

LATIN AMERICA IN THE MOVIETONE NEWS COLLECTION

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In 1980 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation announced that its Movietone newsfilm collection, containing documentary footage produced between 1919 and 1963, would be given to the University of South Carolina. Soon thereafter one-fifth of the collection, some twelve million feet of unduplicated footage, was shipped to the university's central campus in Columbia. Transfer of the film was suspended, however, when Twentieth Century Fox was purchased by a multinational corporation. Footage for the years between 1919 and 1935, and for the period from September 1942 through August 1944, was included in the initial gift. This material is presently housed and available for research in Columbia, South Carolina. Among these materials are hundreds of thousands of feet of documentary film with Latin American content, much of it untouched since the time it was "vaulted" by Fox fifty years ago or more. As such, this material represents a largely unmined and potentially rich source of film information on Latin America. This research note will suggest the nature and extent of this collection.

Most of South Carolina's Movietone News footage exists in the form of "outtakes," or unedited film that was forwarded to Fox offices for possible use in the ten-minute newsreels that were produced twice each week. Only a fraction of this film ever found its way, in edited form, into the newsreel. The rest was simply stored. Relatively more useful to the researcher than the newsreel footage, the outtakes represent virtually "unviewed" film. In addition, any frame of the film may be reproduced as a still photograph. Enhancing the film's value are the "dope sheets" that photographers forwarded with each roll of film. These pages, which are available for the period after 1927, frequently contain information useful in interpreting the film footage.

Coverage of Latin America by the Fox photographers was sporadic. Remote areas were little visited in the early years, and even nations like Argentina, Brazil, and Chile were poorly covered. Only Mexico and Cuba were filmed fairly often, although coverage tended to be uneven in terms of themes and chronology. For example, of the nine rolls of film taken in Mexico in 1930, most deal with equestrian themes,

especially the "Independence Handicap" run in Aguas Calientes on 4 July of that year. Footage for both 1929 and 1931 is more abundant, and subject matter more diverse.

Movietone News photographers looked for scenes that they hoped would interest the moviegoing public back home. Beauty contests, sporting events, visits to Latin America by prominent North Americans, and local curiosities (like the Cuban who smoked cigarettes through his ears) were favored over weightier subjects. Nevertheless, the sheer volume of footage available in the Carolina newsfilm collection offers a broad range of topics for study: U.S.–Latin American relations, economic history, women's topics, transportation and sports topics, and Latin America's participation in World War II, to name but a few.

The information in the appendix to this note is drawn from a survey of the card catalogue accompanying the Movietone News collection at the University of South Carolina. It has been verified through dubbing selected footage on VHS videotape. It should be noted that all film shot between 1919 and 1928 is silent. The compilation in the appendix is neither definitive nor exact, and the minutes of viewing time listed are only approximations. In some cases, the roll of film indicated by a given index card has been lost through deterioration of the unstable nitrate stock, and due to errors in cataloguing, some film listed in the card file as "verified" is in fact lost. But most of the film rests in its repository awaiting viewing by Latin Americanists.

While the University of South Carolina welcomes researchers wishing to work in the Movietone News collection, a fee is charged for materials dubbed for classroom or commercial use, as well as for still photos reproduced for use in publications. Information regarding fees and scheduling visits to the collection is available through the Media Services Division of the Instructional Services Center at the University of South Carolina–Columbia. Academic researchers are advised to telephone the archive and make arrangements with either the director and assistant director for using the Movietone archive.

APPENDIX 1

Movietone News Film Materials by Nation, Year, and Number and Length of Rolls

<i>Nation</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Rolls</i>	<i>Minutes</i>
Argentina	1922–1928	13	28
	1929–1935	11	68
	1943–1944	3	17
Bolivia	1923–1925	11	21
	1943	1	1
Brazil	1922–1927	6	10
	1929–1934	5	17
	1942–1944	32	39
Chile	1922–1929	6	11
Colombia	1921–1930	19	47
	1942–1944	6	34
Cuba	1921–1928	51	180
	1929–1934	51	455
	1942–1944	5	9
Dominican Republic	1922–1928	4	16
	1944	2	9
Ecuador	1943	1	6
Guatemala	1923	5	13
Haiti	1929	2	14
Honduras	1923	3	7
Mexico	1919–1928	91	212
	1929–1935	75	563
	1942–1944	44	184
Nicaragua	1931	1	26
Panama	1920–1928	12	40
	1929–1934	24	218
Peru	1923–1928	4	10
	1931	2	17
	1942–1943	6	14
Puerto Rico	1921–1928	4	16
	1929–1931	2	23
Uruguay	1942–1944	3	8
U.S.–Latin America	1919–1927	29	35
	1928–1935	69	507
	1942–1944	76	296