the Caribbean. According to correspondence between Humphrey and UA's Cristóbal office, multiple deals were made to distribute in the British West Indies (except Jamaica) via the British Colonial Film Exchange (BCFE) during the 1930s. Delays arose amidst arrangements for a three-year contract in 1935, but after negotiations, Humphrey acquired a contract for UA's next three years' entire stock of films for BCFE's first and second run theaters in Trinidad, Barbados, and British Guiana, as well as some theaters situated throughout the islands in the territory with whom they regularly supplied. Among these, the "most important of such theatres are those at present in Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Antigua, St. Kitts, Dutch Guiana, and the country theatres in Trinidad and British Guiana and others."⁶²⁶ After some adjustments to the proposed distribution arrangements, UA would only supply those pictures they made available for distribution in the Trinidad territory during the years of 1935-1937, instead of selling to BCFE their full season's product each year.⁶²⁷

Concerning UA's British producers specifically, both of the British production companies received contract amendments in August and September 1933 that supplemented to their previous, current and future distribution many Central and South American countries, including British Honduras, the Panama Canal Zone, British, Dutch and French Guianas, British, Dutch and French West Indies.⁶²⁸ For B&D, this also applied to Wilcox's earlier, less expensive films: "Above

⁶²⁶ Letter from W. P. Humphrey to Mr Walter Gould, Port of Spain (UA), 7 January 1935; British Colonial Film Exchange and UAC, agreement and correspondence, 1935; UA/2A/B199/F11.

⁶²⁷ UA representative Walter Gould was determined to establish that it would be for UA to decide which pictures to deliver each year, regardless of their USA release, and that UA was not selling all their product in its entirety due to previous "difficulty with Humphrey on a similar score in our last contract with him..." Gould also recommended to the NY office that they draw up a "stiff" and "tough" contract, partly due to Humphrey's willingness to sign any contract they send him in order to acquire UA product. W. Gould to Paul O'Brien (UA/NY), 17 January 1935; British Colonial Film Exchange and UAC, agreement and correspondence, 1935; UA/2A/B199/F11. Humphrey's desperation for high quality product was a response to new competition from MGM and their Globe Theater in Port of Spain, a situation about which he detailed to W. Gould in this series of correspondence.

⁶²⁸ For amendments to LFP's contract with UA, see T. P. Mulrone, Digest of 3 August 1933 Contract, 5 September 1933; and "Slip sheet for Original Digest," 12 September 1933; Agreements with English production and distribution corporations: UAC, UAC Ltd, and London Film, 1930s; UA/2A/B26/F11. For B&D's contract amendments, see Clause 21, p. 29 of Digest of Letter Agreement, 28 August 1933; British

variation applies to any exhibition contract already made and the variation applies to any of the 31 films already produced and to the first twelve of the thirtysix [sic] pictures to be produced during 1933.⁶²⁹ These efforts on behalf of their British producers added the British Caribbean (among the other territories the Cristóbal exchange serviced) to their global distribution strategy for their films. It seems significant to note this occurred prior to the major “boom” in British industry production, when many still considered Wilcox as one of the few higher-quality British producers and Korda had only just met success with *Henry VIII*, though it had yet to be released in Trinidad as late as 1935.⁶³⁰

Another interesting aspect of United Artists’ Caribbean distribution is one contrary to what made them “exceptional” with their anti-block booking policy; a necessity in smaller and minor-profit-making markets led them to set this policy aside in hopes of accruing better revenues.⁶³¹ UA’s distribution agreement for London Films’ *Henry VIII* and *Girl from Maxim’s* (1933) states that “In Central American states, West Indies, Cuba, and Mexico, the American Licensee [UA] shall have the right to book films together with films of other producers and allocate film rental.”⁶³² Accordingly, based on the usual practices of distribution within the Caribbean, UA’s British films would be “in the same contract with films by other producers,” and their allocation of film rental “according to their [American Licensee/UA] best judgement and in accordance with practice prevailing in the particular territory.”⁶³³ Some overseas markets required the block booking

and Dominion Film Corporation and UAC, distribution agreements, misc. and copyright material, 1933-1946; UA/2A/B26/F8-9.

⁶²⁹ The 1932 distribution contracts for B&D included US, India, Canada, & British Isles. Australia cancelled, and these initial amendments are prior to the separate overseas contracts, to which amendments were added December 1933 and still including Cristóbal territory. Resume of Distribution Agreements between B&D and UAC Ltd.; and Summary of Agreement, 5 December 1933; B&D Film Corp. and UAC, distribution agreements, 1933-46; UA/2A/B26/F8-9.

⁶³⁰ As of June 1935, *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) and other pictures including *Moulin Rouge* (1934), *Emperor Jones* (1933), and others had yet to be released in Trinidad as they all awaited the delay of the contract’s official signing, though the film prints were already with Humphrey. Letter from W. Gould to W. Humphrey, 17 June 1935; BCFE and UAC, 1935; UA/2A/B199/F11.

⁶³¹ Balio, *United Artists, Vol. 1, 1919-1950*, FIND; “exceptional”; based primarily on US market, but British quota also outlawed it in Britain.

⁶³² “Slip sheet for Original Digest,” 12 September 1933; Agreements with English production and distribution corporations: UAC, UAC Ltd, and London Film, 1930s; UA/2A/B26/F11.

⁶³³ T. P. Mulrone, Digest of 3 August 1933 Contract, 5 September 1933;

strategy (as other Hollywood studios commonly employed), but this also suggests UA's concern or need for British film profits in this attempt to tie films together for Caribbean rentals and providing allowance for local area practices. Perhaps this also implies (whether UA's assumption or financial reality) that British films at this early stage still needed the quality reputation of UA's American producers (especially Walt Disney shorts, and Samuel Goldwyn's and Twentieth Century's film features) to ensure their sales in this region; additionally, the inherent geographic limitations and spread of islands and urban centers (aka large movie theaters) were a likely factor as well. Neither research nor scholars have yet to clarify UA's block booking policy in regards to research about overseas distribution. However, since this is a clause amendment (in the case of Clause 27 for the early LFP contract for *Maxim's* and *Henry VIII* that specifically states this), what makes UA considered "exceptional" (concerning no block booking) is relegated only to the domestic US market, although quota law inhibited this practice within the British market. Overseas markets' limited profitability necessitated resorting to other methods such as the block booking strategy used worldwide by the other studios' distributing companies.

Moreover, internal business drama between British & Dominions Films and United Artists underscores how important British product was to UA and indicates the effort they were willing to put forth for B&D beyond the British market, even in the face of poor profits outside of English-speaking countries. As previously discussed, B&D films did well with audiences in Britain and thus contributed to the success of UA and their London office UAC, Ltd., which altogether indicates British audiences enjoyed the product B&D created. In reciprocation, UA determined to aid Wilcox's reach to their overseas markets, including some foreign-language territories that ultimately failed to recuperate the company's expenses for the "foreign version" of their films. In late 1933 after his recent trip to Britain, UA Chairman Joseph Schenck decided to give concessions to Wilcox's British & Dominions' overseas contract, concessions equal to UA's

Agreements with English production and distribution corporations: UAC, UAC Ltd, and London Film, 1930s; UA/2A/B26/F11.

Stockholder Producers' options. According to UA's Board President Arthur W. Kelly, Schenck was willing to make these changes in B&D's favor, because:

British & Dominions, who were our first English association, are contributing considerably to our English Company and therefore Mr. Schenck feels and rightly so, that we should assist B. & D. where we can in other parts of the world, by making it possible for them to make money. Their present contract, especially in the non-English speaking countries, and as a matter of fact, the English speaking countries such as Canada and elsewhere, where the terms are on a 50/50 basis and prints, etc being charged against the Producer's share, makes it impossible for B. & D. to make money in these territories.⁶³⁴

United Artists was struggling to make profit from British & Dominions Films' product in non-English speaking countries, including Latin America, India, and the Far East. According to Arthur Kelly, even within Trinidad and the Caribbean, film distribution magnate William P. Humphrey "does not want to pay the price" for exhibiting B&D films in that territory.⁶³⁵ However, American entrepreneur Humphrey owned the Caribbean's leading American films importer, Colonial Film Exchange (later British Colonial Film Exchange), based in Trinidad.⁶³⁶ His willingness to push aside any Hollywood films for British product was likely limited, but little is known about this entrepreneur. Subsequent correspondence reveals further disgruntlement concerning failures in so-called Overseas Territories: B&D Films' Managing Director Hubert T. Marsh blamed United Artists for B&D films' poor performance in distributing abroad, and UA Directors repeatedly tried to explain to Marsh that they have "made every conceivable effort to establish his product in such markets, which requires pioneering and patience to accomplish good results."⁶³⁷ One of the key factors impeding adequate profit-taking and recoup of expenses

⁶³⁴ A. Kelly to W.P. Phillips, 27 December 1933; Arthur W. Kelly, Correspondence – Foreign Territories, 1932-35; UA/9B/B2/F3. Kelly was willing to support these contract changes, because he felt that the end result would probably just eliminate much of the debit balances already held against their individual pictures. Postscript adds that they planned to make a similar adjustment for London Films, once a parallel contract has been signed in which they gave them rights to all their pictures up until 1938.

⁶³⁵ A. Kelly to W. P. Phillips, 3 April 1934 ; *ibid.*

⁶³⁶ Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, 70. Little is known about Humphrey, except he started out in British Guiana, bought CFE from Rosenthal in the 1920s, and controlled it thereafter...etc. See Burns for more.

⁶³⁷ M. Silverstone to A. Kelly, 20 March 1934; Arthur W. Kelly, Correspondence – Foreign Territories, 1932-35; UA/9B/B2/F3. Others, such as Victor Saville, also complained about UA's meager publicity and

dealt with the “foreign version” territories and their requisite for either foreign language dubbing or subtitles of these films. Meanwhile, this minor English-speaking market of Caribbean islands (among others in the Pacific) resided within this categorized “foreign language” territory.

In a follow-up report to Mr. Marsh addressing his criticisms, UA Chairman Joseph M. Schenck addressed the situation further:

Regarding the overseas markets. Mr. Kelly is familiar with all the details and I am not. ...I am not prepared to defend the efficiency of our distribution in the foreign version territory you speak about, as I am not nearly as well acquainted with that territory as Mr. Kelly. I had a long converence [sic] with Mr. Arthur W. Kelly, and he gold [sic] me that the main reason for the bad showing of your first sixteen pictures in the foreign markets must be attributed to – Firstly: Type of picture – which has not been suitable to various language markets. Secondly: Mechanics of superimposition – which, until recently, has not been suitable – particularly the “explanatory” entitling and translation for Latin America.⁶³⁸

Schenck then continued to offer the concession Hubert Marsh asked for current and previous films, including the cancellation of unliquidated charges on United Artists’ books for the overseas markets, with UA keeping all past and future overseas revenue, which included charges and revenue for all of the Cristóbal territory as well as Latin America, Continental Europe, and the Far East (including English-speaking areas such as Malaya, China, and the Philippines).⁶³⁹ In the initial concession request report, dated 16 April 1934, recoupment of charges constituted “all foreign language version territory as a single area,” and only out of this area would they recoup foreign language charges, and not out of foreign English version areas (such as India, Malaya, China, Philippines, etc.)—the same as their stockholder-producers. However, a note is included that “Foreign language version territory includes all of the Cristobal territory notwithstanding some 20% of it is English speaking.”⁶⁴⁰ Again this business strategy of blanket categorization underlines the difficulty of separating profit statistics and recuperations for this area, both then and now.

encouragement for the overseas distribution of their contracted British films. (Saville was specifically concerned with the U.S. market.)

⁶³⁸ J. Schenck (UA) to H. Marsh (B&D), 17 April 1934; *ibid.*

⁶³⁹ J. Schenck (UA) to H. Marsh (B&D), 17 April 1934; UA/9B/B2/F3.

⁶⁴⁰ Amidst spring 1934 correspondence between UAC (Arthur Kelly, William P. Philips, Joseph M. Schenck), UAC, Ltd (Maurice Silverstone), & Hubert T. Marsh (B&D director) in Arthur W. Kelly, Correspondence – Foreign Territories, 1932-35; UA/9B/B2/F3.

Soon after this friction between Marsh and UA et al, Herbert Wilcox visited W. P. Philips in London when he made his declaration of being happy with (“sold on”) UA; Philips explained to Arthur Kelly that Wilcox “realizes that his American grosses in the past have been all that his pictures were entitled to...” and thus expects reducing his annual program to help reduce costs and raise profit alongside the films’ quality.⁶⁴¹ With this debacle in foreign profit-making and limited successes within his primary market goal of the U.S., thereafter Wilcox altered his focus onto both American and British markets, Americanizing his approach to his films and attempting to reduce the large number of productions to make fewer yet more expensive output (as discussed previously in chapter four).

As one can easily see with United Artists and its British producers, the British Caribbean was *not* a major money-maker. Overall, Latin America was the lowest revenue category for United Artists, with the Caribbean making up a small portion of that. According to UA’s black books, Britain grossed the most in their overseas distribution, followed by Continental Europe, the Far East which included Australia, and finally Latin America.⁶⁴² Given the Caribbean region’s population statistics and composition of small islands, along with the added difficulty of export transportation, especially during these early days of flight (few Caribbean towns had airports; these were in the developing stage during the 1930s), film distribution would seem like a poor investment with a likely financial loss. For example, the largest population among the British West Indies was Jamaica with about 1.14 million people; other islands’ population estimates circa 1936 range from 56,000 (British Honduras) to 448,000 (Trinidad and Tobago).⁶⁴³

⁶⁴¹ W. P. Philips to Kelly, 12 July 1934; UA/9B/B2/F3.

⁶⁴² Statistics of Foreign Cabled Report covering 50 weeks in 1934 in Kelly to Philips, Office Rushgram, 21 December 1934; Arthur W. Kelly, Correspondence – Foreign Territories, 1932-35; UA/9B/B2/F3. The report gives Sales, Played and Earned, Expenses, and Outstandings & Bank Balances for the four key distribution regions. Weekly Average Sales (50 weeks ending Dec 1934): England: \$149, 673; Cont. Europe: \$41, 854; Far East (incl. Australia): \$28, 861; Latin America: \$16, 469; Played & Earned Weekly Average (50 weeks ending Dec 1934): England: \$150,006; Cont Europe: \$37,346; Far East: \$25,308; Latin America: \$15,677. An added note states that “The Latin American countries below the Equator are starting to go into their bad season.”

⁶⁴³ West India Royal Commission (1938-1939) and Walter Edward Guinness Moyne, *The Moyne Report: Report of the West India Royal Commission* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2011), 9; also, table of

So *why* did these companies set up distribution of this struggling British product? Their business correspondence and admonition of overseas sales representatives highlights the reciprocity UA provided for their British producers. Additionally, most likely UA wanted to intake any possible profit, which included targeting any and all English-speaking areas with their English-version product. Even within their foreign-language markets (especially those that included both English-speaking and foreign language territories), one can easily see their dedication to B&D Films and LFP's productions, as shown in the examples discussed above which reflect their attempts to stretch further out overseas for these companies that aided them within the British market. With UA's decision to attempt this overseas market with British films, they probably understood that the English-speaking colonies might prefer something from their own metropole, something that they could better understand and perhaps identify with: the stories, the settings, the acting, the speech and slang, and the like. Furthermore, the prestige of United Artists during this period lent itself to their producers under contract; with a higher quality product from Korda and Wilcox (in contrast with other independent British producers during these years), even in minor markets this resembled a mutually beneficial relationship.

Local Exhibition: Theatre Chains & Entrepreneurs

The next stage of this transatlantic process is the role of independent exhibition chains and theater owners within the British Caribbean. By the mid-1930s, the major Hollywood studios were only beginning to build their own theaters for exhibition within the region. As a distribution company, United Artists had to contract rental deals with local exhibitors and independent entrepreneurs. For example, the major importer, Colonial Film Exchange (CFE) owned theaters throughout the British West Indies: including Trinidad, British Guiana, and the Windward and Leeward Islands. Apparently, given CFE's monopoly throughout these large and small markets of this region, their preference for "cheap American films" frequently frustrated the British film

population statistics compiled in Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 27.

industry.⁶⁴⁴ In 1931, W. P. Humphrey replaced the CFE (run in tandem with American George Rosenthal) with his British Colonial Film Exchange and continued to control much of the region—except Jamaica, which was controlled by a local monopoly chain, Jamaica Theatres, Ltd. One of the larger exhibition chains in the Caribbean (especially by 1935-37), Audley Morais managed Jamaica Theatres which became the dominant exhibition circuit in Jamaica (and once Paramount Studios acquired the business of one of JT’s investors, their influence came to dominate Jamaica’s distribution).⁶⁴⁵ Oftentimes these local exhibitors determined the choice of films to rent, from which studios, and how they were publicized to local audiences (audiences they doubtless understood better than the businessmen in New York or London).

James Burns has recently placed emphasis on the consolidation of cinemagoing into the hands of a few colonial businessmen throughout Britain’s “tropical” empire—“almost none of whom were British”—especially in the Caribbean, South Africa, and India.⁶⁴⁶ During the 1920s, the Caribbean’s movie business expanded under significant influence by “members of social or ethnic minorities,” especially South Asians, Americans, and Jewish Jamaicans (“outsiders from the colonial establishment” per Burns) who used their “foreign connections, and access to capital to build the infrastructure and commercial networks that made the cinema business possible.” As previously discussed, South Africa’s Jewish American I.W. Schlesinger is one of these key “outsider” entrepreneurs fitting into Burns’ profile; one whose business acumen built a thriving entertainment industry. Burns clarifies that many of these entrepreneurs “saw themselves as loyal British subjects,” but they treated their film businesses as a separate commercial venture. Ultimately, this would lead them into conflict with “British critics who would come to see their businesses as contrary to imperial interests.”⁶⁴⁷ Burns also suggests that these entrepreneurs’ own marginal standing “may have made them more likely to allow the market, rather than elite

⁶⁴⁴ Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, 153; references govt memorandum note.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 153. See Burns for more specifically regarding Trinidad exhibition during the 1930s, 153-156.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

notions of ethnicity and race, to dictate who paid to see the movies.”⁶⁴⁸ In the previous chapter we have seen that in South Africa, exhibitors allowed balcony and occasionally front row discount seating to Cape Coloureds and some urban black professionals. In the British Caribbean urban towns, where there was a significantly rising working and middle class of mixed race and some blacks, segregated cinemas were less financially viable. Given the expansion of both moviegoing and cinema circuits, mixed audiences became the norm in many Caribbean cinemas, as the following section will explore further.⁶⁴⁹

These local chains also provided an opportunity for another outfit, the British International Film Producers, Ltd to establish the British Film Distribution Agency, Ltd. in Kingston, Jamaica. The BFDA was formed to distribute a series of so-called high-quality British films from 1933-1935 in Jamaica.⁶⁵⁰ The timing of this arrangement coincides interestingly with the success of Korda’s *Henry VIII* in global markets and the growing recognition of an “improved” British film industry. Unlike Korda and Wilcox who utilized Hollywood distribution, this company distributed a number of popular films from the more successfully emergent British combines Gaumont British and British International Pictures/Associated British Pictures, and other smaller production companies. In this way, similar to Gaumont British’s attempt within the American market, some British producers and companies utilized a direct distribution approach for exhibition in Jamaica, circumventing Hollywood’s network as they tried to make their own way into the larger imperial market, at least in this specific instance within Jamaica.

However, though there is no specific evidence to support it, there is a likely correlation with this agency’s establishment in Jamaica and the British United Film Producers Company’s distribution of British films to the remainder British colonies of the Caribbean during the 1930s. As discussed in chapter five, the Colonial Films Committee (CFC) formed the British United Film Producers Ltd (BUFP) in 1931 to implement their strategy for British film distribution to the

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁴⁹ Colonial Office survey of 1931 identified a few cinemas in Trinidad as “all non-European,” but the rest were intended for mixed audiences. *Ibid.*, 156.

⁶⁵⁰ *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, September 4, 1934, 10.

colonies and mandated territories, with its first successful shipments to the British West Indies and West Africa. Sponsored by the Film Producers' Group of the Federation of British Industries (FBI), the involvement (and gradual takeover) of Gaumont British among BUFP's board of directors appears to parallel the appearance of GB films in Jamaica by 1933-35. Trade papers reported that same year that the Board of Directors for BUFP was "understood" to "consist of John Maxwell (BIP), Simon Rowson (Ideal Films), H. Bruce Woolfe (British Instructional), C. M. Woolf (Gaumont British) and Sam W. Smith (British Lion)."⁶⁵¹ However, the Board of Trade's 1936 report to the CFC drew attention to the shift in the Board's character in 1933-34 that led to Gaumont British Picture Corporation (GBPC) taking over financial and directing control of this colonial distributing company.⁶⁵² In addition to the GBPC combine controlling a large portion of Britain's theaters and establishing its own distributing agency in the United States, they acquired colonial distribution with the added beneficial aid of Britain's and local colonial governments. It would be a minor step to include Jamaica's numerically-small importation of films via BFDA among Gaumont British's umbrella.

Like elsewhere in the world, the growth of film audiences paralleled the growth of cities and towns within the Caribbean. During the 1920s, movie consumption grew as larger numbers of audiences became accessible in the growing cities and towns of the Caribbean. As Burns explains, the primary movie theaters in the British Caribbean were situated in the major cities of Kingston, Jamaica and Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, but other urban towns like Bridgetown, Barbados and Hamilton, Bermuda began acquiring movie palaces during this period, and the cinema would expand during the 1930s from these two cities into the smaller towns on the islands.⁶⁵³ By 1930, the cinema had become a primary source of entertainment in many of these urban areas, and as the largest island, the *Film Daily Yearbook* estimated that Jamaica had nineteen cinemas with a

⁶⁵¹ "British Films for the Colonies," *Bioscope*, October 14, 1931, 14.

⁶⁵² Board of Trade, *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Committee on Cinematograph Films*, 12, para. 90.

⁶⁵³ Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, 67.

total seating capacity of over 12,000.⁶⁵⁴ According to a contemporary observer, Jamaicans attended the movies on an average of two to three times per week, even though the films were usually a year or two delayed from their American releases.⁶⁵⁵ This growing popularity of the cinema corresponded to the same occurring in the other British cities in the Caribbean. For example, while Barbados had only two theaters in 1931, about 4,000 people per week were going to the movies; amid a population of only 188,000, they were selling over 200,000 tickets per year.⁶⁵⁶ Finally, the make-up of these Caribbean audiences is explored in more detail below.

Caribbean Historical Context & Audiences

The arrival of “talkie” films into the British West Indies of the 1930s occurred as the region faced the economic downturn of the Depression, growing social unrest, and a “locked” racial/class stratification system only beginning to shake with the rise of a (small) middle class. Most scholarly discussion of the 1930s British Caribbean revolves around the social upheaval and labor unrest that triggered a series of responses and change in the following decades concerning self-government, aspiring nationalism and the black laboring masses, and the decolonization process by mid-century.⁶⁵⁷ A brief overview of these socio-economic conditions and upheaval in the region during these years provides a better understanding of the make-up of British Caribbean cinema-going audiences.

After the (Jamaican) Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, most islands of the British West Indies chose a Crown Colony government system (direct rule from the metropole) over internal self-rule (by the white elites) with the exceptions of the Bahamas and Barbados (and British

⁶⁵⁴ *Film Daily Yearbook of 1930*, referenced in *ibid.*, 69.

⁶⁵⁵ William James Makin, *Caribbean Nights* (1939), quoted in *ibid.*, 156.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 156. Burns provides a detailed account of this growth throughout the British West Indies as well as South Africa and India.

⁶⁵⁷ Mary Chamberlain, *Empire and Nation-Building in the Caribbean: Barbados, 1937-66*, *Studies in Imperialism* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010); Richard Hart, *From Occupation to Independence: A Short History of the Peoples of the English-Speaking Caribbean Region* (London: Pluto Press, 1998); Sahadeo Basdeo, “The ‘Radical’ Movement Towards Decolonization in the British Caribbean in the Thirties,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Latino-Américaines et Caraïbes* 22, no. 44 (January 1, 1997): 127–46.

Guiana until 1928).⁶⁵⁸ By the early twentieth century, the decline of the sugar industry (with the takeover of a beet sugar industry in Europe) had led to a few other commodity productions, but ultimately island economies were struggling throughout the region. However, the 1930s Depression severely impacted the region's economy all the more, as unemployment reached heights ranging between 25-50% in some territories, malnutrition rose, a high infant mortality rate kept increasing, and so forth. Those laborers that remained employed received extremely low wages, and while many islands had a dominant workforce of women, women were paid much less than men. The dominant workforce of women on several of the islands was a result of many men seeking migrant work elsewhere in Central America, such as Panama and Venezuela, until return migration was enforced in some areas.⁶⁵⁹ Seasonal (and full time) migration patterns were disrupted with layoffs, and migrant workers returned to their home islands and overloaded the smaller islands' local supply of labor. This overpopulation in the smaller islands triggered further discontent between migrant and host workers eventually breaking into violence. Bonham C. Richardson argues that migration (or the lack of possibilities for a veteran migrant workforce) "...underpinned the rioting in each case."⁶⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the larger colonies like Jamaica faced appalling poverty levels among the laboring masses, in addition to increasingly poor conditions overall.⁶⁶¹ The growing labor discontent sparked a series of strikes, riots, and in some areas bloody mayhem, as sugar laborers and industrial workers throughout the region struggled to improve their wages and poverty-level conditions. Strikes and riots had occurred in previous years, but never before had uprisings occurred in such a simultaneous manner throughout the Caribbean: first in British

⁶⁵⁸ Hart, *From Occupation to Independence*, 87. Bahamas' lead merchants and Barbados' & British Guiana's plantocracies were more confident of their control over the laboring masses and their maintenance of their self-rule government system without help from London.

⁶⁵⁹ Verene Shepherd, *Women in Caribbean History: The British-Colonised Territories* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1999), 146–147.

⁶⁶⁰ Bonham C. Richardson, "Caribbean Migrations, 1838-1985," in *The Modern Caribbean*, ed. Franklin W Knight and Colin A Palmer (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 215.

⁶⁶¹ Chamberlain, *Empire and Nation-Building in the Caribbean*, 2 good example on degree of impact of depression on Barbados, one of the POOREST of British territories in the Caribbean, given the island economy was dependent on sugar alone, price steadily falling, and alongside other crises in Carib, led to "political backlash against West Indian migrant workers who were expelled" so return to Barbados... .

Honduras (Belize) and in Port of Spain, Trinidad in 1934, followed by St Kitts in 1935, St Vincent and St Lucia in 1936, and Barbados, Bahamas, and Trinidad (again) in 1937. Rebellions in Jamaica and British Guiana held off until 1938 and 1939.⁶⁶²

Amidst this social and economic upheaval, the audiences most likely to be attending the movie theaters were predominantly from the upper and middle classes, but the makeup of these strata extends beyond just the expatriates from Britain and local white elites, merchants, and tradesmen. From the turn of the nineteenth century, a small but increasing middle class, including those of mixed African and European ancestry (“coloureds”) and a few blacks, arose as capitalism, consumerism, and transitions of modernity began to impact the region’s urban societies.⁶⁶³ Furthermore, the racial and class stratification of the British Caribbean varied slightly from island to island, which impedes determining who is actually watching these films on a regular basis.

A general three- and four-tier structure, a legacy from slavery, provides a sense of the breakdown while highlighting the close ties between race and class within twentieth-century Caribbean society. Bridget Brereton explains this three-tier class-racial structure as a legacy of slavery that continued as a “basic framework of Caribbean society” until the late 1930s upheaval and the changes wrought during and after World War II. Simply stated, the white upper classes held social prestige, political power, and economic hegemony. The “coloured” middle held a degree of education (at least primary and some secondary schooling) and knowledge of the English language, a legacy of imitating European behaviors and mannerisms, and an inclination to separate themselves from the laboring masses. And lastly, the black Creole masses of primarily African descent and descendants of slaves usually were poor rural laborers, poorly

⁶⁶² Shepherd, *Women in Caribbean History*, 166; Chamberlain, *Empire and Nation-Building in the Caribbean*, 4.

⁶⁶³ Similar to South African usage, contemporaries of this period used the term “coloured” to reference primarily those of mixed African and European ancestry. Occasionally, I found local newspapers also utilizing the “American” terminology of Colored to refer to those peoples with *any* degree of African ancestry. However, in keeping with the dominant trend (and British English spelling), this chapter utilizes “coloureds” to refer to those with mixed ancestry and either black Creoles or black laboring masses to refer to those of African heritage.

educated, and largely excluded politically, and they observed different lifestyles and religious practices from the other “tier” groups. A fourth tier of Asian immigrants (especially Indian and some Chinese) were primarily in areas of Trinidad, British Guiana, and Jamaica. They often separated themselves from the other groups by establishing rural communities and continuing to practice different religions and cultural traditions.⁶⁶⁴

According to Richard Hart, mostly white men (often expatriates sent from Britain) held positions of leadership and civil service jobs, such as administration department heads, governors, police commissioners and troops officers, and including clergy and teachers. The white elites of the middle and upper classes—expatriates and white Creoles—had the money and the time for leisure if they were inclined to attend the cinema (as opposed to the more elite, status-maintaining events such as the opera, theater, social clubs & other hosted events). Like in the United States, those concerned with maintaining their status image might have declined attending this cheaper form of entertainment. James Burns refers to a 1914 *Gleaner* editorial at least to speculate that “neither the poorer nor the most affluent members of Jamaican society” were attending the movies.⁶⁶⁵ Yet by the 1930s, there were increasingly more movie palaces in the cities and towns of the Caribbean. Between the exclusive seat ticket pricing and the elite stature of first-run premier films, some white elites likely included cinema-going among their leisure activities.

Those British colonies with larger white populations (such as Barbados and the Bahamas) tended to practice more overtly racial discrimination, although there was no official system of segregation within the British West Indies. Others, such as those elites in Jamaica, kept a degree of social aloofness to both the black laboring masses and the increasingly “coloured” middle class. Some of the island colonies had small white populations (too small to

⁶⁶⁴ Bridget Brereton, “Society and Culture in the Caribbean: The British and French West Indies, 1870-1980,” in *The Modern Caribbean*, ed. Franklin W Knight and Colin A Palmer (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 88.

⁶⁶⁵ Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, 40.

form a class) in which the lighter-skinned “coloureds” often took leadership roles (as seen in the Windward Islands).⁶⁶⁶

The rising middle stratum, consisting of whites and progressively more “coloureds” and a few blacks, increasingly participated in the opportunities of modernity, including weekly attendance to their local theaters. While the United States’ middle class was reaching a majority of the population, this middle Caribbean class was much smaller in proportion; nevertheless, both were participating in increasingly urban, professional, and educated lifestyles. By the 1930s, those individuals of (various) mixed ancestry as well as whites entered into white-collar and civil service jobs or became merchants and small business owners. They viewed education as a vital tool for upward mobility, and many focused on raising their stature through secondary schooling and language efficiency.⁶⁶⁷ Some islands had various degrees of mixed race populations. For example, Barbados never had a large number of “coloureds,” while Jamaica had significant numbers of mixed ancestry as a result of the high incidence of absentee planters during its era of slavery.⁶⁶⁸

These upper and professional middle classes had the opportunity regularly to attend the movies, and as the following publicity analysis reflects, there was a local awareness of this small but growing number of potential spectators especially as cinema-going became increasingly popular. While the metropole assumed only expatriates and Creole whites might be interested in British films, in all likelihood there was much more racial variety to the weekly cinema-goers in the British West Indies, especially in the neighborhood theaters. For example, upon his visit to Jamaica, one observer describes the 1930s audience of the movies “as ‘colored’ shop assistants

⁶⁶⁶ Brereton, “Society and Culture in the Caribbean: The British and French West Indies, 1870-1980,” 92–93.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁶⁸ Shepherd, *Women in Caribbean History*, 66–67. Throughout the Caribbean, the population of free Coloureds rose dramatically by the mid-nineteenth century. In Jamaica, the figures rose from 10,000 at the end of the eighteenth century to 44,000 by the end of slavery. With so many absentee planters and the discouragement of marriage of their white overseers and bookkeepers, a significant number of children of mixed ancestry resulted. Among them, free women of color usually outnumbered white men and women as well as “coloured” men (though never outnumbering the enslaved in British-colonized territories).

and 'doomed aristocrats.'"⁶⁶⁹ James Burns explains that it is difficult to figure out just who was going to see movies in Jamaica (and elsewhere in the Caribbean) given the various identities that made up, in this instance, Kingston society. Within the social pyramid of Kingston, at the top was "a self-identified white Creole elite" of British citizens that dominated commerce and society.

Burns describes those below them as:

a population of urbanized 'coloreds' who identified themselves as being of mixed European and African ancestry, such as the 'coloreds' of South Africa. However this community had a less well-developed corporate identity, and was even more socially porous than that of the coloreds of South Africa. One result of this was that in public discourse there was a reticence to speak of coloreds as a discrete community. This makes it quite difficult to determine who in fact was seeing movies in the early part of the century.⁶⁷⁰

In any case, from the various races and class strata, audiences had a more complex make-up than presumed by British colonial administrations or American businessmen in Hollywood.

Finally, the less affluent members of society, or the rural black laboring masses, would have been the least likely group to attend the movies on a regular basis. Aside from the distance and displacement away from the movie theaters themselves, other obstacles hindered their opportunities for this cheaper form of mass media entertainment: free time (they had little), money, language (they spoke creole patois, and limited English), literacy (most were illiterate, not educated past primary schooling), racial discrimination (mostly composed of Black or "dark-skinned" people), and perhaps inclination. Unlike those of the upper- and middle-classes that could afford secondary schooling in the British colonies (predominantly whites and "coloureds"), most black laborers irregularly attended primary schools and nothing beyond that level.⁶⁷¹ Or in

⁶⁶⁹ William James Make, *Caribbean Nights* (1939), referenced in Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, 69, footnote 45.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁷¹ Bridget Brereton describes how secondary education was primarily the preserve of middle- and upper-class children until after the Second World War. Most pupils were white or colored, "with a few blacks and (in Trinidad and Guyana) a sprinkling of Indians by the 1930s." The "highly elitist form" of secondary education was based on the English upper-class public or grammar school, and followed the same curriculum and used the same textbooks as the "metropolitan model." Brereton explains that since "so few children from peasant and working-class families could gain entry to the secondary schools before the 1950s..., they served to deepen and sharpen class distinctions." Even so, education was a vital institution

brief summation, the majority black population was illiterate, rural-based, and spoke their own Creole patois languages; it is likely that most of them were unable to afford the time, money, and/or comprehension.

Some areas of the British West Indies (especially Trinidad, British Guiana, and to a lesser degree Jamaica) had a fourth tier to their racial stratification system, East Indian migrants. After emancipation of slavery and British government approval for their passage, plantation owners imported indentured Indian workers to keep wages and prices even.⁶⁷² By the 1930s, some of these Indians' descendants had worked their way into the middle classes, but the majority of these Asian laborers often segregated themselves into rural communities (although by no means were they a homogenous group themselves, having come from all over India and in actuality separated by language, religion, and caste). Most Indians remained in rural areas until a shift to urban centers started during the 1940s.⁶⁷³ However, some of the communities, perhaps those situated geographically closer to urban neighborhood theaters, enjoyed films on occasion. For example, in Trinidad, where the Indian population was significant, some theater owners began importing Indian-produced films by the mid-1930s to show to this dispersed group. Gokool Meah, founder and owner of the *Metro* in Trinidad since 1933, claims to have screened the first Indian film brought to Trinidad, *BalaJoban*, in 1935.⁶⁷⁴ The film's success led to a tour of the print into the Indian regions of the country, and spurred others to get into the business of importing Indian

and tool for upward social mobility. For more, see Brereton, "Society and Culture in the Caribbean: The British and French West Indies, 1870-1980," 107-109.

⁶⁷² The British government approved the passage of indentured workers from India to serve five-year contracts in the Caribbean. The first boatload arrived in British Guiana in early 1838. This migration seemed to "solve" the perceived post-emancipation labor shortages of southern Caribbean planters. From 1838 to 1917 (termination of indenture system), nearly 240,000 men and women were sent to British Guiana, 135,000 to Trinidad, and 33,000 to Jamaica. Richardson, "Caribbean Migrations, 1838-1985," 207-208; For a more detailed account of the experiences of indentured Indian migration to British Guiana, see David Hollett, *Passage from India to El Dorado: Guyana and the Great Migration* (Madison [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999).

⁶⁷³ Shepherd, *Women in Caribbean History*, 126.

⁶⁷⁴ Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, 154-155. Film was brought by businessman Ranjit Kumar, who purchased a copy print while on a visit to Bombay. He sold initially to Gokool Meah for this first screening at the *Metro*, a theater founded with the intent to show MGM films in competition with Humphrey's monopoly of the region.

films and establishing theaters specifically to screen them in the following years.⁶⁷⁵ Throughout the Caribbean, perhaps less of those in the Indian communities were attending the movies than other groups during much of the 1930s, but some of them began viewing the occasional Indian-produced film. Additionally, it is likely that among those working near or within urban areas, some attended American and British screenings on occasion.

Overall, the majority of the laboring masses, especially rural plantation workers, most likely were *not* the ones to attend the movies, and therefore neither would the advertisements in newspapers be intended for them. At least, many of the larger-circulating daily newspapers did not target these working class masses. Nonetheless, one would expect word of mouth and publicity visuals (posters, sandwich boards, etc.) to spread interest among those living in the urban centers that might attend and to lure them into the venues, especially for the cheaper tickets at local neighborhood, third-run movie theaters where there was a large enough local population to warrant such publicity.

Comparable to southern Africa and other areas of British colonial control, the availability and influence of films to black laboring or "native" audiences raised concerns among British colonial administrators. This concern stems from a legacy of what Richard Hart explains as a heritage of making "European and white North American models" the ideal, and portraying Africans and Asians as "primitive, backward, and unworthy of emulation."⁶⁷⁶ Hart explains that this long heritage of the social pyramid and white superiority was perpetrated over many generations socially as well as through institutions such as the education system and the press projecting this same idea. In keeping with this outlook, or perhaps as a result of this ingrained perception of peoples, individuals like the Resident Magistrate raised concerns of showing "natives" any negative depictions of whites in films. R. C. Bodilly, a Jamaican resident for seven years, was aware of the need for a sense of inferiority of the governed. In an article for Jamaica's *Today's Cinema* magazine, he revealed his concern for many films that "belittle the respect of the

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 155.

⁶⁷⁶ Hart, *From Occupation to Independence*, 93.

natives for the whites,” especially those films he referred to as “the bathroom, bedroom, and bomb dramas.”⁶⁷⁷ By the late 1920s and ‘30s, the primary concern for any film censorship needs were often directed at the black laboring masses possibly being exposed to more negative portrayals that countered this image of the white/European “ideal” model.

However, James Burns argues that by the 1930s the fears about film’s danger to “white prestige” were fading and shifting towards the “dangers specific films posted to public order” and which “differed from region to region.” For example, given the heated political and economic climate in Jamaica, “it meant censoring images that might stoke revolutionary inclinations.”⁶⁷⁸ In Trinidad, concerns about “white prestige” persisted in the sound era, but censors’ stringent policy faced difficulties when Britain implemented a quota for the colony in 1935; given the still-limited stock of available British films to the territory, distributors struggled if one of their films was banned.⁶⁷⁹ Outside of censorship boards’ banning and editing prints, available scholarship expand upon how they kept the black lower classes from cinema-going in the Caribbean, besides their general incapacity through limited monies, time, and its urban location, and in some areas enforced segregation. Most colonial censorship scholarship focuses upon African and Asian colonies, but as elsewhere, British Caribbean administrators found difficulty enforcing censorship regulations for exhibition to non-Europeans in the face of practical application and potential financial benefits to local exhibitors.⁶⁸⁰

Publicity Analysis

Sources Used

The missing piece of this puzzle is the degree of success or failure of these British films within the Caribbean market. Similar to South Africa’s situation, there are no available box office statistics to reflect financially the reception of these films in the Caribbean (not even among

⁶⁷⁷ *Today’s Cinema* magazine, 1932, quoted in *ibid.*, 94.

⁶⁷⁸ Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, 158. See also p. 167 for a detailed example of Jamaican censorship banning *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1938, presumably due to its revolutionary subject matter.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 167–168.

⁶⁸⁰ For more concerning colonial censorship (primarily in Africa and Asia), see also Reynolds, *Colonial Cinema in Africa*, 101–104; Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, 157–173.

United Artists' Black Books). Additionally, film reviews in local newspapers were still in their infancy at this time, if the local papers even included something more than the title, star's name, and possibly a tagline of what's playing at a particular theater. Usually these reviews included short storyline mentions, but the evolution of publicity, advertisements and the growth of gossip columns about the stars lagged a few years behind the rapidly-developing American format of publicity.

Without box office statistics, explicit film reviews, or other avenues like personal recollections, it is difficult to determine to what degree Caribbean audiences actually enjoyed or preferred these films identified as British. This lack of sources forces us to rely upon the importance of perception—the perception of those individuals and companies attempting to make a profit from the distribution and exhibition of British films. By observing the way in which these films were advertised and the intentions of local exhibitors and distributors behind their choice of publicity, we can at least derive *their* assumptions about local audiences' expectations and preferences, i.e. their target market. These perceptions of a local identity are reflected in what these audiences might enjoy onscreen if they are informed of the presumably “best” aspects of the movie.

If a film's British origins was a negative aspect of the product, especially if the industry had sustained any sort of a negative reputation, I would argue in that case that they would not be overtly advertised as such. Yet if the Britishness of a film is used as a significant selling point, then this indicates the feature is considered by some as an asset. Ultimately, this usage implies that audiences might prefer to watch a “British” film, at least with the hope that it will fulfill their desires for a “proper” story or reflection of their culture. Even if potential spectators are unfamiliar with a film's stars (often not listed, or lesser-known names), if it is a British narrative and perhaps fills some perceived need of a “British atmosphere” or quality (perhaps concerning the acting styles, adaptation of classic British literature, or even “properly” spoken English), this Britishness becomes a popular feature of advertising during the 1930s.

My primary research consists of film publicity within three popular daily newspapers: the Bahamas' *The Nassau Daily Tribune*, Bermuda's *Royal Gazette & Colonist Daily*, and Jamaica's *Kingston Daily Gleaner*. Advertisements and various publicity were pulled from among an assorted selection of months and years from throughout the 1930s, with the bulk of my attention focused upon the boom years of 1932-1936.

Britishness as a Selling Point

Not surprisingly, among the key trends that I discovered in the publicity from these select newspapers, the small advertisement blocks, editorials, and promotional articles ultimately reflect various aspects of local, British, and racial identities. To begin with, as global prestige for British film rose during this decade with the production of successful films like Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), many local newspaper ads utilized a movie's Britishness as a marketing ploy, making it a key selling point to lure in Caribbean audiences. From 1927, exhibitors initially used this sell-point intermittently in their newspaper ads, especially during the early thirties in the Bahamas and Bermuda, but by 1934 there was a distinctive attempt in all three local Caribbean newspapers to indicate the Britishness of any British film coming to their theaters.

As noted in the previous chapter, newspapers indicated the Britishness of a film in a variety of ways, but oftentimes just stating blatantly that it is "a British Picture." For example, multiple advertisement blocks promoted the film *Marry Me* (1932) in the *Nassau Daily Tribune* as "A British Production" and "another English Production...a cast of English Actors..."⁶⁸¹ Not only did advertisers use the film's production origin as a strategic marker, but one notices they employed British and English as interchangeable description signifiers. This additional aspect probably points to the relationship between film writing and literature (given the frequency of screen adaptations), and it reflects the literary heritage of using Englishness and Britishness interchangeably throughout the various stories and literature of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. For example, Kelly Boyd explains how Englishness was used interchangeably with Britishness in

⁶⁸¹ *Nassau Daily Tribune*, 16 January 1934. Gainsborough's *Marry Me* was also one of the "Follow the Flag" films in Jamaica, but in the Bahamas it received separate promotion, which reflects the different distribution strategies between locations and the role of local businessmen/monopolies.

stories and literature depictions throughout 1855-1940. Britishness referenced Englishness, not Britain as a whole; Celtic was left to the fringe (rare) for heroes.⁶⁸² This literary and cinematic use of Englishness as Britishness coincides with its use elsewhere in the Empire; like John Lambert explained about the British identities of English-speaking South Africans, there was a common recognition of Englishness as Britishness given the dominance of Anglo-Saxon values over Celtic and the majority of English to Welsh, Irish, and Scottish.⁶⁸³

Once viewers were familiar with a specific studio (like Gaumont British) or a British movie star (like Gracie Fields, George Formby, or Jessie Matthews), their names alongside the title would also more readily indicate its origins. Whether achieving box office success in either/both Britain and the US, some publicity promoted a British movie stars' Britishness, even for those actors starring in Hollywood-produced films. Achieving this wider success also helped validate British (or Caribbean, in this case) interest in some of these stars. For example, while Gracie Fields didn't crack the American market as a star, her name was utilized as one that was already familiar (or if not, should be) to audiences in the Caribbean (and the rest of the British Empire), even upon a first-time exhibition of one of her films, such as the case of *This Week of Grace* in Bermuda.⁶⁸⁴ In Bermuda's *Royal Gazette*, in order to promote his Hollywood films, a write-up about Colin Clive emphasized his earlier years as a London stage actor, ostensibly to validate his acting abilities while also indicating his British origins.⁶⁸⁵ Examples like these reveal that Britishness as a component of these movie stars' identities was important in Caribbean

⁶⁸² Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 123.

⁶⁸³ Lambert, "An Unknown People". See also my previous chapter for more on South African identity.

⁶⁸⁴ Bermuda advertisement celebrates Fields' movie debut in Bermuda and includes an inset drawing of her face for visual recognition. *Royal Gazette*, October 8, 1934. Concerning Gracie Fields' difficulty in American market, see Macnab, *J. Arthur Rank and the British Film Industry*, 18.

⁶⁸⁵ *Royal Gazette*, October 10, 1934, 3. A biographical blurb on Colin Clive, whose film *One More River* (Universal, 1934) was currently playing in Bermuda, detailed Clive's own ancestral connection to Clive of India, as well as the actor's desire to serve as officer in the British army (for which a broken knee from a riding accident disqualified him). Further details of his stage acting experiences in London prior to his journey to Hollywood lend itself towards validating him as a British actor, with imperial connections and interests—all of which reflect the transatlantic subject matter of his current film, *One More River*—a melodrama based upon a popular John Galsworthy novel (of *That Forsyte Saga* fame), and filmed in Hollywood alongside other British film actors, director James Whale, and others.

advertising, whether or not the films themselves were British.⁶⁸⁶ Recognition of this trait as another of the essential aspects of a film star's identity can help us to further develop the links between stardom, acting ability, and national identities. As seen in my earlier chapter, the assumption that a British or London West End theatrical background substantiates one's abilities has long since been a common marker for British movie stars and actors.

In the smaller islands of the Bahamas and Bermuda, the shipping proximity to the United States appears to have prompted distribution channels via the American market. For example, United Artists included Bermuda within their network of United States' and Canadian distribution. Those British films that they distributed successfully to the United States were also distributed throughout these areas of the British Caribbean. Additionally, this distribution network may help to explain why there was less of a delay for the release of Hollywood films in this region (in contrast to the other colonial islands and even the rest of the British Empire), and yet a longer delay before the arrival of British films not distributed by a Hollywood Studio.⁶⁸⁷ This network also helps to explain why these smaller islands received less of a local push of propaganda for more British films, and why non-Hollywood films (whether British or European) were not being advertised or screened on some of these islands during the early years of sound films.

It was not until about 1933 or 1934 that these British colonies' newspapers portray a parallel shift to more British film publicity, following in the wake of the more populated colonies like Jamaica and Trinidad. The Bahamas' advertisements for films such as *Marry Me* (see above) and *Baroud* (1933) signify the shift towards indicating productions as British, even if *Baroud* was technically a France/Britain multiple language version co-production. To designate it as an English language version, the Nassau advert emphasized the British origins: "Wed & Thurs –

⁶⁸⁶ To clarify, many advertising blurbs and stories came from press packets originating from the studios; however, newspapers and local marketers chose which stories to run. One could further surmise that even in Hollywood there was recognition that Britishness was an important factor in marketing certain films in regions of the British Empire, at the least.

⁶⁸⁷ James Burns also points to this difference in delay-times of film releases. See James Burns, "Excessive Americanisms: Hollywood in the British Empire, 1918–1930," *Britain and the World* 7, no. 2 (August 29, 2014): 201.

BAROUD This is a British Production".⁶⁸⁸ Set in French colonial Morocco, Gaumont British filmed their English version of this melodrama in Morocco and in conjunction with French production company Armor Films in their short-lived efforts to make multi-language productions in this early sound era.⁶⁸⁹

In contrast to their earlier release in Jamaica in September and October of 1934, films like *The Ghoul* (1933), *The Fireraisers* (1934), and *The Constant Nymph* (1933), were finally making their rounds to the Bahamas by May 1935. Remarkably, even in 1935 amid the peak of British film production, these ads in the *Nassau Daily Tribune* nevertheless only occasionally mention the British nature of the films!⁶⁹⁰ Even United Artists' swift release of London Films' *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1935) in the Bahamas in July 1935 makes no direct mention in its *Tribune* of being British; it is implied indirectly through the reader's recognition of the studio (LFP) or director, if mentioned (*Nassau Daily Tribune* appears to have less designation of production companies than the other newspapers in this study). At least in one series of the film's ads, there was no mention of its British origins or British production company. Instead, the focus is drawn to the author and its stars: "It is our pleasure to present for your entertainment Baroness Orczy's renowned story *The Scarlet Pimpernel* featuring two great stars Leslie Howard and Merle Oberon (Don't Miss This) ADMISSION 3s (United Artists Production)." And only once the reader turns a couple pages do they find an inset article providing a brief storyline of the film that references its inherent Englishness: "All England is intrigued by the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel..." However, there is still no mention of Alexander Korda or London Film Productions, which appears very unusual compared to other newspapers' publicity for this film.⁶⁹¹ Even so, as a successful London stage play and British historical novel from 1905, the title itself might lead advertisers to consider that perhaps there was no need to indicate its production origins; it is inherently selling its British nature in terms of story and subject matter. Or perhaps the Bahamas, in such proximity to Florida,

⁶⁸⁸ *Nassau Daily Tribune*, January 24, 1934. Nassau Theatre club ad; *Baroud* was re-titled *Love in Morocco* for its USA release (1933).

⁶⁸⁹ For more about the filming of MLV's from 1929-1932, see Vincendeau, "Hollywood Babel."

⁶⁹⁰ *Nassau Daily Tribune*, February 11, 1935; May 18, 1935; May 29, 1935.

⁶⁹¹ *Nassau Daily Tribune*, July 13, 1935, 3-5.

is more of an exception to the region. In any case, this variation in publicity reflects the variety of a commodity's industry as well as tastes and preferences (and perhaps identities) within the English-speaking Caribbean.

In contrast, Bermuda's market more readily embraced a British emphasis in their advertising. Unlike the Bahamian market, Bermuda exhibitors were more willing to have international films (like UFA productions from Germany) in addition to the predominant Hollywood product of the early 1930s. Like Jamaica and to a degree the Bahamas, newspaper publicity by 1934 more readily identified the Britishness of a film. Additionally, like the publicity in South Africa, a film's success in England was perceived as a significant selling point to local readers. Advertisers promoted Gracie Fields' movie debut in Bermuda with the assumption that success in England presumed success in Bermuda:

Gracie Fields England's reigning Queen of Musical Comedy makes her movie debut in Bermuda today—You'll be hearing your friends talk about her in England's 1934 Box Office Sensation 'This Week of Grace' a feature length musical comedy tailor made to Miss Fields' talents. 4 song hits and a perfect story enriched with LAUGHTER & TEARS [sic]. [Inset drawing of her face follows ad.]⁶⁹²

Even the Hollywood-produced film *One More River* had a tagline "Dramatic Masterpiece! That has shattered Box Office records in England and America."⁶⁹³ As shown above with British stars' identity, the approval of fellow British audiences in the "homeland" were portrayed as another important British element of film advertising: recognizing that Caribbean audiences perceived themselves as being like or similar to audiences in Britain and ultimately reinforcing an imperial identity.

Local Requests: Wanting "British" films

The editorials and promotional articles reflect another trend in these newspapers; various Caribbean individuals wanted and requested more British films to be shown in their colony. In the case of Jamaica, locals even involved the British Trade Commissioner to negotiate and organize

⁶⁹² Bermuda *Royal Gazette*, October 8, 1934.

⁶⁹³ Bermuda *Royal Gazette*, October 10, 1934, 3.

their availability. According to various articles in the *Gleaner*, this situation was especially prominent in Jamaica and led to the establishment of the British Film Distributing Agency, Ltd. (BFDA) in 1933. This newly-formed agency worked in tandem with Jamaica Theatres, Ltd. to exhibit “a regular supply of British films” apart from those already showing from United Artists and British International Pictures.⁶⁹⁴ One of these articles details this new distribution alliance and quotes the British Trade Commissioner H. Massie-Blomfield’s assurances that “the very best aims of English production are now to be shown here.” According to the report, the British Trade Commissioner said:

Lovers of United Kingdom films will doubtless be glad to learn that at long last the difficult negotiations which have been going on in England during the past six months appear to have terminated successfully and that Jamaicans in the near future will have the privilege of enjoying, for the first time, some of the latest and best films produced in England and distributed by the British International Film Producers, Ltd., through their local representatives in this part of the world, British Film Distributing Agency, LTD., of which Mr. Rex Wetherell has charge.⁶⁹⁵

To validate his claims emphasizing the greatness of the films to be shown, this report provides a detailed list of upcoming popular titles for the 1934 season from Gaumont British, Twickenham Studios, and British Lion. This schedule included the following British films: *I Was A Spy*, *Friday the 13th*, *The Ghoul*, *It’s A Boy*, *Waltzes from Vienna*, *Aunt Sally*, *Evergreen*, and many more. The British Trade Commissioner also explained to the reporter that while some markets and their local exhibitors had set their minds against British films, Jamaicans greatly appreciated them:

I am quite satisfied from the many conversations I have had in various parts of Jamaica that British pictures are greatly appreciated, although the best have never yet been seen. And therefore I have no doubt that local exhibitors around the island will have the fullest confidence and exhibit these excellent pictures on the best nights and in the best possible way.⁶⁹⁶

Perhaps the commissioner used the newspaper to encourage better exhibition practices for these British films to ensure that the negotiation and alliance were a success. Yet one must consider

⁶⁹⁴ *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, September 4, 1934, 10.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

that the time and effort he spent even on acquiring this distribution locally emphasizes a recognized need or desire for this British-made product.

Why was there such request for British films if they already received high-quality Hollywood films? According to the British Trade Commissioner, even some Hollywood filmmakers recognized that some British film aspects were superior, especially with the advent of sound. He remarked that:

...one of the leading American producers is now in England searching for English actors and English ideas for his own productions... American producers are finding that what is termed the 'English diction' goes over the microphone better than any other. After all there is no such thing as an English accent for English is English, other forms thereof being obviously dialect, whether it be that spoken in Lancashire or anywhere else.⁶⁹⁷

Yet the English accent and its dialects are unlikely to be reflective of long-term Jamaican residents (aside from recent, first- and second-generation British expatriates). Even so, the Commissioner portrayed "English diction" as superior to the brash, drawling American accent, and the local reporter anticipated that locals would agree.

Perhaps the following example can shed further light on some of the underlying reasons, and why to some Jamaicans, perhaps "English" was inherently better than American. For example: in a Letter to the Editor, one reader openly venerated the BFDA and Jamaica Theatres for providing "first class British pictures," including *Friday the 13th* (1933), in which the strong cast (including Jessie Matthews) "will illustrate the subtle and favourable difference between polished English Acting and its American equivalent." This British film advocate continues to explain that recent drop in attendance is due to the Jamaican public being "fed up with the average American picture that is being shown. There are so many of them and so few that have anything outstanding about them that the introduction of some of the newer British pictures with their British News Reels" will restore the popularity of "talkies." The author then equates the situation in "culinary terms" that:

⁶⁹⁷ *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, September 4, 1934, 10.

an almost unrelieved diet of the American product is admittedly powerful and deep-rooted in this Island...but a complete change of diet is far too drastic a remedy to be recommended even by the most pro-British... [Instead], the British pictures can now provide the local fare with just that essential element of flavor and difference that is capable of transforming ordinary everyday food into rich but easily digestible meals, that will satisfy even the hungry appetites of the public and the box office. For this reason as well as a counter-blast to the everlasting American propaganda, I am making this appeal to the proverbial fair-minded public of Jamaica.⁶⁹⁸

The author concludes by calling on Jamaicans to see these films with an open mind, and in return, they will be rewarded with the high quality and “the excellent photography that we associate with Hollywood studios, but with superior dialogue, acting, and scenarios.”⁶⁹⁹

As you can see, there is a definite promotional element to this letter to the editor, one which equates the British film product to be not only as good as Hollywood’s but culturally superior. Earlier in his letter, the author indicates his acceptance of Hollywood’s domination of the Jamaican market, and yet the author also challenged that even occasionally viewing this product (which this person has yet to actually see the upcoming films) should be enough to raise the local standards and the level of entertainment available, while appeasing audiences. Furthermore, the author of this particular letter is promoting specifically the impending Fall 1934 release of two Gaumont British films that were released the previous year in Britain to great success (and the following May 1934 in the United States): *I Was A Spy* (1933) and *Friday the 13th* (1933). Today’s audiences may/may not view these films as more prestigious or high-quality British films, but they are often included among those titles that helped to continue building the British industry prestige during these pivotal years. Since they were popular in the British domestic market, distributors then released them further abroad.⁷⁰⁰


⁶⁹⁸ K.R. Abrahams, letter to the editor, *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, October 11, 1934, 12.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ As discussed at the start of the chapter, *I Was a Spy* won British fan accolades in the fan poll for Film Weekly’s Best British Film of 1933. A popular film in England, *Spy* is included among the more “notable” first runs as a single-bill program at the Tivoli in the West End, lasting six weeks from September 4, 1933. This run is comparable to other popular Gaumont British titles at this venue, such as *Jew Süss* (1934) and *The Iron Duke* (1934); however, it is far from Fox’s incredible sixteen-week run with *Cavalcade* (1933) in the Spring of 1933. Only 20th Century’s *The House of Rothschild* (1934) comes close at a twelve-week run. Meanwhile, *Friday the 13th* was more of an average-type film in the domestic British market, and

While these two films represent some of the quality selection of British films made available in the Caribbean, the Jamaican *Gleaner* promoted other, perhaps less popular titles from Gaumont British (and other studios) as a block of acquired films during the Fall-Spring seasons of 1933-35. This particular series of promotions was the most blatant expression of a film's Britishness among the advertisements that I came across. The British Film Distributing Agency, Ltd. (as if their name was not indicative enough in fine print at the bottom of the ads) pushed a "Follow the Flag Films" promotion, with a large, waving Union Jack underneath this title, followed by a list of upcoming British films from these top British combines. (See Figure 7.1) Local Jamaican advertisers chose to focus upon the inherent British nature of these films—indicated by the flag image, the ad tagline and smooth alliteration, and even the names of the studios—and thus returning this analysis back to the dominant trend of using Britishness as a marketing strategy to push these films.

Follow The Flag Films

And  See

NEXT WEEK OCTOBER 1st.—6th

TO-DAY & TO-MORROW AT THE PALACE
FOR THE LAST TIMES.

TELL ME TO-NIGHT
THE * * * * * FILM

WEDNESDAY MORANT BAY
NEXT WEEK END MANDEVILLE

AFTER THE BALL

TUESDAY SPANISH TOWN
WEDNESDAY PORT MARIA

LET ME EXPLAIN DEAR.
A GENE GERRARD FARCE

MONDAY MONTEGO BAY
THURSDAY SPANISH TOWN

MARRY ME
with RENATE MULLER—THE "SUNSHINE SUSIE" GIRL

MONDAY SPANISH TOWN
THURSDAY PORT ANTONIO
FRIDAY GAITY

The British Film Distributing Agency Ltd.

Figure 7.1 "Follow the Flag Films" Ad, *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, September 30, 1933

Sedgwick's 18.61 POPSTAT ranking reflects this status. Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain*, 83.

Furthermore, this style of promotion linked British-made films with other British commodities by referencing a tagline used since the Victorian era to promote the trade of Imperial goods. During the 1930s Depression, there was mounting concern for British trade to “Follow the Flag” rather than those North American goods made more readily available in the Caribbean. With the economic crisis of 1931, the Empire Marketing Board’s 1927 campaign to “Buy British” and “Buy Imperial” goods involved massive efforts to promote Empire trade during the EMB’s short existence (1926-1933).⁷⁰¹ The pervasiveness of the campaign throughout Britain and its Empire successfully and effectively illustrated the “patriotic duty” of British peoples to buy home and overseas imperial products.⁷⁰²

This “Follow the Flag” advertisement series two years later harkens to these recent trade concerns to motivate cinema-going customers, but the cultural aspect of this commodity also ties it to other layers of unease, both commercial and cultural. Commercially, the movie screen provided opportunities of product placement and on-screen use of (British) manufactured goods, but the dominance of American films (worldwide) hindered this chance. Instead, moviegoers were inundated with an abundance of American-made cars, house-hold products, and new-fangled appliances and technology. Culturally, in addition to many other aspects, the talkies raised concerns of the influence of American slang. James Burns points out that sound technology generated a previously unforeseen cultural threat; the influence of language and pronunciation shaped a nationalistic concern that drove more calls for greater British influence in the film

⁷⁰¹ During Parliamentary debates in the House of Commons about EMB’s expenditures, advocates such as Mr. Ormsby-Gore explained that the value of the Buy British campaign publicity was to “bring home to the people the fact that this country and the Empire overseas do produce articles that they can obtain. The publicity has not been to push the sale of particular commodities, but to give a general background to the whole of the people of this country of the economic advantages of all kinds of Empire development. The slogan, ‘Buy home and overseas’ has been welcomed by producers of this country quite as much as by producers overseas. It is not so much the slogan but the general educational value of this publicity in a field which has never been touched before.” *Dominions Office*. HC Deb (5th Series), June 26, 1930, vol. 240, c1434, accessed March 26, 2016, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1930/jun/26/dominions-office#S5CV0240P0_19300626_HOC_391.

⁷⁰² According to reports received by the EMB and discussed in the House of Commons, inquiries made into a wide variety of markets confirmed “that the public’s will to purchase has by this campaign been directed to a dramatic extent towards home and over-sea sources of supply.” Mr. Thomas, *Buy British Campaign*, HC Deb (5th Series), December 8, 1931, vol. 260, c1670, accessed March 26, 2016, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1931/dec/08/buy-british-campaign>.

business, especially from colonies such as Jamaica.⁷⁰³ In these selected publicity examples above, the repeated comparisons of American and British film products and the innate superiority of an English film, from sound differences to superior acting and quality, might be more readily understood in light of James Burns' recent assessment of Americanization fears during the interwar years and the cultural threat that colonials felt Hollywood films posed to imperial identity in addition to its economy.⁷⁰⁴ Note the attention being drawn towards the quality of English diction to the brashness of American dialects and slang. Even just the idea of adding "spice" to the local film diet in order to alleviate the non-stop flow of a range of caliber Hollywood films presents a local perspective concerned with American influence and responding in kind by negating it as an inferior product. These colonial fears of Americanization in terms of trade and cultural influence tie into the development of an imperial identity, which is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Returning to the example, this "Follow the Flag Films" ad series sometimes was placed strategically alongside single-film ad blocks for other, more popular British films (at least in Britain). For example, in the September 30, 1933 edition of the *Gleaner*, the "Follow the Flag Films" promo—for *Tell Me To-Night* (1932, GB), *After the Ball* (1932, GB), *Let Me Explain Dear* (1932, BIP), and *Marry Me* (1932, Gainsborough)—is deliberately located below a large block advertisement for the special picture *Tell Me To-Night*, another Gaumont British "international triumph" that was requested by the locals. This prominent advertisement claims:

NEVER BEFORE has any film been so insistently demanded by thousands! We have received so many letters, telephone messages and personal requests for further showings of this international triumph, that we doubt whether there will be anybody who will not be seeing it on Sunday—"TELL ME TONIGHT" A British-Gaumont Musical Sensation.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰³ Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, 158–161; Burns refers to colonial concerns about language and diction in articles in the *Jamaican Gleaner* and elsewhere.

⁷⁰⁴ Burns, "Excessive Americanisms," 197–198. His main arguments will be discussed in more detail in the following section concerning film, identity, and Britishness in the Caribbean.

⁷⁰⁵ *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, Saturday, September 30, 1933.

Interestingly, this film and Gainsborough's *Marry Me* were co-productions with Germany, a fact which is not included within either advertisement.⁷⁰⁶ (Also, note the switch to the Gaumont British company name to emphasize the British component by listing it first.) Ignoring the international aspect of production (and merely noting it's "triumph" internationally), the ad placement and content piggybacks on the popularity of the seemingly superior film, as well as references the need to support British trade and products. Advertisers intended to build enticement and hopefully lure in audiences to see multiple, specifically-British films.

Finally, while these editorials and write-ups do not request any particular British producer or studio, by the mid-1930s, they asked generally for British films and newsreels, and they complained (in this instance) that Jamaica was not getting the British films that they heard about. Ultimately this lead some individuals to call for revamping distribution and exhibition on their island. These editorials reiterate that they did not want to alter the entire film distribution network, they just wanted to add some variety to their film diets (as shown above). This nostalgic sentiment coincided with the formation of the British Film Distributing Agency and British International Film Producers, Ltd (as well as the British United Film Producers company) to circumvent Hollywood distributors and provide an alternative and more direct route for British films into the Caribbean, or more specifically, Jamaica.⁷⁰⁷

Race as a Selling Point

While this next trend deviates from this analysis' focus upon Britishness in advertisements, it provides a more comprehensive understanding of the varied aspects of identity among Caribbean movie audiences. As a last important theme and selling point, another occasional trend I observed in these Caribbean newspapers was the noteworthy promotion of

⁷⁰⁶ Again, here's another reference to GB and Michael Balcon's early attempts to maintain access to international markets in the face of sound technology by co-producing with UFA (in this case), and the co-productions were included in this wider overseas colonial distribution.

⁷⁰⁷ No further information has been found on this agency; no evidence for why they stopped promotions/distribution? After 1935 needs further research. Given the dominance of GB films provided, perhaps one can surmise that with GB's temporary closure in 1937 ended this affiliation. However, it appears to have faded prior to this period.

“all-coloured cast” films when they were available for exhibition.⁷⁰⁸ In 1935, the Jamaican *Gleaner* provided a large-sized ad comparable to the other major Hollywood studio headliners for Paul Robeson’s 1933 film *Emperor Jones*, with a picture of Robeson’s head which dominates the page and immediately indicates visually to readers that this is a film to interest black and mixed-race Jamaicans.⁷⁰⁹ (See Figure 7.2) The inclusion of black-cast film advertisements in what might be considered conservative, possibly white-targeting English newspapers reveals a more complex relationship between readerships, movie advertising, and local identities.

THE DAILY GLEANER, SATURDAY, JUNE 29, 1935

Wings in the Dark
 MYRNA LOY
 CARY GRANT
 TONIGHT 7.30 & 9.15
PALACE

WORLD DRAMA OF TODAY!
 YOU NEVER SAW SO STRANGE A STORY
CLAUDE RAINS
 "The MAN WHO RECLAIMED His HEAD"
 OPENS SUNDAY 8.30
PALACE

TODAY 10.00 A. M. CHILDREN'S MATINEE!
 ALL CAPTIONS including
 "CURLS IN LOVE" "BOY" "MIDNIGHT"
 "GRANDMOTHER & ANTS"
 "PETTY IN THE LARK"
 "MICKIE'S WOOD DUCK"
 Bring the Children Today 10.00 a.m.
MOVIES

GIN . GALS . DICE
 and wonder made him a
 fugitive in the night! See
 morning Grandeur in King and
 ruler of an empire!
PAUL ROBESON
 in
Emperor JONES
 From the sensational stage
 play by JOSEPH WOODS
 with BEVERLY SINGERS and a
 cast of all colored artists
 headed by PETER HARRIS
 TONIGHT 7.30 & 9.15
 SUNDAY 8.30
GAIETY

Bureau of MISSING PERSONS
 YOU'LL LOSE YOURSELF
 IN A MAZE OF THRILLS
 When you learn what happens to the
 minds of girls who never come home
 again. Taken from the secret files of a
 renowned mental nurse. Love your
 self in a parade of fear, made that
 chase quickly from the night of fear
 see it all through the alluring eyes
 of her
MOVIES

Decca Records
 2/6d each
NEW DECCA RECORDS
 At
DePASS
 2/6 3/ p.d. each
 Royal Wedding Anthem—
 2/6 each
 BISC ORCHID
 221—IT'S EASY TO REMEMBER
 FROM SUE
 181—DOWN BY THE RIVER
 BOB
 181—WITH EVERY BREATH
 I TAKE
 181—THE WIND AROUND
 MY EARS
 181—THE WIND AROUND
 MY EARS
 181—THE WIND AROUND
 MY EARS
 181—THE WIND AROUND
 MY EARS

Springfield Beach Club
 Sunday Morning Members Dance 10 a.m.
 Radiophone Latest Records.
 N.B. Dance Hall engaged Saturday Night.
 Civil Service Dance. Admission only by special
 programme.
 Keep in mind Annual Meeting Secondary
 School Swimming Championship on Saturday
 July 6th 7.30 p.m.

Adds Zest to Salads!
HELLMANN'S MAYONNAISE
 In Most Delicacies.
 A. M. SULLIVAN, Sole Agent.

DEPASS' OFFER ZENITH

ELIZABETH ARDEN
 ADDS FRAGRANT LUXURY

Figure 7.2 “Emperor Jones” Ad, *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, June 29, 1935.

⁷⁰⁸ This decade marks a change in terminology relating to race pictures. The 1930s saw terms for “colored” give way to “Negro,” and “race movies” of the silent era died out, with some starting to call them “sepias” in the 1930s. For clarity, I will use “all coloured cast” in reference to quoted advertisements, “race movies” for silent black independent films, and “all-black” talkies or more generally “race pictures” to refer to black cast sound films of the 1930s.

⁷⁰⁹ *Kingston Daily Gleaner*, Sat, June 29, 1935, 3.

Some of the earliest “all-Black” talkies from 1930-31 like Oscar Micheaux’s *The Exile* (1931), Micheaux’s *Daughter of the Congo* (1930), and the musical *Georgia Rose* (1930), were heavily promoted in the Bahamas when they arrived in 1932.⁷¹⁰ The promotion indicates that the most important value of these films was the racial component since sometimes the promotion started before the exhibitors knew what title they were to receive. For example, tagged at the end of Nassau’s Palace Theatre MGM ad for Laurel & Hardy’s *Pardon Us* was a teaser ad for “another coloured production coming soon. Watch ad.”⁷¹¹ Again, four days later, there was a reference to “an all coloured production coming.”⁷¹² In addition to indicating that exhibitors were in the process of contracting a distribution deal, the lack of any movie titles designates where the importance and interest in these films lay with Caribbean audiences. The ads become even more exuberant with the July arrival of:

Oscar Micheaux’s All-Coloured Production A-Daughter-of-the-Congo with Lorenzo Tucker... Not since ‘the Exile’ have you seen such a picture! Thrills upon thrills! Along with the All-color production we are showing Douglas Fairbanks Jr in *Its Tough To Be Famous*.⁷¹³

From this advert it seems pretty simple to derive which film in this double feature had the greater draw for proportionately larger audiences in Nassau; consequently, the make-up of these audiences targeted by these newspaper advertisements likely included many laboring and middle class, mixed race and black individuals.

What makes this intermittent availability of these films in the Caribbean especially interesting to note is that by the early 1930s, the black independent film industry in America was struggling to exist, and Hollywood delayed a couple years before filling in the vacuum. The Depression and the transition to sound hit this particular “race movie” industry hard, and all black

⁷¹⁰ *Georgia Rose* (1930) followed two months after the July 1932 release of *Daughter of the Congo* (1930), arriving Wednesday, September 7, 1932. The advertisement in that day’s newspaper merely used its race selling point to interest its readers, with no other additional information. This central point implies some degree of success with previous race pictures in the area. “‘Georgia Rose’ an All Coloured Cast Tonight, Thursday, & Friday.” *Nassau Daily Tribune*, September 7, 1932.

⁷¹¹ *Nassau Daily Tribune*, January 7, 1932.

⁷¹² *Nassau Daily Tribune*, January 11, 1932.

⁷¹³ *Nassau Daily Tribune*, Sat., July 16, 1932.

independent filmmakers except Oscar Micheaux stopped making these films.⁷¹⁴ Silent race movies died out by the early 1930s, and the rise of Hollywood studios' race pictures, sometimes called "Sepias," attempted to meet needs by the mid-1930s in the United States when studios realized how they could profit off this market in the Southern U.S. and key cities of the North and Midwest.⁷¹⁵ But this Hollywood perspective, often portraying blacks as savage, exotic, or sexual objects, contrasted with Micheaux's and other independent black filmmaker's concerns dealing with whiteness or "passing" dramas.⁷¹⁶ Earlier studio-produced (or "white-made") race films like *Borderline* (1930) and *Emperor Jones* (1933) did reach the Caribbean as well, as noted above with the latter in Jamaica.

Even so, distributors and exhibitors provided these few rarities from Micheaux (as well as the subsequent studio-produced race pictures) within a year or two in the British Caribbean! Given the demographics of the Caribbean, it seems logical for the black film market to include this region. Yet in the context of Micheaux's own struggle to get his films exhibited—even to the point of going on a road tour to encourage independent theater owners to book his films throughout the United States—it makes one speculate how and why his films made it to this region.⁷¹⁷ To put this into further perspective, the first Micheaux film to show in Los Angeles, CA (and its Black Belt

⁷¹⁴ Patrick McGilligan, *Oscar Micheaux, the Great and Only: The Life of America's First Black Filmmaker* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 256. According to McGilligan, "No other race-picture producer from the silent era—not a single one—broke through all the barriers and crossed over into the sound age."

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 284. According to McGilligan, Hollywood breakthroughs such as *Imitation of Life* (1934) instigated a few "all-Negro" projects, like *The Green Pastures* (1936). By the late '30s, Hollywood saw a resurgence of race pictures in both quantity and quality. For more on this subject, see Clyde Taylor, "Crisis of 1937-1939: Crossed Over and Can't Get Black," *Black Film Review* 7, no. 4 (n.d.): 22–28, accessed October 7, 2014.

⁷¹⁶ For more about Oscar Micheaux and his films, see J. Ronald Green, "Oscar Micheaux's Interrogation of Caricature as Entertainment," *Film Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (April 1, 1998): 16–31, doi:10.2307/1213599; J. Ronald Green, *Straight Lick: The Cinema of Oscar Micheaux* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Pearl Bowser, Jane Gaines, and Charles Musser, *Oscar Micheaux and His Circle: African-American Filmmaking and Race Cinema of the Silent Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Pearl Bowser, *Writing Himself Into History: Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audiences* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000); McGilligan, *Oscar Micheaux, the Great and Only*.

⁷¹⁷ McGilligan, *Oscar Micheaux, the Great and Only*, 256. McGilligan explains the difficulty Micheaux overcame to get exhibitors to show his films, by "traveling to black theaters in the major markets of Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Chicago to personally arrange key bookings."

Neighborhood) was not until 1934 with his film *Murder in Harlem* (1934).⁷¹⁸ Micheaux appears not to have traveled outside of the U.S. on his booking tours.

Two possibilities may help to explain how these films traveled abroad to the Caribbean. To begin with, some exhibitors in the Caribbean may have read a rare advertisement such as one submitted by Micheaux to the Hollywood trade directory *Film Daily Yearbook of 1932*, and perhaps these exhibitors then sought out Micheaux's films. Micheaux's 1932 ad was intended to target independent black theater owners and managers in the United States –

GET A LOAD OF THIS, MR. EXHIBITOR: Poor attendance is due, in some measure, to the fact that your patrons are 'fed up' on the average diet you are feeding them daily and are crying for 'something different.' Why not give them one of our Negro features as a change? Many theaters are doing so—and with gratifying success. They are especially good for midnight shows. Modern in theme, which pleases your flapper patrons—each picture has a bevy of Creole beauties—with bits of the floor shows from great nightclubs of New York, with singing and dancing as only Broadway negro entertainers know how to delivery—try one!⁷¹⁹

Given the steadily growing ties between Caribbean migrants and the Harlem community during this period, perhaps this ad succeeded with some Caribbean theater owners more rapidly than those in key American cities? A second option points to someone coordinating this distribution further abroad to the Caribbean islands—if not to Micheaux himself, perhaps to the white Jewish financiers Frank Schiffman and Leo Brecher in Harlem, New York with whom Micheaux was affiliated.⁷²⁰ Whether these or other methods were used to get race pictures into the Caribbean, one can at least recognize that some audiences in the Caribbean enjoyed watching not just Hollywood or British films, but race pictures as well.

Like distinguishing the Britishness of a film, these American-made films provided another area of interest for their Caribbean viewers. This use of race as a selling point in promotions indicates that not only was there “coloured” and black readerships of these newspapers, but also to the make-up of Caribbean film audiences. This confirms what historians have understood—that

⁷¹⁸ Ibid., 282.

⁷¹⁹ *Film Daily Yearbook of 1932*, quoted in *ibid.*, 267.

⁷²⁰ See *ibid.*, 257–282, for more about the impact these “gods of Harlem show business” played in Micheaux's production and American exhibition. No indication of distribution beyond U.S. borders.

a racial identity is tied to the variety of local, national, and imperial identities within this region. Therefore, the types of films made available to the local public reflect it as well. It also informs this analysis that the newspaper advertisements are not exclusively targeting the minority of European white elites with its film promotions. While it is difficult to determine whether these Caribbean audiences would truly prefer British to American films, or identify more with one than the other, we can at least understand that it is a mixed-race target audience, composed of upper- and middle-class European and Creole whites, as well as middle-class and urban working-class “coloureds,” blacks, and other ethnicities (those literate enough to scour the newspaper advertisements).⁷²¹

Finally, let us briefly consider the likelihood of why some Coloureds may also have been interested in seeing British films. The situation of coloured communities throughout the British Caribbean (and South Africa) reveals some of the overlap in Atlantic identities and the ties between class and race. In both regions, Cape and Caribbean Coloureds were among the growing number of urban, working- and middle-class semi-professionals. Furthermore, in both areas, there was a history (dating from the nineteenth century) of “passing for white,” especially those among the more skilled or wealthy. The degree of whiteness often correlated strongly with their embracement of European behaviors, mannerism, and dress – particularly on some Caribbean islands with such small white populations that taking on the image and interests of Europeans would set them as a “middle class” apart from the black laboring masses.⁷²² Thus, it stands to reason that this aspect of their identities likely carried into the twentieth century. With the modern mass medium of cinema transmitting Euro-American values and “middle-class

⁷²¹ It is interesting to note that while Jamaica and some of these other islands held small Indian communities, no advertisements appeared in any of these three newspapers to reflect this. Future research into newspapers of Trinidad and British Guiana might indicate otherwise, since the US representative from Trinidad reported in January 1936 that Trinidad theaters had begun to exhibit imported Indian films. “Several films produced in India by native actors, and in the Indian language, recently have been exhibited in Trinidad and have proved very popular. These have included ‘Bharat-Ki-Beti’ (Daughter of India), ‘Noor-E-Yaman’ (Light of Arabia), and ‘Ver-Ka-Badla’ (Vengeance is Mine).” Cristobal Report, 1936; Cristobal, *Black Books*; UA/1F/B2/F6.

⁷²² Brereton, “Society and Culture in the Caribbean: The British and French West Indies, 1870-1980,” 107.

western lifestyles,” one might deduce that some Coloureds still identified in some way with the metropole and thus a British identity – not just the Creole whites.

Film and Identity: Britishness in the Caribbean

Looking at the role of film culture within the British Caribbean allows us the opportunity to explore the meaning of a British national cinema within redefined geographical boundaries of Britishness and British identity. Caribbean cinema-going and its experience reinforces the use and reshaping of British nationality into a British imperial identity that is much more inclusive geographically and racially while still stratified staunchly by class. This more inclusive idea of Britishness is relative to today’s understanding of a more fluid and complex Britishness in a post-imperial “British World.” Film-going (alongside other cultural mediums such as education, media and radio, sports events, and even royalty-related activities & celebrations) reinforces British identity even as some locals participate in reshaping it to meet their needs locally. Consequently, this interaction reiterates how films contribute to the evolving sets of cultural meanings that a community may share collectively even as the predominant films available come from Hollywood. In this example, the competition with Hollywood highlights the fears of Americanization and American influence in the Caribbean as well, which the latter half of the twentieth century would see increase exponentially as decolonization provided an opportunity if not a void to fill in some areas of trade. Finally, the multiple facets of a regional and imperial identity participates in a broader notion of a British national identity of which British peoples in Great Britain were typically unaware during this period. Nevertheless, this participation reiterates the importance in the 1930s for a nascent British national film industry.

Britishness has been explained in previous chapters of this study from the perspective of those British citizens from the British Isles as well as the small minority in South Africa that focuses upon a narrower definition of the concept. According to the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act of 1914 (amended up to November 1933), those individuals born in the colonies and

Commonwealth and loyal to the Crown were legally considered “natural born British subjects.”⁷²³ However, scholars such as Venus Green argue that this definition failed “to entitle them to privileges of British national identity.”⁷²⁴ To be a British subject did not secure the equal and fair treatment propagated (especially during and post-WWII) as a key component of the British Imperial national identity.⁷²⁵ The official legal definition for this period under discussion includes those subjects born in the British Caribbean. However, among those same British Caribbean subjects, once any of those with apparent differences travelled outside of the Caribbean and back to the “motherland” of Great Britain, any visual features and vocal accents indicating they were “NOT WHITE” triggered unequal treatment. From the perspective of those in the British Isles (and in South Africa), their definition of nationality underlined the role of whiteness. To them, it became imperative that whiteness provide avenues for equal treatment within the British West Indies. Thus, from the perspective of those British subjects *within* Britain, this racial and ethnographic definition was Anglo-Saxon, English language-speaking (also indicated in the Act), ...and ultimately, *white*.

Venus Green’s comparative research of post-WWII American and British telephone operators provides a good example of this metropole perspective towards defining nationality and imperial identity. Both race and gender played a formative role in the employment of phone

⁷²³ “British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act 1914,” accessed June 5, 2014, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/4-5/17/enacted>.

⁷²⁴ Venus Green, “Race, Gender, and National Identity in the American and British Telephone Industries,” *International Review of Social History* 46, no. 02 (2001): look up pg #.

⁷²⁵ After significant imperial expansion following the previous Act of 1870, the 1914 Act helped to codify a British nationality law that defined a common nationality status based upon allegiance to the imperial Crown and clarified the status and position of the Dominions. Previously, Imperial naturalization, which granted them British subject status valid throughout the Empire, was only conferred upon those naturalized within the United Kingdom. Those individuals naturalized in a British colony were granted a British subject status in that colony only, a “Local Naturalisation” as understood since the Naturalization Act of 1847. 1914 Act provided an Imperial naturalization process for those colonies with Dominion status (once those Dominions adopted the naturalization conditions of this act) – specifically Canada and Newfoundland (adopted 1915), Australia (1920), South Africa (1926) and New Zealand (1929) [and later Burma in 1937, upon gaining Dominion status]. Thus, from 1914 (more specifically, following each dominion’s adoption of conditions), those born in the White Dominions were granted equal nationality status via Imperial naturalization, in contrast to those born in other colonies such as those in the Caribbean [and British India?]. First generation expatriates extended with the 1922 act to an indefinite transmission with registration upon birth. For more on this, see “British Nationality: Summary,” 5, accessed October 8, 2014, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/267913/britnatsummary.pdf.

operators, and Green's exploration of a government institution (Post Office Personnel Departments) indicates that even as late as mid-twentieth century, the limited number of phone positions given to blacks and "coloureds" in the 1950s United Kingdom reveals that their "rights under national identity never exceeded the disadvantage of being unable to attain 'whiteness.'"⁷²⁶ Regardless of whether they may have achieved a degree of whiteness in the Caribbean, any obvious characteristics (such as lips, voice and accents, skin color, and the like) would invalidate that degree within Britain—these differences were "not wanted."⁷²⁷

Yet what about how subjects within the Caribbean defined a British national identity, and how did it evolve into more of an imperial identity during these years? With the growth of consumerism and modernity, the British Caribbean colonies' economic ties strengthened with both the United States and Britain for increased commodities and manufactured products. The political definition of British nationality included those born in their colony as British subjects, and locally on their individual islands, class played a more influential role on their status than race, although the two were often intrinsically tied. The impact of these changes on rising lower middle-class professionals of mixed-race heritage led to their slowly crossing these boundaries within the scope of the Caribbean.

Among the film-going audiences in British colonies of the Caribbean, the British expatriates, Creole whites, and the rising "coloured" and black middle-class urban professionals all viewed themselves as British subjects, but their understanding of British nationality incorporated an imperial identity that varied per group.⁷²⁸ Scholarship concerning British national

⁷²⁶ Green, "Race, Gender, and National Identity in the American and British Telephone Industries," 204.

⁷²⁷ Ibid. Green's overall argument is that even with a state-owned business (Post Office), there was no impact in opening up employment opportunities for blacks or in changing women's roles – thus she concludes that "power of national identity in the workplace is intensely circumscribed by 'whiteness'." In both America and Britain, Europeans could "evoke 'whiteness' to obtain employment when they did not possess national identity. For black people, however defined, this was not an option...not simply exclusion but the unavailability of 'whiteness'...."

⁷²⁸ The degree and concept of "Britishness" as understood by the different peoples of the British Caribbean is further fragmented by each island's own historical context: when Britain acquired said colony; previous occupants' religion (Catholic Spain/France vs Protestant Britain/Netherlands); and treatment of race (different racial parameters with Spain). For example, the longer-established British colonies acquired and maintained traditional British institutions, and the majority of free residents that possessed property/income

and imperial identities among its Caribbean subjects prior to decolonization has expanded in recent years to include more than the British expatriates located there, the Creole whites, or the black laboring masses (especially when concerned with British identity).⁷²⁹ Thus, to fully understand how film culture participated in a regional reshaping of British identity, let us first look at how the small but growing “coloured” middle tier altered Caribbean understandings of Britishness.

Anne Spry Rush explores the importance of a “British heritage” from the perspective of rising middle-class West Indians (especially those colonials of color), many of whom she claims identified themselves as “imperial Britons” and used their understanding of Britishness in order to establish a place for themselves in the British Imperial World.⁷³⁰ According to Rush, many middle-class “black and brown” West Indians adopted Britishness as part of their own identity, because by the early twentieth century, Britishness was an integral part of colonialism and daily life in the British Caribbean, and they were encouraged to identify with the cultural values and social structures “touted as intrinsically British.”⁷³¹ Rush emphasizes that even as they refashioned themselves into fitting British ideals, they also “recast Britishness in their own image, basing it on a British culture that they understood to be racially and geographically inclusive.”⁷³² She explains that their understanding of an imperial British identity was not egalitarian, because it was entangled with an ideology of Respectability, a concept that over the years had come to be seen

qualifications to entitle them to political rights were white. Freed blacks and “coloureds” with property were a minority and subject to various disqualifications. As Hart points out, in Trinidad the religious and racial complications must be taken into consideration. There were many more free persons of African descent and they enjoyed some rights under Spanish rule that were denied in older British colonies. Examples such as public offices and militia commissions could be held. And Hart continues with Trinidad, and British government capitulation terms with change in ownership; (and is what led to Britain creating Crown Colony government style/ Direct Rule in 1810). For more, see Hart, *From Occupation to Independence*, 56–57.

⁷²⁹ For example, some scholars are looking increasingly at the small but growing middle classes of the early twentieth century Caribbean, a brown/mixed-race class, and the impact of music and leisure activities upon this group, such as: Putnam, *Radical Moves*; Belinda Edmondson, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁷³⁰ Anne Spry Rush, *Bonds of Empire: West Indians and Britishness from Victoria to Decolonization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1. This version of Britishness was often used later in their negotiation of the challenges of decolonization.

⁷³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷³² *Ibid.*

by many middle-class Caribbeans as central to their own identity and based upon Victorian values such as a Western education, Christian morality, and domesticity.⁷³³ This Respectability contributes not only to their identity as British imperial subjects, but also as participants in a growing modern and progressive society. Thus, despite their differences in ethnicity and geography, the shared importance of respectability in British culture created further ties between the metropole and its Caribbean colonies.

Additionally, these ties of Britishness and class status as defined by this concept of Respectability also had repercussions in promoting divisive class distinctions among Caribbean peoples. This use of respectability enabled coloureds and others of the “rising” middle class to separate themselves from the laboring, uneducated, working-class masses.⁷³⁴ As previously discussed, since at least the late nineteenth century, there existed a heritage of coloureds and a few blacks claiming a British identity to link themselves to whites via nationality (instead of race) in order to acquire political empowerment in the colony. For example, looking back to 1883, the *Grenada People* newspaper proprietor and editor submitted a memorandum to the West Indies Royal Commission calling for non-white representation in the Crown Colony’s Legislative Council. At the heart of his argument against submitting to be “ruled like serfs,” the author declares that they “consider ourselves to be *free-born Britons*...”⁷³⁵ Efforts such as this early failed attempt used the notion of a self-identified Britishness to connect educated non-whites with whites regardless of the distinct racial barrier. While “coloureds” continued to apply this idea of nationality instead of racial identities towards enfranchisement throughout the Caribbean region and into the twentieth century, a legacy of whiteness continued to influence and enable their social and economic mobility.

⁷³³ Ibid.

⁷³⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁷³⁵ Hart, *From Occupation to Independence*, 100; italics added. According to Hart, William Galway Donovan’s memorandum was the first articulated demand by “persons identifying themselves as non-Whites” for the right to be represented. This demand followed upon earlier petitions by whites demanding that taxpayers be given the right to elect representatives, although the decision in Grenada to accept Crown colony government had only recently been made (in 1876).

Richard Hart explains that this heritage of white superiority was observed for many generations socially, and the education system as well as the press projected the same idea—that European and white North American models were the ideal, in contrast to the perceived “backwardness” of African or Asian society models.⁷³⁶ Rush extends this notion further and reiterates the importance of British culture and influence; those with lighter skin color might be accorded higher status because of their color, but if they did not embrace those things which create “respectability,” such as attending a “proper” church, or if they failed to utilize any education opportunities, their status could be lower. And while darker-skinned individuals faced more discrimination, Rush claims that if they were able to attend secondary school and embrace moral habits, become regular church-goers, and the like, then their status could rise in tandem.⁷³⁷ Rush explains this coloured, colonial version of a British imperial identity as it was propagated by the League of Coloured Peoples in London during the 1930s and 1940s. Instead of a “white” definition (as seen in the British Isles), it alternatively interpreted a Britishness:

that respected traditional Western ideas of class and gender structure, yet abhorred racial distinctions... [The League of Coloured Peoples] had come to understand Britishness as being constructed from three main elements; a middle-class notion of respectability, loyalty to an idealized British empire, and pride in varied racial and geographical heritages.⁷³⁸

By drawing upon elements of Britishness widely accepted by native Britons, particularly respectability and imperial pride, coloureds invoked this colonial version of Britishness they had long utilized in the Caribbean in order to gain support for their organization from “both black colonials and white ‘English’ women and men.”⁷³⁹ In London, the League deployed Harold Moody’s vision of a British imperial identity in the 1930s and 1940s to raise awareness about

⁷³⁶ Ibid., 93–94.

⁷³⁷ Rush, *Bonds of Empire*, 11.

⁷³⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁷³⁹ The League of Coloured Peoples was founded in London in 1931 by Harold Moody, “a dark-skinned, middle-class Jamaican... [who] was born a British subject, raised in a society infused with British culture, and taught to take pride in his birthplace as an important part of the British Empire.” His travels to England to attend medical school in 1904 shocked him to the core as he discovered that native Britons knew little of Jamaica, cared even less, and considered the empire’s “coloured” colonial subjects to be “inferior aliens.” He pledged himself to fight this prejudice. For more, see *ibid.*, 102–103.

citizenship based on British subjecthood and equal rights for all black Britons—colonial subjects as well as native Britons.

This notion of a non-racial, inclusive Britishness based on class-conscious and gendered notions of Victorian respectability, education, and Christian morality continued to inform non-white peoples of the Caribbean's identities and citizenship (up to the present day). While Anne Spry Rush explains that generally, the West Indian working classes were unlikely to adopt British identities and culture, the growing numbers of white-collar workers increasingly participated in shaping this Caribbean Britishness. However, there were exceptions among the laboring masses, and subsequent years would see the growth of a larger Afro-Caribbean participation and activity.

Kenetta Perry's recent work on Black Britishness and citizenship in the twentieth century articulates how the codification of imperial citizenship in 1948 with the creation of the category of Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies (CUKC) did not happen instantly nor exclusively as a juridical issue.⁷⁴⁰ Instead, the ideas and language of belonging and imperial citizenship rights were important elements of the post-emancipation colonial experience. Perry emphasizes this same heritage of appropriating and remaking Britishness as a form of belonging and a way to practice a kind of "everyday citizenship that oftentimes challenged colonial authority and summoned the power of state." However, the "politics of Empire" also produced and shaped their expectations "that a sense of shared allegiance to the Crown might supplant the stigmas attached to Blackness and provide opportunities to claim and secure rights and privileges afforded to all British subjects, regardless of race."⁷⁴¹ Then and later, these expectations would be met with resistance and often end in disappointment. Racial equality, as a major element of this version of Britishness, challenged the very notion from which it stemmed. Perry continues this thread and

⁷⁴⁰ The passage of the British Nationality Act of 1948 introduced a new classification, Commonwealth citizenship, to establish imperial belonging via subjecthood in the metropole, colonies, and dominions. Additionally, the imperial nationality of British subjects, whether living in Britain or its colonies, gained official recognition via the category of CUKC. (Perry clarifies that in its political context, the 1948 Act emerged as a government response to Commonwealth developments, particularly the Canadian Nationality Act of 1946.) For more, see Kenetta Hammond Perry, *London Is the Place For Me: Black Britons, Citizenship, and the Politics of Race*, *Transgressing Boundaries, Studies in Black Politics and Black Communities* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 54–55.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

ties these earlier practices and versions of British identity to an entire generation of Afro-Caribbean migrants in the post-war world as they situated their claims to British citizenship upon these identifications that did not negate (and sometimes comprised affirmations of) Blackness as part of the process of defining their freedom as citizens.⁷⁴²

Among many of these varied groups of peoples, including the rising middle class and the different races, British films functioned alongside other designators of British culture and identity as indicators of status and individuals' understanding of their own identity. And in choosing which films to attend, whether from Hollywood or elsewhere, this choice is the equivalent to being participants in one's own shaping, reshaping, and reinforcement of national and cultural identities. Film contributes to the wider media usage of encouraging the admiration of British culture and "things," commodities, products, and lifestyles. As Rush points out, British-identifying peoples were not merely recipients of British culture, but they participated in a "shared imperial culture," and in their admiration for all that is "British," this results in claims to Britishness and the shaping of their own society.⁷⁴³ Film culture in the Caribbean (and throughout the Empire, including South Africa) reflects their participation in this shared imperial culture. As James Burns points out, even the names of the local theaters stress the imperial nature of the experiences of going to the movies. Take, for example, the Empire, Rex, Regal, and the Globe, and add to that monarchy references such as the Royal Theatre and the Princess. As Burns explains, these imperial names for movie theaters reflect the role of the movies themselves as "presenting the colonized with vivid images of their rulers, of foreign cultures, and of each other." Thus, he explains, "what one saw at the movies, where one saw films, and with whom, all became important markers of status and identity for imperial audiences."⁷⁴⁴

Rush asserts that it is class and status that results in the uneven shape brought about in this region more than race. And while one might argue that this imperial culture was imposed

⁷⁴² See Chapter One for Perry's sketch of how African-descended people of the Caribbean mobilized this inclusive sense of Britishness and citizenship via subjecthood by tracking how these identifications were deployed from the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. *Ibid.*, 24–47.

⁷⁴³ Rush, *Bonds of Empire*, 8–9.

⁷⁴⁴ Burns, *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*, 2.

upon them, it does not mean that their only choices were to accept or reject it. It is useful to understand the perspective of “native Britons”—those in the British Isles—concerning their understanding of British identity in relation to media and British culture. Rush uses the example of radio and the BBC Empire Service to the West Indies as a way to explore her argument concerning egalitarian imperialism. Prior to the second world war, the explicit goal of the BBC Empire Service (1932+) was “to project Britain and via this process cement colonials’ loyalty to the British Empire”... an image of Britain that was “largely insular as well as its understanding of who were Britons.”⁷⁴⁵ BBC broadcasters expected their programs to appeal to a white expatriate audience.

Radio, another media outlet based within Great Britain, reflects this metropole perspective of a Caribbean still not racially inclusive in its definition of British people in the Caribbean. Their intent was to target white expatriates and (perhaps with a distorted understanding of) white colonials in that definition. Generally speaking, radio is a mass market medium which cannot officially enact control over its listeners and audience. Like radio, there was probably a parallel intention among British filmmakers’ (and American distribution companies’) and ruling elites’ expectations in distributing films to the Caribbean, an expectation assuming that the target audience was mainly British expatriates (or colonial subjects in need of a better cultural influence than what Hollywood provides). Except the reality within the Caribbean was that anyone who might identify with British culture might be inclined to watch British films; if they could afford the time/money, it is logical to assume the status marker of attendance and participation would contribute to indicate the rising stature of “respectable,” educated, and “British” individuals among the rising “coloured” middle class West Indians in addition to Creole whites and expatriates.

Different definitions of Britishness produced different outcomes than perhaps the one the metropole intended by sending British culture media out to their colonies. While British commercial films were not specifically produced for the Caribbean market (unlike BBC Empire

⁷⁴⁵ Rush, *Bonds of Empire*, 149. It was not until during World War II that the BBC started airing a more egalitarian imperial vision for Caribbean broadcasts.

Service radio), the decisions to target a global market and include special distribution to the colonies of the Caribbean bear consideration. The ruling elites and filmmakers took into account the influence of films upon non-Europeans, except primarily in terms of a “superior” culture influencing these “easily-swayed” colonial subjects. Local exhibitors and publicity reflect a local understanding of a wider interest beyond just the small minority of expatriates looking to maintain cultural ties to “home.” Rush’s examination of BBC documents and programs makes clear that targeting the expatriates was the uppermost goal in their minds; her approach can also be applied to British film industry’s overseas distribution. Furthermore, this argument ultimately supports the idea of a British national cinema; the filmmakers just also happened to reach other “Britishers” they did not initially consider, based on these different notions of Britishness. In a way, we can better understand British nationality during the 1930s as also a British imperial identity.⁷⁴⁶ To the “coloured” middle class, radio was a symbol status and one to be shared with their neighbors; it allowed them to connect to the wider world. Similarly, British newsreels and recorded sporting events like boxing matches, as well as the increasing availability of British feature films, served this same purpose as well. And finally, coinciding with this increased access, the rise in imperial subject matter and stories in British films by the mid- to late-1930s further reflects the transition occurring towards a more imperial definition of British nationality that became official in 1948.

British Caribbean cinema-going fits into and supplements Rush’s key arguments. While theater owners (exhibitors) chose to show more American than British movies (for all the various reasons previously discussed), they still responded to local demands and inevitably brought in some British movies—albeit used as a “film diet” supplement (as seen above). Composite identities are reflected with this variety of options and various cultures being represented

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., 155. Rush describes the 1930s audience for radio in the British Caribbean, a description that sounds like those making up their film audiences, at least for the first-run palace theaters: “Since only persons with some disposable income could afford to subscribe to a wired service or purchase a radio receiver, listeners in the West Indies were largely middle and upper class – and many of them were whites of European descent. Yet by the 1930s the audience in the British Caribbean had already grown well beyond the expatriate core that BBC officials envisioned. First of all, many of these whites were born IN the Caribbean, and some of them were of continental European, not British, descent. Furthermore the rise of a ‘coloured’ middle class ensured that many Caribbean listeners to radio were neither European nor white.”

onscreen for their consumption; they could choose which film to see, and choice is in the individual's purview. Given the lack of an indigenous film industry, they are then shaped by what is provided: Hollywood glamour, occasionally independent American black cast films, and a growing stream of British films. Thus, even the watching of British films contributed to the continued heritage and use of Britishness for social uplift. Rush explores the roles of education, royalty relations and activities, and the use of radio after the establishment of BBC's Empire Service in 1932. My study contributes the realm of film as another cultural medium providing an outlet for participation in shaping personal and social identity and using Britishness (and Americanness) amidst their choices.

National and imperial identities are not necessarily separate; they are all British subjects, and from perspective of (at least) the minority of middle and upper classes in the British Caribbean, their local Caribbean identity could exist alongside a British imperial definition of their nationality within this framework. Perhaps one might use this perspective in correlation with a national British Cinema as a mass medium perceived by many to reflect only a British isles' definition of a "British" industry, and argued by others that it does not exist because of the many non-British connections and personnel within the industry. Yet as with Britishness and British identity, there are different perspectives and definitions of a British national cinema. And these films would reflect much (though with the absence of a racially-inclusive perspective) of what these "coloured" middle-class colonial subjects considered to indicate Britishness: respectability, education, manners, behaviors, and speech in the content of these films (and which their local publicity also reflects) in contrast to the perceived brash American nature in Hollywood films.

During the interwar years, concerns in Britain arose concerning the American influence commercially, politically, and culturally. Many scholars have explored these concerns, but few have looked at the perspective of those within its colonies (usually expats or local elites) throughout the Empire. James Burns has recently explored the difference (compared to the metropole) in tone and focus of local elites' debates within the Caribbean, South Africa, and British Southeast Asia, finding that in addition to similar threats to "white prestige" and educating

with amoral and illegal behaviors onscreen, local elites and British expatriates worried that American films might “chip away” at their “cultural connection” to their homeland.⁷⁴⁷ Colonial elites feared especially that Hollywood movies imposed American history, its institutions, and brash slang upon colonial audiences. And with the advent of sound, they feared the deterioration of the Queen’s English.

From the First World War, local elites warned about Americanization primarily in terms of cultural influence, but their anti-Americanism throughout the region ultimately betrays their fears of America’s growing political influence during the interwar years.⁷⁴⁸ Yet by the early Thirties, after the burgeoning concerns of accents, slang, and language, Burns states that Caribbean criticisms of American cultural influence began to die out by this time, as the debates had run their course and the rapid transition to sound technology and continued dominance of Hollywood films “persuaded the most bitter critics that there was little profit in continuing to rail against American movies.”⁷⁴⁹ Interestingly, as a result of the Colonial Films Committee and the BUFP, the British Caribbean began to receive a steadier stream of British films by 1932/33 which continued through the following years. Perhaps the increased availability of British films, albeit a limited amount, provided just enough option for local audiences to relieve elites’ concerns after their continued push for more British product, as seen above within Jamaica especially.

Burns also explains that these elites’ criticisms and reactions reveal the fragility of imperial identity formation during this period, at least as perceived by elites.⁷⁵⁰ Given his use of administration papers and some newspaper articles, Burns limits his scope of imperial identity to those British expatriates and local elites whose identities were tied to a “distinctly British heritage” and thus perceived Hollywood’s threat more acutely. My study would suggest that while elites’ fears of Americanization are more apparent given the source material, other colonial subjects (from a wider spectrum, at least from within the growing middle classes) may have also

⁷⁴⁷ Burns, “Excessive Americanisms,” 198.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

demonstrated concerns or at least an interest in some British films as a continuation of the British cultural education they received elsewhere in their daily lives. British films never overtook Hollywood's hold within the Caribbean region (or elsewhere in the British Empire), but by the mid-1930s there was an established presence of higher quality and popular British-made films from England.

Overall, a Caribbean identity fused many traits together in varying degrees, from local interests (and growing local nationalism) to British heritage and culture, racial awareness, and American identity influences. Various transatlantic connections existed within this migratory and pulsating region. The film industry's distribution practices, local geography, its people's expectations locally, as well as those abroad in Britain or in America—all shaped each island's local experience of cinema and cinema-going during these years just prior to the burgeoning drive for nationalism and decolonization the following decades would bring. From British producers' intentions to reach international (especially American) markets and adjusting their product accordingly, to the (albeit limited) role of these less profit-realizing regions of other English-speaking peoples, British cinema achieved an international presence that its filmmakers would continue to struggle to maintain throughout the following decades.

Like with new Empire radio being set up in Caribbean, those individuals in the metropole assumed they were providing a service for British expats and maybe a few others; filmmakers probably viewed the Caribbean (and other more distant countries) in a similar fashion—still worth an attempt, but it remained a region that would take backseat to the profit possibilities of the American (and Australian) markets. But local newspaper editors, advertisers, local exhibitors and companies show the inadequacies to that assumption of film audiences' identities. Albeit still a minority (in contrast to the black laboring class masses), there was more to the racial and class constructions of a British identity in the Caribbean: from “coloured” middle classes to upper-class white expatriates and Creoles, to those few blacks beginning to rise into the middle classes.

Comparative Observations

The sheer variety of local particularities remains important. No two British communities were entirely alike, although all offered opportunities for transformation, if not advancement, and all offered too, the routine dangers of over-reach, failure, or quiet mediocrity—life, in other words, was lived there as it was lived anywhere... While [British travelers] saw one world of empire settlement stretching from New Zealand via Shanghai, India, to Sudan and beyond, a world in which they encountered and re-encountered members of the same social circles, outside observers will see a world of multifaceted difference and particularity. Both strands have much to offer an understanding of the inter-related world of Britain and its colonies, dominions, and other settlements...⁷⁵¹

The varied perceptions of Britishness among English South Africans, British Caribbeans, and other British communities throughout the Empire denote the possibility (or likelihood) of different film experiences and selections of films attended. As the variances exemplified between South Africa's and the Caribbean's British communities display, different notions of Britishness extended and sustained a much larger British imperial culture and society than perhaps the one Britons in the Isles perceived. However, the internationality of film business, its growth within the British film industry, and the cultural aspects of the commodity present an opportunity to explore these different British communities during the 1930s.

Local distributors, advertisers, and exhibitors could use Britishness to their advantage in promoting cultural commodities such as British films throughout the Empire and other British-derived societies. While British filmmakers and others of the industry based in London were not necessarily aware of any notion of Britishness beyond that of the "homeland," they expected the Empire to be a ready-made market to supplement domestic and international (i.e. American) profits. This expectation was based on the assumption that fellow (white) Britons and neo-Britons would prefer their "truly" British product. They hoped (and for some, presumed) that the superiority of British culture would interest British-identified audiences by presenting something of a higher caliber than the escapist and brash Hollywood gangster films, screwball comedies, and musicals.

⁷⁵¹ Robert A. Bickers, ed., *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas*, The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.

When British producers chose to target an international market that included the Empire, distributors, exhibitors, and advertisers at the local level were able to negotiate a space for British films against the international dominance of Hollywood. Without the implementation of quotas or legislation in places such as South Africa and the colonies of the Caribbean, this negotiated (and however small) space nonetheless indicates an interest in and growing partiality for British films among some local audiences. Where there existed distinct British societies and communities, a ready-made market seemed feasible. And when producers were able to arrange a wider distribution, advertisers used the Britishness of these assorted British peoples to their business advantage. In other words, the cultural aspects of the film commodity provided an avenue for marketers (at both the distributing and exhibiting levels of dispersal) to connect these British films with other British-identified peoples throughout the Empire.

As the previous chapter explains, in the dominion of South Africa a distinct but quite small minority of British (or English-speaking) South Africans became the primary target market for British films. White, English-speaking, and British-derived, this Anglo society based its notion of Britishness on the same ethnographically-defined concept of the other, “white” dominions such as Australia. But in contrast to the larger white British settler populations of the other dominions (Australia, New Zealand, Canada), this minority populace was distinctively culturally visible in contrast with the other, majority white minority—the Afrikaners. Two centuries and recent wartime conflicts between them hovered behind the attempts to unite these white South African peoples after Union, and by the 1930s the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in political power enhanced an increased cultural awareness and differentiation between the two groups. Despite being the slighter in population, the dominance of English-language newspapers perpetuated and reinforced a strong sense of imperial Britishness among the Anglos. The re-vitalization and entry of British films in the 1930s was utilized as another cultural tool to promote Britishness primarily within this distinct community (and its own variations within, such as the more “stridently” British Natalians).

In contrast, with its very nature and make-up of islands scattered just south and east of the United States and into the Atlantic Ocean, the British Caribbean provided a more diverse notion of Britishness and British peoples towards whom British films could be targeted. At first glance, British filmmakers and their company businessmen were perhaps less aware of this mixture; given the less profitable character of the region, they focused their attentions elsewhere and likely overlooked these British-identifying peoples. However, the colonial political structure of these islands provided an opportunity for Britain's governing elites to purposefully target and influence "others" who embraced Britishness alongside their British counterparts (the minority of British expatriates and Creole whites). With the Colonial Film Committee's provision of minimal funding, coordination, and encouragement for the establishment of distribution directly to the British West Indies (and West Africa), British films (in addition to those few UA provided) could promptly penetrate these local markets. This distribution scheme appears to have continued at least through the peak of British film production in the 1930s.

With more inclusive notions of Britishness in some of these Caribbean islands, a larger audience (by way of ratio to the population as a whole) could indeed be targeted and possibly met. Beyond expatriates and Creole whites, various "coloureds" and a few blacks could utilize British film culture alongside other British institutions to validate their notions of Britishness and their own identification with it. Furthermore, their definition of Britishness was based on concepts of Victorian Respectability, and many of 1930s British films perpetuated some of these traits such as gentlemanly behavior and duty. Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich refer to this appropriation as "adopting Britishness," but however it is described, the British community of the Caribbean was culturally larger than at first appeared to those in London and probably among the ruling white elites in these communities.⁷⁵²

British cinema as a cultural commodity provided different uses of its films throughout the wider distribution developed during the 1930s. As South Africa exemplifies, film's cultural nature enabled those deprived of their "homeland" to reinforce their sense of British identity in contrast to

⁷⁵² Bridge and Fedorowich, *The British World*.

other local identities within the Empire. It also provided further opportunity for others to take on Britishness as part of their own identity, as the British film experience in the British Caribbean demonstrates. As a commodity and mass-oriented medium, British films were driven more towards those international markets with the prospect of high profitability. Nevertheless, the imperial trade connections of the British Empire during its final peak of sunshine provided the groundwork for British films to reach a much larger range of British and non-British audiences throughout the world.

Britishness during the 1930s appeared to be a static, Anglo-Saxon, white, capitalist identity; however, a British film culture in the further reaches of the Atlantic Ocean reveals that notions of Britishness were much more fluid as it flexed to fit into and interacted among other groups. Like today's post-imperial "British world," this fluidity has come to be a more widely accepted notion of Britishness as it was redefined in the aftermath of Decolonization and the influx of various so-called "British" peoples from the Empire into Britain during the mid- and late-twentieth century. However, as this 1930s study shows, the foundations of this more fluid concept of Britishness was already in place among British peoples overseas and ready to be built into one of two directions: towards its earlier ethnographic and political definition in its extreme, as a few continue to propagate; or in the more inclusive and multi-racial direction that complements the multi-national nature (of English, Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish) already in place.

Chapter 8

Conclusion:

Britishness, a “British World,” and British National Cinema

The larger geographical and cultural scale of the 1930s’ “British World” consisted of varied self-identifications of Britishness.⁷⁵³ These two case examples of British film culture and markets within South Africa and the British Caribbean highlight some of these differences, especially as regards the functionality of film as a commercial cultural commodity interacting individually among mass audiences. It is here where film culture and constructions of identity intersect.

Saul Dubow advocates that to better understand the “British world,” one must separate the concept of Britishness from “the British state or the ‘ethnological’ unity of Greater Britain” others have promoted, and challenge “the unstated assumption that the British Empire refers to territories and peoples which were somehow owned or collectively possessed by the United Kingdom.” Instead, Dubow proposes “a more capacious category capable of including elective, hyphenated forms of belonging” that

downplays the jurisdictional power of the British crown and British parliament in favour of institutions and symbols that are shared or de-territorialised. Britishness, in this sense, is better seen as a field of cultural, political and symbolic attachments which includes the rights, claims and aspirations of subject-citizens as well as citizen subjects – ‘non-Britons’ as well as ‘neo-Britons’ in today’s parlance. Space is thereby created for the inclusion of colonial nationalists of various political stripes and colors who, paradoxically, may have chosen to affirm their Britishness even in the act of resisting British imperialism.⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁵³ The term “British World” stems from J.G.A. Pocock’s challenge in 1974 to “integrate the rest of the peoples of the home islands and of the British overseas into their accounts.” Bridge and Fedorowich, among others, are writing this history. For more on this subject, see *ibid*.

⁷⁵⁴ Dubow, “How British Was the British World?,” 2–3. For his case in point, he uses the unique example of South Africa in contrast to other, “white” dominions, as the least thoroughly Anglicized and more troublesome dominion that a revised understanding of Britishness helps to reconnect with those remaining in South Africa who still considered themselves to be British.

This study applies his open approach to defining Britishness and the utilization of its cultural bonds to explore how the British film industry may have capitalized upon these connections.

During the interwar years, the British government was concerned with the international power of film culture to transcend borders and impact lives throughout the Empire, whether for “good” or “evil.” In 1932 in the midst of economic depression, British ruling elites continued to debate over the importance of proliferating British films and stressed cinema’s influence over “modern life” including trade, industry and commerce as well as people’s mental and moral characters. According to the Secretary of State for the Dominions, it was felt that British films of the right caliber could fulfill “the deep-felt desire of the Dominions to keep in touch with what is happening in the heart of the Empire,” sway the “impressionable mind of the natives” throughout the Empire, as well as possibly “increase the power of the British Empire for good and to stimulate inter-Imperial trade”.⁷⁵⁵ This study has shown how natives’ and non-Europeans’ experience of movie-going was highly restricted in Britain’s dominions and colonies, and in some instances film screenings were regulated as a form of missions work. It has also pointed to different British peoples such as British expatriates, English South Africans, and British Caribbean “coloureds” and Creole whites making up cinema-going audiences throughout the Atlantic region.

These government debates occurred at the cusp of the British industry’s boom period of production, and it was hoped that they would achieve a stable and wide-reaching industry to taper American influence (via Hollywood films) throughout the Empire. Lord Snell recognized the internationality of film culture, how

...the film is world wide in its influence, and it goes over national barriers in a way that no other medium does. It speaks all languages, it reaches all classes, it appeals to all ages. It is constant, and its influence extends to the remotest corners of the earth. It is not difficult to understand why that is so. It catches life

⁷⁵⁵ *Importance of British Films*. HL Deb (5th Series), May 4, 1932, vol. 84, c292. The Secretary’s comments were pulled from a communication with the Morning Post of April 1, 1932 and quoted during this Parliamentary Debate. British films were a frequent topic in debates of the mid-1920s and at the Imperial Conferences of 1926 and 1927. This renewal returned to some of the same issues previously visited, as the quota had yet to fully alter and stabilize industry output (given the transition to sound).

in the very act of living, and it selects episodes that appeal most strongly to the imaginative faculties of young people.⁷⁵⁶

The possible international nature of film (as a business as well as a viewing experience) meant that peoples could reconnect and reinforce British culture throughout the far-flung settler societies on a more personal level. Along these lines, Lord Snell suggested that

“...British civilisation does not consist merely in ships and trains, imports and exports, and the rest, but its source and inspiration and meaning are rather on the cultural side—in its literature and art, in the way English people bear themselves towards the problems they have to face. It is the lack of this presentation through this great educational medium [of film] that is a matter of the sincerest anxiety to those who look to the future...I feel that when an alien culture, even though it is American, is imposed upon peoples such as those living in the Colonies it makes a very deep cut into the established traditions and the historical sanctions of our land.”⁷⁵⁷

Furthermore, Lord Snell’s emphasis on what makes up “British civilization” and why a British film culture is necessary ironically fits Dubow’s argument for a concept of a “British World” shorn of state (and racial) ties and instead structured around cultural and symbolic attachments.

It is easier today to look upon the 1930s British Empire and envision a British imperial film culture propagating cultural ties to the homeland through the government’s support of a domestic industry, through the endeavors of British filmmakers to build a competitive and distinctive British film product, and through the machinations of businessmen (and ruling elites) attempting to distribute this British output to consumers worldwide with a particular focus upon fellow British and English-speaking peoples.

As seen above, audiences’ participation in British culture was a much-hoped for outcome to support and maintain a prosperous industry. In its make-up, British cinema could depict Britishness in one of two main ways: as a British-made product (and thus assumed to inherently

⁷⁵⁶ *Importance of British Films*, HL Deb (5th Series), May 4, 1932, vol. 84, c296, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1932/may/04/importance-of-british-films>. Debate at this time concerned the motion regarding whether to place the question of securing the showing of films throughout the Empire on the agenda for the Imperial Conference at Ottawa. This motion was ultimately withdrawn as the previous Imperial Conference of 1926 had already determined that the “only effective Government action in any part of the Empire to assist in the exhibition there of films...must take the form either of Customs Duties or of quota legislation.” Furthermore, films’ direct influence on imperial trade and preferences was slight in contrast to other British goods. (c303)

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, cc296-297.

comprise a British “atmosphere”), and through the films' content via onscreen cultural representations including distinctive imagery of Britain, narratives reflecting common ideologies, the behaviors and personalities of characters, and even speech patterns and accents. This study focuses predominantly on the former to draw out the connections between the economic side of film industry with the cultural component of the medium's dispersal to consumers. It does so by exploring how film as a cultural commodity can portray Britishness in its manufacture and through its marketing and advertising. Lastly, this study begins to uncover how British-identifying peoples beyond Great Britain may have received these films by forming a hypothesis based upon supply-side expectations, local businessmen's knowledge of their region, and some of the marketing strategies employed in local press.

However, a more in depth exploration of the second type—the actual content of the films the British film industry produced and shipped overseas, and how they (in contrast with Hollywood films) were actually received by these same audiences—is an area of study that needs further exploration. Given the limitations of available sources and lack of box office statistics, film reception studies for international markets remains a weak area of scholarship. However, through the use of cinema ephemera such as newspaper advertising and publicity (including some and magazines and trade papers), this study can start historians upon an idea of how audiences may have received British films in the 1930s and any differences between regional markets.

In the cases of southern Africa and the British Caribbean, an overall common strategy of using a film's Britishness as a key selling point became increasingly apparent during the 1930s. Furthermore, it coincides with the British industry's gain in world recognition with certain successful “international” films (albeit few in contrast with Hollywood's abundant output). Over the course of the decade, the increasing use of “British” promotional jargon for the British films exported to these regions reflects the expectations and likelihood of a positive response on the whole from these audiences to the industry's advancements and to the product it produced. While some British films were likely not preferred to the escapist and entertaining fare from Hollywood flooding all these markets, over the course of the decade British films apparently were received

well enough to provide a pleasurable addition, especially for those individuals more familiar with British customs, institutions, imagery, (stereotyped) personalities and characters, and ideology that make up British culture, and (more practically) English patterns of speech and dialects. This observation is validated by the course of action that Hollywood took in response to the British industry's achievements. In order to maintain their hold on the pivotal British market, Hollywood filmmakers increasingly produced their own versions of British stories (including adaptations of some of the most well-known British literature), and they used British actors to create a Hollywoodized sense of authenticity.

While I cannot quantitatively substantiate the reception of these films (British or American) within localities such as South Africa and the British West Indies, my qualitative analysis of the supply side's attempts to reach their target markets allows me to hypothesize that with the growth of the British film industry and increased efforts towards international distribution, British films became increasingly perceived as an entertaining alternative to Hollywood product. British films were able to negotiate a degree of space within each of these markets; and with the creation of this space, British films of the following decades would continue to have an outlet in these particular markets. Thus, one can argue that a British National Cinema was born during the interwar years, transitioning from a nearly non-existent industry into a full-fledged international business propagating British culture.

And here is where this study concludes its attempt to discover how film (as a cultural commodity) and audiences interact in specific locations situated within a much larger, transoceanic community of Britons and Britishers, of Anglophiles and neo-Britons, among numerous others. With the application of this transatlantic perspective, the establishment of a more productive and internationally-recognized industry exposes the rise and formation of a British National Cinema during these years. Granted, the few films to be successfully distributed internationally (and those received with great fanfare) made up a small selection of the British industry's output, and the notion of a British National Cinema should not ignore the bulk of

domestically-intended (domestically-marketed) movies that also represented Britishness onscreen.

The similarities and application of a more Hollywood-style of production have led some historians to claim that some British films' imitation of Hollywood denotes the lack of a specifically British National Cinema during these years, and thus the era's movies remained ignored for the most part (except perhaps for those discussing Alfred Hitchcock's early films). Britain's 1930s films have only recently begun to be unearthed and rediscovered by a select few, and in the last couple years the DVD distribution company Network Distributing Ltd (UK) has begun making many of these lesser-known films available through their British Film series launched in 2013. After concluding my research and having watched a number of these newly-available films, I assert that the entire range of British 1930s films should be included within the notion of a British National Cinema, including the domestic as well as the internationally-intended productions, from the quota productions and standard genres of detective stories, music hall comedies, and musicals to the more expensive and lavish pictures such as the costume drama. (Also, take note that most of these 1930s genres remain popular genres or variations thereof among today's British films.)

However, the establishment of a national cinema does not preclude the struggles to maintain a vital and strong industry. Uncertainty pervaded the industry from 1936 to 1938 with rumors of financial difficulties, insecurity about what the new quota would entail, and the changing of key figureheads in the major combines. British filmmakers witnessed many of their hard-earned efforts drain away as a result of reckless overspending, poor investment schemes, and the resulting financial fallout by the end of 1937. The following year, the changes made to the British quota upon renewal resulted in the opportunity for Hollywood to increase their involvement in British film production.⁷⁵⁸ The entry of J. Arthur Rank, his acquisition of production studios, and restructuring of distribution led to a new approach to filmmaking in the following years. Rather than raising money to make films, this "millionaire industrialist" utilized his business acumen and

⁷⁵⁸ The Cinematograph Act of 1938 went into force April 1938.

made films because he had the money. Rachel Low describes his group of financial magnates entering the filmmaking world: “They treated films as they would any other commodity—they organized the backing and they took it for granted that the talent would be there when required.”⁷⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the outbreak of war put a temporary halt to all production for a short period, triggering some producers and directors such as Alexander Korda and Alfred Hitchcock to head to Hollywood and keep making films. Nevertheless, this finally-established British Cinema did not simply disappear during these latter years, and neither can one ignore this decade of production because it does not flow smoothly into the type of product produced during and after World War II. Instead, given its cultural and social nature, conceive a national cinema evolving with the changes taking place in society, economy, and culture throughout the twentieth century.

Overall, the incorporation of 1930s British films requires a re-envisioned framework of British national cinema, one not necessarily predicated on the concept of social realism that became an accepted standard from the 1940s.⁷⁶⁰ Instead, the model of a national cinema should also consider the inherent international connections necessary within the production of what is both a domestically- and internationally-intended cultural commodity. For this study, I utilize a transatlantic perspective to draw out some of these connections, which results in widening the playing field of the British film industry and enlightens further upon its successes and failures. Britain of the 1930s cannot be segregated from its larger imperial context, nor can the ties between London and Hollywood (or Britain and America) be ignored. Furthermore, American influence upon Britain’s indigenous film industry does not necessarily negate its identity or its British nature and character. Instead, film historians should seek out these ostensibly

⁷⁵⁹ Low, *The History of the British Film, 1929-1939*, 7:217.

⁷⁶⁰ British films began taking a closer and more authentic look at British society during the war than they had previously, a trend that continues to the present day; consequently, this British realist tradition is frequently used as a defining element of British National Cinema. Samantha Lay describes three overlapping applications of “social realism” in British Cinema: practice and politics, style and form, and content. In terms of the “practice and politics” of British social realism, what is generally meant is “independent production (though as [her] study demonstrates this term means different things at different times), conducted in an artisanal way, and using real locations and non-professional or little-known actors.” The politics (or the agenda and intent of the filmmaker) influences that practice as they seek to demonstrate their ideas about the social world. For more on British social realism, see Samantha Lay, *British Social Realism: From Documentary to Brit-Grit* (London: Wallflower, 2002), 9–10.

contradictory exchanges and engage them further. No national identity or film culture (or nation, for that matter) is formed or shaped and existing withdrawn from the rest of the world. A history must incorporate the connectivity of the world (or the Atlantic Ocean, in this example) into these histories and into a British National Cinema framework.

Overall, a national cinema framework of study should not close its borders to the events and circumstances around it. In today's increasingly globalized society, historians are now utilizing historical approaches that look beyond nation-states and their political boundaries to explore the exchanges and connections within a much larger and international community. Among these, transatlantic history methodology expands upon the field of Atlantic history to explore the interactions and exchanges occurring around the Atlantic basin through the movements of peoples, ideas, and goods up to the present day. Film, like other commodities, serves as a useful unit of analysis that moves with the exigencies of economy across borders and engages with "imagined communities" throughout the broader transatlantic (transnational, imperial, or global) community.

Therefore, film historians should apply these same methodologies. With histories of American Cinema, this has been less problematic given the widely-accepted nature of Hollywood film as the international standard and its global dominance which extends back to the 1910s. However, other national cinemas, whenever they have been established, have not been formed without some form of interaction beyond their nation's borders. Hollywood's dominance makes this an inherent part of establishing and negotiating any film industry's so-called independence.

For that reason, these same approaches can be useful for application in today's global film world and studying the British films within it. Many parallels, despite the major differences in the economic structures and the British film industry itself, can be drawn between the 1930s and the 2010s. For example, like British producers Michael Balcon and Alexander Korda, "international" British films (especially "Blockbuster" franchises) are being produced with an eye to the American and international markets and consequently critics have questioned their British nature. Debates arose in the 1930s about the problematic role of American companies financing

British production, and today many continue to consider that to be indicative of an international (and not British) industry with merely a London base.

However, in recent years, others such as Alan Parker have advocated that in the current age of global capitalism, it is vital to open up to the idea of taking on investment from non-British sources in order to sustain a viable British film industry into the future. In the Chairman of the UK Film Council's words, "We have to stop worrying about the nationality of money. We want to encourage investment into our film industry from anywhere in the world—without tearing up the roots of cultural film production."⁷⁶¹ Taking on foreign investment in order to guarantee global distribution and access means that Hollywood finances the bulk of the projects and Britain provides the "creative film hub" in order to create a culturally distinctive product.

Look at the examples of the James Bond and Harry Potter franchises. Both of these British literature-based franchises are technically joint British and American projects (or co-productions). The eight Harry Potter films were co-produced by British and American companies, they were filmed at Leavesden Studios just outside of London, and they were distributed by Warner Bros.⁷⁶² However, the majority of the money spent on their production was spent in England. Andrew Higson points out that considering the distinctively British cultural nature of the books that so many had taken to heart (throughout the world),

Creating an English base for this particular blockbuster franchise was thus about both generating substantial business and securing a sense of national identity, an identity that was at the same time both fictional and familiar, its class-bound world reproducing the mores of a traditional, privileged private school education and the solidity of ancient institutional buildings.⁷⁶³

⁷⁶¹ Alan Parker, Building a Sustainable UK Film Industry, 5/11/2002 quoted in John Fitzgerald, *Studying British Cinema: 1999-2009* (Columbia University Press, 2010), 25.

⁷⁶² As of 2012, Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden have converted a portion of their facility to now serve as a monument to the Harry Potter franchise for which made it a key center of film production. The Warner Bros. Studio Tour London provides a complete Harry Potter experience allowing fans and film enthusiasts to visit many of the original film sets with accompanying props and costumes used in all eight films. For more information, visit <https://www.wbstudiotour.co.uk/>.

⁷⁶³ Andrew Higson, *Film England: Culturally English Filmmaking Since the 1990s* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), 28.

The extensive host of British and Irish acting talent and the strict adherence to the distinctive British roots in J.K. Rowling's books (all of which was supplemented by extensive Hollywood funds) enabled the creation of an accessible yet distinctly British cultural film that American and international audiences could still easily "tap into." From the British-accented "Happy Christmas!" colloquialisms and Christmas presents at the end of their beds (in the earlier films), to the school uniforms, train rides, and imagery of the Scottish Highlands and iconic London locales, the British crews and talent fashioned what John Fitzgerald describes as the "biggest British film phenomenon of all time."⁷⁶⁴

However, few British films reach the level of international success experienced by these franchises. And the question that haunted British filmmakers in the 1930s continues to resonate in the twenty-first century: Do you make big-budget international films in tandem with major Hollywood studios and risk "falling on your face," or do you make smaller, niche-market type films intended primarily for domestic consumption? Filmmakers continue to debate over the altered trajectory instigated by the UKFC and Alan Parker that focuses on box office returns and making movies that audiences everywhere will go see.⁷⁶⁵ Luckily in more recent years, other options have widened this outlook to include viable outlets such as home viewing (television, DVD/Blu-ray sales, and digital downloads) that can not only supplement profits but also provide easier access to international audiences.

Other parallels between the 1930s and today's British film industry can be drawn. For one thing, British and Hollywood movie stars and actors continue to hop back and forth over the "pond" at will, and producers of both industries cast them for many of the same reasons as before. Along the lines of another corresponding theme, government involvement in aiding the maintenance of a national cinema industry continues to remain a hot button topic. From 2000 until its closure in 2011, the UK Film Council served as a non-departmental public body created to develop and promote the UK film industry (a service which has now been transferred to the

⁷⁶⁴ Fitzgerald, *Studying British Cinema*, 27.

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

charity organization of the British Film Institute). These efforts included such attempts to finance and support the production of more “British” films culturally distinct from Hollywood. While the UKFC (and BFI today) work in tandem to find inward investments, those unable to acquire substantial Hollywood funding create “smaller” and more regional films which often struggle to reach beyond the domestic market except among those Anglophiles that seek them out and British-oriented niche art markets. However, as American viewers such as myself can attest (and those of other British-derived societies), even this element of today’s viewing of British films (and television now, as well) points to a continuance of self-identification (for some) with Britishness both within Britain *and* beyond its borders in a transatlantic and global “British world.”

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APPENDIX A

Production and Distribution Information of
Films Referenced

FILM TITLE	YEAR	ORIGIN	DIRECTOR	PRODUCER	Production Company / Studio Information	Distribution (Origin Domestic Market; International Markets when available)
<i>Brigadier Gerrard</i>	1915	BR	Bert Haldane		Barker Productions	BR: Walturdaw, 1915; US: Red Feather Photoplays, 1916
<i>De Voortrekkers</i>	1916	SA	Harold Shaw	I.W. Schlesinger	African Film Productions	US: Arrow Film Corp., n.d.;
<i>Symbol of Sacrifice</i>	1918	SA	Dick Cruikshanks	I.W. Schlesinger	African Film Productions	
<i>The Blue Lagoon</i>	1923	SA	William Bowden	Dick Cruikshanks	African Film Productions	BR: Film Distributors, 1926
<i>Woman to Woman</i>	1923	USA	Victor Saville	Michael Balcon	Balcon, Freedman, and Saville	BR: Woolf & Freedman Film Service (W & F Films), 1923; US: Lewis J. Selznick Enterprises, 1924
<i>Beau Brummel</i>	1924	USA	Harry Beaumont		Warner Bros. (WB)	US: Warner Bros., 1924
<i>The Blackguard</i> (<i>Die Prinzessin und der Gerger</i>)	1925	BR-DE	Graham Cutts	Michael Balcon, Erich Pommer	Gainsborough Pictures / Universum Film (UFA) (made in Berlin, Germany)	BR: Wardour Films, 1925; US: Lee-Bradford Corp., 1925
<i>Nell Gwyn</i>	1925	BR	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox	W.M. Productions / British National	BR: First National, 1925; US: Famous Players-Lasky (Paramount), 1926; SA: 1928
<i>The Rat</i>	1925	BR	Graham Cutts	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: W & F Films, 1925; US: Lee-Bradford, 1925; Aywon, 1928
<i>The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog</i> (US: <i>The Case of Jonathan Drew</i>)	1926	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures / Piccadilly Pictures Ltd. (Islington)	BR: W & F Films, 1927; US: AmerAnglo and Artlee Pictures, 1928
<i>Mountain Eagle</i> (<i>Der Bergadler</i> ; US: <i>Fear o' God</i>)	1926	BR-DE	Alfred Hitchcock	Michael Balcon, Erich Pommer	Gainsborough Pictures / Bavaria Film / Munchner Lichtspielkunst AG (Emelka Studios, Munich)	BR: W & F Films, 1926; US: Lee-Bradford, Artlee Pictures, 1926;
<i>The Pleasure Garden</i> (<i>Irrgarten der Leidenschaft</i>)	1926	BR-DE	Alfred Hitchcock	Michael Balcon, Erich Pommer	Gainsborough Pictures / Bavaria Film / Munchner Lichtspielkunst AG (Emelka Studios, Munich)	BR: W & F Films, 1927; US: Lee-Bradford, Aywon Film, 1926;

<i>The Triumph of the Rat</i>	1926	BR	Graham Cutts	Michael Balcon, Carlyle Blackwell	Gainsborough Pictures / Piccadilly (Islington)	BR: W & F Films, 1927; US: Artlee, 1927; SA: Kinemas, 1928
<i>The Volga Boatman</i>	1926	USA	Cecil B. DeMille	Cecil B. DeMille	DeMille Pictures Corporation	US: Producers Distributing Corp., 1926; BR: Producers Distributing Corp., 1927; SA: AF, 1928
<i>Downhill</i> (US: <i>When Boys Leave Home</i>)	1927	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: Wardour Films, 1928; US: World Wide Pictures, 1928
<i>Easy Virtue</i>	1927	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: W & F Films, 1927; US: World Wide Pictures, 1928
<i>The Fighting Eagle</i> (SA: <i>Brigadier Gerard</i>)	1927	USA	Donald Crisp	Cecil B. DeMille	DeMille Pictures Corporation	US: Pathe Exchange, 1927; SA: ACF, 1928
<i>Further Adventures of the Flag Lieutenant</i> (US: <i>Further Adventures of a Flag Officer</i>)	1927	BR	W.P. Kellino	Julius Hagen	Neo-Art	US: Williams & Pritchard Films, 1927; SA: Kinemas, 1928
<i>The Ghost Train</i> (<i>Der Geisterzug</i>)	1927	BR-DE	Geza von Bolvary	Michael Balcon, Hermann Fellner	Gainsborough / UFA (made in Germany)	BR: W & F Films, 1927; DE: Phoebus-Film AG, 1927
<i>Metropolis</i>	1927	DE	Fritz Lang	Erich Pommer	Universum Film (UFA)	DE: Parufamet & UFA, 1927; BR: Wardour Films, 1927; US: Paramount, 1928; SA: Kinemas, 1928
<i>Mumsie</i>	1927	BR	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions	BR: W & F Films, 1927; SA: AF, 1928
<i>Old San Francisco</i>	1927	USA	Alan Crosland	Darryl F. Zanuck	Warner Bros. (as The Vitaphone Corporation)	US: WB, 1927; SA: AF, 1928
<i>The Ring</i>	1927	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	John Maxwell (uncredited)	British International Pictures (BIP) (Elstree Studios, Borehamwood)	BR: Wardour Films, 1927

<i>The Blue Danube</i>	1928	USA	Paul Sloane	Cecil B. DeMille	DeMille Pictures Corporation	US: Pathe Exchange, n.d.; SA: Kinemas, 1928
<i>Champagne</i>	1928	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	John Maxwell (uncredited)	British International Pictures (Elstree Studios)	BR: Wardour Films, 1928
<i>The Constant Nymph</i>	1928	BR	Adrian Brunel	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	DE: Universum Film, 1928; BR: W & F Films; US: Big Three Prod., 1929
<i>The Farmer's Wife</i>	1928	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	John Maxwell (uncredited)	British International Pictures (Elstree Studios)	BR: Wardour Films, 1928; US: Ufa Eastern Division, 1930
<i>The Manxman</i>	1928	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	John Maxwell (uncredited)	British International Pictures (Elstree Studios)	BR: Wardour Films, 1929; US: Sono Art-Worldwide Pictures, 1929
<i>Moulin Rouge</i>	1928	BR-DE	Ewald Andre Dupont	E. A. Dupont	British International Pictures (Anglo-German co-production)	BR: Wardour Films, 1928; US: Sono Art-World Wide Pictures, 1929
<i>Blackmail</i>	1929	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	John Maxwell (uncredited)	British International Pictures	BR: Wardour Films, 1929; US: Sono Art-Worldwide Pictures, 1929; SA: African Films Ltd., 1930
<i>A Cottage on Dartmoor</i> (US: <i>Escape from Dartmoor</i>)	1929	BR	Anthony Asquith	H. Bruce Woolfe (uncredited)	British Instructional Films	BR: Pro Patria, 1930; US: BIP (America) and Harold Auten, 1930
<i>Disraeli</i>	1929	USA	Alfred E. Green		WB (as The Vitaphone Corporation)	US: Warner Bros, 1929,1934; SA: 1933
<i>The Lady From The Sea</i>	1929	BR	Castleton Knight		British International Pictures	BR: Paramount British Pictures, 1929
<i>The Last of Mrs. Cheyney</i>	1929	USA	Sidney Franklin	Irving Thalberg	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)	US: MGM, 1929
<i>The Letter</i>	1929	USA	Jean de Limur		Paramount Pictures (as Paramount Famous Lasky Corp.)	US: Paramount Pictures, 1929

<i>Piccadilly</i>	1929	BR-DE	Ewald Andre Dupont	E. A. Dupont	British International Pictures / E.A. Dupont Production (Anglo-German co-prod.)	BR: Wardour Films, 1929; US: Sono Art-World Wide Pictures, 1929
<i>Birds of Prey</i> (US: <i>The Perfect Alibi</i>)	1930	BR	Basil Dean	Basil Dean	Associated Radio Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: RKO Radio, 1930; US: RKO Radio, 1931
<i>Daughter of the Congo</i>	1930	USA	Oscar Micheaux	Oscar Micheaux	Micheaux Film	US: Micheaux Film, 1930; Bahamas: 1932;
<i>Escape!</i>	1930	BR	Basil Dean	Basil Dean	Associated Radio Pictures (Ealing Studios)	US & BR: RKO Radio Pictures, 1930
<i>Georgia Rose</i>	1930	USA	Harry A. Gant	Harry A. Gant	Arista Film	Bahamas: 1932
<i>Harmony Heaven</i>	1930	BR	Thomas Bentley		British International Pictures	BR: Wardour Films, 1930
<i>Juno and the Paycock</i> (US: <i>The Shame of Mary Boyle</i>)	1930	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	John Maxwell (uncredited)	British International Pictures	BR: Wardour Films, 1929; US: BIP (America) and Harold Auten, 1930
<i>City of Song</i> (US: <i>Farewell to Love</i>)	1931	BR-DE	Carmine Gallone	Arnold Pressburger, Isidore W. Schlesinger	Allianz Tonfilm GmbH / British Sound Film Prod. / Tobis Filmkunst	BR: Sterling Films, 1931; US: World Trade Exchange, 1933; GBPCA, 1935; SA: African Consolidated Films (ACF), 1932
<i>The Congress Dances</i> (<i>Der Kongress tanzt</i>) [MLV]	1931	BR-DE	Erik Charell	Erich Pommer	UFA (English-language version of German Original, imported by Gaumont British)	BR: [Gaumont British], 1931 DE: UFA, 1931; US: UA, 1932; Bermuda: 1932
<i>The Exile</i>	1931	USA	Leonard Harper, Oscar Micheaux	Oscar Micheaux, Frank Schiffman	Micheaux Film	US: Micheaux Film & Norman Distributing Co., 1931
<i>The Ghost Train</i>	1931	BR	Walter Forde	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: W & F Films, 1931; US: GBPCA, 1933
<i>Michael and Mary</i>	1931	BR	Victor Saville	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: Ideal Films, 1931 US: Universal, 1932; SA: ACF, 1932
<i>One Heavenly Night</i>	1931	USA	George Fitzmaurice	Samuel Goldwyn	Samuel Goldwyn Co.	US: UA, 1931; SA: ACF, 1932; Bahamas: 1932
(Noel Coward's) <i>Private Lives</i>	1931	USA	Sidney Franklin	Irving Thalberg	MGM	US: MGM, 1931; Bahamas: 1932

<i>Rich and Strange</i> (US: <i>East of Shanghai</i>)	1931	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	John Maxwell	British International Pictures (Elstree Studios)	BR: Wardour Films, 1931; US: Powers Pictures, 1932
<i>Sally In Our Alley</i>	1931	BR	Maurice Elvey	Basil Dean	Associated Radio Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: RKO Radio, 1931
<i>The Skin Game</i>	1931	BR	Alfred Hitchcock		British International Pictures (Elstree Studios)	BR: Wardour Films, 1931; US: BIP (America), 1931; US: Powers Pictures Inc., 1932; SA: ACF, 1932
<i>The Speckled Band</i>	1931	BR	Jack Raymond	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions / British & Dominions Film Corp. (B&D)	BR: W & F Films, 1931; US: First Division, 1931; [re-release] BR: Equity British Films, 1938
<i>Sunshine Susie</i> (US & Bahamas: <i>Office Girl</i>)	1931	BR	Victor Saville	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington) [Remake of German film <i>Die Privatsekretärin</i> prod. by Greenbaum]	BR: Ideal Films, 1931; US: RKO Radio, 1932; SA: ACF, 1932; Bahamas: 1934
<i>Waterloo Bridge</i>	1931	USA	James Whale		Universal Pictures	US: Universal, 1931; SA: 1934
<i>After the Ball</i>	1932	BR	Milton Rosmer	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: Gaumont British Distributors (GBD), 1932; US: Fox Film, 1932; JA: BFDA, 1933
<i>Baroud</i> (US: <i>Love in Morocco</i>) [MLV]	1932	BR-FR [Foreign]	Rex Ingram	Rex Ingram, Mansfield Markham	Rex Ingram Productions (made in Morocco) [French & English versions made.]	FR: Les Films Armor, 1933; BR: Ideal Films, 1933; US: GBPCA, 1933; Bahamas: 1934
<i>The Blue Danube</i>	1932	BR	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions / British & Dominions	BR: W & F Films, 1932; US: Mundus Distributing Corp., 1934; SA: ACF, 1933
<i>Girl From Maxim's</i>	1932	BR	Alexander Korda	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1933; US: J. H. Hoffberg Co., 1936
<i>Goodnight, Vienna</i> (US: <i>Magic Night</i>)	1932	BR	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions / British & Dominions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1932; US: UA, 1932; [re-release] BR: Equity British Films, 1937

<i>His Royal Highness</i> (US: <i>His Loyal Highness</i>)	1932	BR	F.W. Thring	F.W. Thring (uncredited)	Efftee Film Productions (made in Australia)	AUS: Universal Pictures, 1932
<i>The Impassive Footman</i> (US: <i>Woman in Bondage</i>)	1932	BR	Basil Dean	Basil Dean	Associated Talking Pictures (ATP) (Ealing Studios)	BR: RKO Radio, 1932; BR: Harold Auten, 1932; SA: 1934
<i>Let Me Explain, Dear</i>	1932	BR	Gene Gerrard, Frank Miller	John Maxwell	British International Pictures	BR: Wardour Films, n.d.; JA: BFDA, 1933
<i>The Lodger</i> (US: <i>The Phantom Fiend</i>)	1932	BR	Maurice Elvey	Julius Hagen	Julius Hagen Productions (Twickenham Studios)	BR: W & F Films, 1932; US: Olympic Pictures, 1935; Bahamas: 1934;
<i>Looking on the Bright Side</i>	1932	BR	Graham Cutts, Basil Dean	Basil Dean	Associated Radio Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: RKO Radio, 1932; SA: ACF, 1934
<i>The Love Contract</i>	1932	BR	Herbert Selpin	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions / British & Dominions	BR: W & F Films, 1932; SA: ACF, 1933
<i>The Man From Toronto</i>	1932	BR	Sinclair Hill	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures / British Lion (Islington)	BR: Ideal Films, 1933; SA: ACF, 1934
<i>Marry Me</i>	1932	BR	William Thiele	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: Ideal Films, 1932; Bahamas: 1934; JA: BFDA, 1933
<i>Number Seventeen</i> (US: <i>Number 17</i>)	1932	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	Leon M. Lion	British International Pictures (Elstree Studios)	BR: Wardour Films, 1932
<i>The Passionate Plumber</i>	1932	USA	Edward Sedgwick	Harry Rapf	MGM	US & BR: MGM, 1932; SA: MGM (S.A.), 1932
<i>Rome Express</i>	1932	BR	Walter Forde	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1932; US: Universal Pictures, 1933; SA: ACF, 1933
<i>Service For Ladies</i> (US: <i>Reserved for Ladies</i>)	1932	BR	Alexander Korda	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions for Paramount British Pictures	BR: Paramount British Pictures, 1932; US: Paramount, 1932
<i>Smilin' Through</i>	1932	USA	Sidney Franklin	Albert Lewin	MGM	US: MGM, 1932; SA: MGM (S.A.), 1933

<i>Tell Me Tonight</i> (US: <i>Be Mine Tonight</i>) [MLV]	1932	BR-DE [Foreign]	Anatole Litvak	Hermann Fellner, Josef Somlo	Cine-Alliance (made in Germany)	BR: W & F Films; US: Universal, 1933; JA: BFDA, 1933
<i>There Goes The Bride</i>	1932	BR	Albert de Courville	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures / British Lion (Beaconsfield) [Remake of German Film: <i>Ich bleib' bei dir</i> , prod. by Schulz und Wüller]	BR: Ideal Films, 1932; US: GBPCA, 1933
<i>Aunt Sally</i> (US: <i>Along Came Sally</i>)	1933	BR	Tim Whelan	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GBD, 1934; US: GBPCA, 1934; SA: 1935; Bermuda: 1934; JA: 1934
<i>Berkeley Square</i>	1933	USA	Frank Lloyd	Jesse L. Lasky	Fox Film Corporation	US: Fox Film Corp., 1933; SA: 1934
(Noel Coward's) <i>Bitter Sweet</i>	1933	BR	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions / British & Dominions	BR: UAC, Ltd., 1933; US: UA, 1933; SA: ACF, 1934
<i>Captured!</i>	1933	USA	Roy Del Ruth	Edward Chodorov	WB (as The Vitaphone Corporation)	US: Vitaphone Corp. (WB), 1933
<i>Cash</i> (US: <i>For Love or Money</i>)	1933	BR	Zoltan Korda	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: Paramount British Pictures, 1933; US: J.H Hoffberg Co., B&D, and Mundus Distributing Corp, 1934
<i>Cavalcade</i>	1933	USA	Frank Lloyd	Frank Lloyd	Fox Film Corporation	US: Fox Film Corp., 1933; BR: Fox Film Co. Ltd, 1933
<i>The Constant Nymph</i>	1933	BR	Basil Dean	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1933; US: Fox Film, 1934; SA: 1934; Bahamas: 1935; JA: 1934
<i>Emperor Jones</i>	1933	USA	Dudley Murphy		John Krimsky and Gifford Cochran, Inc.	US: UA, 1933; JA: 1935
<i>The Fire Raisers</i>	1933	BR	Michael Powell	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British	BR: W & F Films, 1934; Bahamas: 1935; JA: 1934
<i>The Fortunate Fool</i>	1933	BR	Norman Walker	Jack Eppel	Jack Eppel Productions (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1933;

<i>Friday the 13th</i>	1933	BR	Victor Saville	Ian Dalrymple, Angus MacPhail	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GBD, 1933; US: GBPCA, 1934; SA: 1934; JA: 1934
<i>The Ghoul</i>	1933	BR	T. Hayes Hunter	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: W & F Films, 1933; US: GBPCA, 1933; SA: 1934; Bahamas: 1935; JA: 1934
<i>The Good Companions</i>	1933	BR	Victor Saville	George Pearson, T.A. Welsh	Gaumont British/Welsh/Pearson (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: Ideal Films, 1933; US: Fox Film Corp., 1933; SA: ACF, 1933; Bahamas: Fox, 1934
<i>I Was A Spy</i>	1933	BR	Victor Saville	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Welwyn/Shepherd's Bush)	BR: W & F Films, 1933; US: Fox Film Corp., 1934; SA: 1934; JA: 1934
<i>It's A Boy</i>	1933	BR	Tim Whelan	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: W & F Films, 1933; US: GBPCA, 1934; SA: 1933; Bahamas: 1935; JA: 1935
<i>The King's Vacation</i>	1933	USA	John G. Adolphi		Warner Bros.	US: WB, 1933
<i>Perfect Understanding</i>	1933	BR	Cyril Gardner		Goria Swanson British Productions / ARP (Ealing Studios)	BR: United Artists Corp., Ltd., 1933; US: United Artists, 1933
<i>The Private Life of Henry VIII</i>	1933	BR	Alexander Korda	Alexander Korda; Ludovico Toeplitz	London Film Productions	BR: UAC, Ltd., 1933; US: UA, 1933; SA: UA/ACF, 1934; JA: 1934
<i>The Solitaire Man</i>	1933	USA	Jack Conway	Bernard H. Hyman	MGM	US: MGM, 1933; SA: MGM (S.A.), 1934
<i>The Song You Gave Me</i>	1933	BR	Paul L. Stein	John Maxwell	British International Pictures	BR: Wardour Films, 1933; US: Columbia Pictures, 1933

<i>Sorrell and Son</i>	1933	BR	Jack Raymond	Herbert Wilcox	British & Dominions Film	BR: UAC Ltd., 1933; US: UA, 1934; SA: MGM (S.A.), 1934; [re-release] BR: Ambassador Film Productions, 1938
<i>This Week of Grace</i>	1933	BR	Maurice Elvey	Julius Hagen	Real Art Productions / Twickenham Film Studios	BR: RKO Radio, 1933; SA: 1934; Bermuda: 1934
<i>Viktor und Viktoria</i>	1933	DE	Reinhold Schunzel	Eduard Kubat, Alfred Zeisler	UFA	US: UFA Film Co., 1935
<i>Yes, Mr Brown</i>	1933	BR	Jack Buchanan, Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions / British & Dominions	BR: W & F Films, 1933; US: UA, 1933; SA: ACF, 1933; [re-release] BR: Equity British Films, 1937
<i>Barretts of Wimpole Street</i>	1934	USA	Sidney Franklin	Irving Thalberg	MGM	US: MGM, 1934
<i>British Agent</i>	1934	USA	Michael Curtiz		Warner Bros. (WB) / First National (FN)	US: Warner Bros., 1934; BR: WB, 1935; SA: ACF, 1935
<i>Chu-Chin-Chow</i>	1934	BR	Walter Forde	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington/Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1934; US: GBPCA, 1934; JA: 1935
<i>Cleopatra</i>	1934	USA	Cecil B. DeMille	Cecil B. DeMille	Paramount Pictures	US: Paramount, 1934; SA: ACF, 1935
<i>Count of Monte Cristo</i>	1934	USA	Rowland V. Lee	Edward Small	Reliance Pictures	US: UA, 1934; BR: UAC Ltd., 1934; SA: UA/MGM (S.A.), 1935; Bermuda: UA/Reliance, 1934
<i>A Cup of Kindness</i>	1934	BR	Tom Walls	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1934
<i>Evensong</i>	1934	BR	Victor Saville	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1934; US: GBPCA, 1934; SA: 1934
<i>Evergreen</i>	1934	BR	Victor Saville	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1934; US: GBPCA, 1934-35; SA: ACF, 1934; JA: 1935

<i>The House of Rothschild</i>	1934	USA	Alfred L. Werker	Darryl F. Zanuck	Twentieth Century Pictures	US: UA, 1934; SA:UA/MGM (S.A.), 1934
<i>Jew Süß</i> (US: <i>Power</i>)	1934	BR	Lothar Mendes	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush/Islington)	BR: GBD, 1934; US: GBPCA, 1934; SA: ACF, 1934; JA: 1935;
<i>The Key</i>	1934	USA	Michael Curtiz	Robert Presnell Sr.	Warner Bros.	US and BR: Warner Bros., 1934; SA: 1936
<i>Kid Millions</i>	1934	USA	Roy Del Ruth	Samuel Goldwyn	Howard Productions, Inc.	US: UA, 1934
<i>Lorna Doone</i>	1934	BR	Basil Dean	Basil Dean	Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1935
<i>Love, Life And Laughter</i>	1934	BR	Maurice Elvey	Basil Dean	Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1934; SA: ACF, 1934
<i>The Man Who Knew Too Much</i>	1934	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	Ivor Montagu	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GFD, 1934; US: GBPCA, 1935; SA: ACF, 1935
<i>My Old Dutch</i>	1934	BR	Sinclair Hill	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GBD, 1934; SA: ACF, 1934
<i>Nell Gwyn</i>	1934	BR	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions / British & Dominions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1934; US: UA, 1934; SA: MGM (S.A.), 1934; Bermuda: 1935
<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i>	1934	BR	Thomas Bentley	Walter C. Mycroft	British International Pictures / Associated British Picture Corp	BR: Wardour Films, 1934; US: Alliance, 1935; SA: ACF, 1935
<i>The Private Life of Don Juan</i>	1934	BR	Alexander Korda	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1934; US: UA, 1934; SA: MGM (S.A.), 1934
<i>Queen's Affair</i> (US: <i>Runaway Queen</i>)	1934	BR	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions / British & Dominions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1934; US: UA, 1934
<i>The Rise of Catherine the Great</i>	1934	BR	Paul Czinner	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1934; US: UA, 1934
<i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i>	1934	BR	Harold Young	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1934; US: UA, 1935; SA: UA/MGM (S.A.), 1935; Bahamas: 1935

<i>The Secret of the Loch</i>	1934	BR	Milton Rosmer	Bray Wyndham	Wyndham Productions (ATP/Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1934;
<i>Sing As We Go!</i>	1934	BR	Basil Dean	Basil Dean	Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: Associated British Film Distributors (ABFD), 1934; SA: ACF, 1935-36;
<i>Something Always Happens</i>	1934	BR	Michael Powell	Irving Asher	WB/FN at Teddington Studios (WB British)	BR: Warner Bros., 1934
<i>Waltzes from Vienna</i> (US: <i>Strauss's Great Waltz</i>)	1934	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	Tom Arnold	Tom Arnold Productions / Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1934; US: Tom Arnold and GBPCA, 1935; SA: ACF, 1934; JA: 1934
<i>We Live Again</i>	1934	USA	Rouben Mamoulian	Samuel Goldwyn	Samuel Goldwyn Co.	US: UA, 1934; SA: ACF, 1935
<i>The 39 Steps</i>	1935	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	Ivor Montagu	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1935; US: GBPCA, 1935; SA: ACF, 1935; Bahamas: 1936
<i>Abdul the Damned</i>	1935	BR	Karl Grune	Max Schach	Alliance-Capital Productions (BIP Studios, Borehamwood)	BR: Wardour Films, 1935; US: Alliance, 1935
<i>Boys Will Be Boys</i>	1935	BR	William Beaudine	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GBD, 1935; US: GBPCA, 1935
<i>Brewster's Millions</i>	1935	BR	Thornton Freeland	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions / British & Dominions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1935; US: UA, 1935; [re-release] BR: Equity British Films, 1941
<i>Bulldog Jack</i> (US: <i>Alias Bulldog Drummond</i>)	1935	BR	Walter Forde	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1935; US: GBPCA, 1935
<i>Cardinal Richelieu</i>	1935	USA	Rowland V. Lee	Darryl F. Zanuck	Twentieth Century Pictures	US: UA, 1935; SA: UA/MGM (S.A.), 1935
<i>The Clairvoyant</i> (US: <i>The Evil Mind</i>)	1935	BR	Maurice Elvey	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GBD, 1934; US: GBPCA & Fox Film Corp., 1935
<i>David Copperfield</i>	1935	USA	George Cukor	David O. Selznick	MGM	US: MGM, 1935; SA: MGM (S.A.), 1935
<i>Death Drives Through</i>	1935	BR	Edward L. Cahn	Clifford Taylor (uncredited)	Clifford Taylor Productions / Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1935

<i>Escape Me Never</i>	1935	BR	Paul Czinner	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions / British & Dominions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1935; US: UA, 1935; [re-release] BR: Equity British Films, 1941
<i>First A Girl</i>	1935	BR	Victor Saville	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British	BR: Gaumont British Distributors, 1935; US: GBPCA, 1935; SA: ACF, 1936
<i>Forever England</i> (original title: <i>Brown on Resolution</i> ; US: <i>Born for Glory</i>)	1935	BR	Walter Forde, Anthony Asquith	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1935; US: GBPCA, 1935; SA: ACF, 1935; [re-release] US: Monogram, 1940; GB: International Film Renters Ltd., 1941
<i>The Ghost Goes West</i>	1935	BR	Rene Clair	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1936; US: UA, 1936; SA: UA/MGM (S.A.), 1936
<i>Honeymoon For Three</i>	1935	BR	Leo Mittler	Stanley Lupino	Gaiety Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1935
<i>The Iron Duke</i>	1935	BR	Victor Saville	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush / Shepperton/Islington)	BR: GBD, 1935; US: GBPCA, 1935; SA: ACF, 1935; JA: 1935
<i>The Lives of a Bengal Lancer</i>	1935	USA	Henry Hathaway	Louis D. Lighton	Paramount Productions Inc.	US: Paramount, 1935; BR: Paramount Pictures Ltd. (UK), 1935
<i>Look Up And Laugh</i>	1935	BR	Basil Dean	Basil Dean	Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1935
<i>Me and Marlborough</i>	1935	BR	Victor Saville	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1935
<i>Midshipman Easy</i>	1935	BR	Carol Reed	Basil Dean	Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1935
<i>Moscow Nights</i> (US: <i>I Stand Condemned</i>)	1935	BR	Anthony Asquith	Alexis Granowsky	Denham Productions / London Film Productions	BR: GFD, 1935; US: UA, 1936; SA: UA/MGM (S.A.) 1936;
<i>Music Hath Charms</i>	1935	BR	Thomas Bentley	Walter C. Mycroft	British International Pictures	BR: Wardour Films, n.d.
<i>The Night Is Young</i>	1935	USA	Dudley Murphy	Harry Rapf	MGM	US: MGM, 1935

<i>Passing of the Third Floor Back</i>	1935	BR	Berthold Viertel	Ivor Montagu	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1935; US: GBPCA, 1936
<i>Peg of Old Drury</i>	1935	BR	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox Productions / British & Dominions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1935; US: Paramount, 1936; [re-release] BR: Equity British Films, 1941
<i>Phantom Ship</i> (US: <i>Mystery of the Marie Celeste</i>)	1935	BR	Denison Clift	Henry Passmore	Hammer Film Production	BR: GFD, 1935; US: Guaranteed Pictures Corp., 1936
<i>Play Up The Band!</i>	1935	BR	Harry Hughes	Eric Donaldson, Basil Humphrys	City Film Corporation (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1935
<i>Ruggles of Red Gap</i>	1935	USA	Leo McCarey	Arthur Hornblow Jr	Paramount Pictures	US: Paramount, 1935; BR: Paramount British Pictures, 1935
<i>Sanders of the River</i> (orig.: <i>Congo Raid</i>)	1935	BR	Zoltan Korda	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1935; US: UA, 1935; SA: UA/MGM (S.A.), 1935
<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	1935	USA	Jack Conway	David O. Selznick	MGM	US: MGM, 1935; SA: MGM (S.A.), 1936
<i>Triumph of Sherlock Holmes</i>	1935	BR	Leslie S. Hiscott	Julius Hagen	Real Art Productions	BR: GBD, 1935; US: Olympic Pictures, 1935
<i>The Tunnel</i> (US: <i>Transatlantic Tunnel</i>)	1935	BR	Maurice Elvey	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush) [Remake of the German film <i>Der Tunnel</i> (1933) prod. by Vandor]	BR: GBD, 1935; US: GBPCA, 1935; CA: Regal Films Ltd., 1935; SA: 1936; Bahamas: 1936 [re-release] BR: GFD, 1938
<i>As You Like It</i>	1936	BR	Paul Czinner	Paul Czinner, Joseph Schenck	Inter-Allied Film Producers / 20th Century Fox (Ellstree Studios, Borehamwood)	BR & US: 20th Century Fox, 1936
<i>The Beloved Vagabond</i>	1936	BR	Curtis Bernhardt	Ludovico Toeplitz	Toeplitz Productions Ltd (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1936; US: Columbia Pictures, 1937
<i>Bride of Frankenstein</i>	1936	USA	James Whale	Carl Laemmle Jr	James Whale Production / Universal Pictures	US: Universal Pictures, 1935
<i>Cheer Up!</i>	1936	BR	Leo Mittler	Stanley Lupino (uncredited)	Stanley Lupino Productions (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1936

<i>Conquest of the Air</i>	1936	BR	Alexander Esway, Zoltan Korda	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1936 & 1940; US: UA, 1940
<i>Crown v. Stevens</i>	1936	BR	Michael Powell	Irving Asher	WB/FN at Teddington Studios (WB British)	BR: Warner Bros. Pictures Ltd., 1936
<i>The Flying Doctor</i>	1936	BR	Miles Mander		Gaumont British / National Productions (made in Australia)	AUS: Twentieth Century Fox, 1936; BR: GFD, 1937
<i>Forget-Me-Not</i> (US: <i>Forever Yours</i>)	1936	BR	Zoltan Korda	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1936; US: Grand National, 1936
<i>The House of the Spaniard</i>	1936	BR	Reginald Denham	Hugh Perceval	Independent Film Producers / Phoenix Films (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1936
<i>It's Love Again</i>	1936	BR	Victor Saville	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1936; US: GBPCA, 1936; SA: ACF, 1936
<i>Laburnum Grove</i>	1936	BR	Carol Reed	Basil Dean	Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1936; US: Anglo Films, 1941
<i>Little Lord Fauntleroy</i>	1936	USA	John Cromwell	David O. Selznick	Selznick International Pictures	US: UA, 1936; SA: MGM (S.A.), 1936
<i>Mary of Scotland</i>	1936	USA	John Ford	Pandro S. Berman	RKO Radio Pictures	US & BR: RKO Radio, 1936; SA: 1936
<i>Queen of Hearts</i>	1936	BR	Monty Banks	Basil Dean	Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1936
<i>Rembrandt</i>	1936	BR	Alexander Korda	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1936; US: UA, 1936; SA: UA/MGM (S.A.), 1937
<i>Rhodes of Africa</i> (US: <i>Rhodes</i>)	1936	BR	Berthold Viertel	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1936; US: GBPCA, 1936
<i>Sabotage</i> (US: <i>The Woman Alone</i>)	1936	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1936; US: GBPCA, 1937
<i>Secret Agent</i>	1936	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	Ivor Montagu	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1936; US: GBPCA, 1936

<i>Things To Come</i>	1936	BR	William Cameron Menzies	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1936; US: UA, 1936; SA: MGM (S.A.), 1936
<i>Tudor Rose</i> (US: <i>Nine Days a Queen</i>)	1936	BR	Robert Stevenson	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GBD, 1936; US: GBPCA, 1936
<i>Where There's a Will</i>	1936	BR	William Beaudine	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GBD, 1936; US: GBPCA, 1937
<i>Windbag the Sailor</i>	1936	BR	William Beaudine	Michael Balcon	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GBD, 1936
<i>21 Days</i> (US: <i>21 Days Together</i>)	1937	BR	Basil Dean	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: Columbia Pictures Corp., 1940; US: Columbia Pictures, 1940
<i>Brief Ecstasy</i> (US: <i>Dangerous Secrets</i>)	1937	BR	Edmond T. Greville	Hugh Perceval	Phoenix Films (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1937; US: Grand National, 1938
<i>Dark Journey</i>	1937	BR	Victor Saville	Victor Saville	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1937; US: UA, 1937
<i>Dreaming Lips</i>	1937	BR	Paul Czinner	Paul Czinner, Max Schach	Trafalgar Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1937; US: UA, 1937
<i>Elephant Boy</i> (Filmed in 1935)	1937	BR	Robert J. Flaherty, Zoltan Korda	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1937; US: UA, 1937; SA: UA/MGM (S.A.), 1937
<i>Emperor's Candlesticks</i>	1937	USA	George Fitzmaurice	John W. Considine Jr	MGM	US & BR: MGM, 1937
<i>Farewell Again</i> (US: <i>Troopship</i>)	1937	BR	Tim Whelan	Erich Pommer	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1937; US: UA, 1938
<i>Fire Over England</i>	1937	BR	William K. Howard	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1937; US: UA, 1937
<i>Gangway</i>	1937	BR	Sonnie Hale		Gaumont British (Pinewood)	BR: GFD, 1937; US: GBPCA, 1937
<i>The Girl in the Taxi</i>	1937	BR	Andre Berthomieu	Curtis Bernhardt, Eugène Tucherer	British Unity Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1937
<i>Good Morning, Boys</i>	1937	BR	Marcel Varnel	Edward Black	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GBD, 1937

<i>Head Over Heels</i> (US: <i>Head Over Heels in Love</i>)	1937	BR	Sonnie Hale	S.C. Balcon	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GBD, 1937; US: GBPCA, 1937
<i>History is Made At Night</i>	1937	USA	Frank Borzage	Walter Wanger	Walter Wanger Productions	US: UA, 1937
<i>King Solomon's Mines</i>	1937	BR	Robert Stevenson, Geoffrey Barkas	Geoffrey Barkas	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GFD, 1937; US: GBPCA, 1937
<i>Knight Without Armour</i>	1937	BR	Jacques Feyder	Alexander Korda		BR: UAC Ltd., 1937; US: UA, 1937
<i>Love From a Stranger</i> (US: <i>A Night of Terror</i>)	1937	BR	Rowland V. Lee	Max Schach	Trafalgar Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1937; US: UA, 1937
<i>Non-Stop New York</i>	1937	BR	Robert Stevenson		Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush)	BR: GFD, 1937; US: GBPCA, 1937
<i>Over She Goes</i>	1937	BR	Graham Cutts		Associated British Picture Corp.	BR: ABPC, 1937
<i>Paradise for Two</i> (US: <i>Gaiety Girls</i>)	1937	BR	Thornton Freeland	Alexander Korda	Denham Productions / London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1937; US: UA, 1938
<i>The Prisoner of Zenda</i>	1937	USA	John Cromwell	David O. Selznick	Selznick International Pictures	US: UA, 1937; BR: UAC Ltd., 1937; SA: UA/MGM (S.A.), 1937
<i>Return of the Scarlet Pimpernel</i>	1937	BR	Hanns Schwartz	Alexander Korda, Arnold Pressburger	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1937; US: UA, 1938
<i>The Show Goes On</i>	1937	BR	Basil Dean	Basil Dean	Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1937
<i>St. Martin's Lane</i> (US: <i>Sidewalks of London</i>)	1937	BR	Tim Whelan	Erich Pommer	Mayflower Pictures (Borehamwood)	BR: ABFD, 1938; US: Paramount, 1940
<i>A Star Is Born</i>	1937	USA	William A. Wellman	David O. Selznick	Selznick International Pictures	US: UA, 1937
<i>Storm in a Teacup</i>	1937	BR	Ian Dalrymple, Victor Saville	Victor Saville	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1937; US: UA, 1937
<i>Take A Chance</i>	1937	BR	Sinclair Hill	Harcourt Templeman	Grosvenor Films Ltd. (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1937

<i>Under the Red Robe</i>	1937	BR	Victor Sjöström (as Victor Seastrom)	Robert Kane	New World Pictures (Denham Studios)	BR & US: Twentieth Century Fox, 1937
<i>Victoria the Great</i>	1937	BR	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox	Imperator / Herbert Wilcox Productions	BR & US: RKO Radio, 1937
<i>A Yank at Oxford</i>	1937	BR	Jack Conway	Michael Balcon	MGM British Studios, Ltd. (Denham Studios)	US & BR: MGM Loew's, 1938
<i>Young and Innocent</i> (US: <i>The Girl Was Young</i>)	1937	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	Edward Black	Gaumont British (Shepherd's Bush / Pinewood)	BR: GFD, 1937; US: GBPCA, 1938
<i>Bank Holiday</i> (US: <i>Three on a Weekend</i>)	1938	BR	Carol Reed	Edward Black	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GFD, 1938; US: GBPCA, 1938
<i>The Challenge</i>	1938	BR	Milton Rosmer	Alexander Korda, Gunther Stapenhorst	Denham Films / London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1938; US: Film Alliance of the United States, Inc., 1939
<i>The Citadel</i>	1938	BR	King Vidor	Victor Saville	MGM British Studios, Ltd. (Denham Studios)	US & BR: MGM Loew's, 1938
<i>Climbing High</i>	1938	BR	Carol Reed		Gaumont British (Pinewood)	BR: MGM, 1938; US: Twentieth Century Fox, 1939; [re-release] BR: ABFD, 1942
<i>Convict 99</i>	1938	BR	Marcel Varnel	Edward Black	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GFD, 1938
<i>The Divorce of Lady X</i>	1938	BR	Tim Whelan	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1938; US: UA, 1938
<i>The Drum</i> (US: <i>Drums</i>)	1938	BR	Zoltan Korda	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1938; US: UA, 1938
<i>The Gaunt Stranger</i> (US: <i>The Phantom Strikes</i>)	1938	BR	Walter Forde	Michael Balcon	CAPAD (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1938; US: Monogram Pic., 1939
<i>Hey! Hey! USA</i>	1938	BR	Marcel Varnel	Edward Black	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: GFD, 1938
<i>The Lady Vanishes</i>	1938	BR	Alfred Hitchcock	Edward Black	Gainsborough Pictures (Islington)	BR: MGM, 1938; US: GBPCA, 1938
<i>Penny Paradise</i>	1938	BR	Carol Reed	Basil Dean	Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1938

<i>Pygmalion</i>	1938	BR	Anthony Asquith, Leslie Howard	Gabriel Pascal	Gabriel Pascal Productions	BR: GFD, 1938; US: MGM Loew's, 1938
<i>Sailing Along</i>	1938	BR	Sonnie Hale	Michael Balcon	Gaumont British (Pinewood)	BR: GFD, 1938; US: GBPCA, 1938
<i>Sixty Glorious Years</i> (US: <i>Queen of Destiny</i>)	1938	BR	Herbert Wilcox	Herbert Wilcox	Imperator Film Productions / Herbert Wilcox Productions	BR & US: RKO Radio, 1938
<i>South Riding</i>	1938	BR	Victor Saville	Alexander Korda, Victor Saville	London Film Productions / Victor Saville Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1938; US: UA, 1938
<i>The Ware Case</i>	1938	BR	Robert Stevenson	Michael Balcon	CAPAD (Ealing Studios)	BR: ABFD, 1938; US: Twentieth Century Fox, 1939
<i>Ask a Policeman</i>	1939	BR	Marcel Varnel	Edward Black	Gainsborough (Islington/Shepperton)	BR & US: MGM Loew's, 1939
<i>The Four Feathers</i>	1939	BR	Zoltan Korda	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1939; US: UA, 1939
<i>Goodbye, Mr Chips</i>	1939	BR	Sam Wood	Victor Saville	MGM British Studios, Ltd.	US & BR: MGM, 1939
<i>Over the Moon</i>	1939	BR	Thornton Freeland	Alexander Korda	London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1939; US: UA, 1940
<i>Shipyard Sally</i>	1939	BR	Monty Banks	Robert Kane	20th Century-Fox / Gainsborough	BR: 20th Century-Fox, 1939
<i>Tower of London</i>	1939	USA	Rowland V. Lee	Rowland V. Lee	Universal Pictures	US: Universal, 1939; BR: General Film Distributors (GFD), 1940
<i>Contraband</i> (US: <i>Blackout</i>)	1940	BR	Michael Powell	John Corfield	British National Films	BR: Anglo-American Film Corp., 1940; US: UA, 1940
<i>Thief of Bagdad</i>	1940	BR	Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell, Tim Whelan	Alexander Korda	Alexander Korda Films / London Film Productions	BR: UAC Ltd., 1940; US: UA, 1940

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Karen E. Beasley was born in England, but she grew up in Dallas, Texas where she watched numerous Classic Hollywood movies and British television shows in her free time. She earned her BA in Radio-TV-Film from Texas Christian University and her MA in History with archival certification from University of Texas at Arlington. During the periods between each of her degrees, she has worked on local film productions, served as a contract archivist for the Dallas Public Library and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and taught college courses on film survey, history and film, and US history. Upon receiving her PhD, Dr. Beasley plans to continue her academic scholarship in British and American Cinema as she teaches a variety of subjects including the histories of Film, the Atlantic, Britain, South Africa, and the United States.