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Vučetić, Mihailo

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The Power of Words from Disney to de Gaulle: Gaucho Goofy, BBC, Free France & Argentina's Second World War Neutrality

Mihailo Vučetić¹

The Second World War was a global conflict fought not only on battlefields but through diplomacy, ideology, and various methods of resistance. One country that emerges as a fascinating example of these meshes is Argentina. This country navigated between its proclaimed neutrality and perceived sympathy for the Axis powers, a stance that underwent significant shifts following the June Revolution of 1943, a military coup d'état against President Ramón Castillo. This period marked a weakening of hemispheric ties with the United States. It brought into focus Argentina's role as a battleground of competing ideological forces, including US-driven propaganda and European cultural influences. For years, the United States, under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy, sought to improve relations with Latin America. Nelson Rockefeller, a close ally of Roosevelt, also played a pivotal role in these efforts, as he traveled extensively to South America, producing documentaries aimed at fostering a good image of the region back in the US. These aims influenced propaganda production through the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), combining Hollywood's movies and Disney's iconic animations. This propaganda aimed at cultural indoctrination before the Second World War, and notable examples are the cartoons *Saludos Amigos* and the *Tres Caballeros*. Adding to this already intricate dynamics, a popular saying at the time captured Argentina's unique development: "Argentines are Italians who speak Spanish, think they're British, and live in Paris."² Yet, beneath the surface of this complex socio-political and cultural interplay, with neglect towards indigenous communities, Argentina's wartime see-saw—marked by apparent neutrality, competing U.S. interests with deep European cultural ties—gave rise to a lesser-known chapter of history: Albert Guérin's Free French resistance movement in the so-called "Paris of South America," Buenos Aires. Guérin's background adds a fascinating dimension to this narrative. His life exemplifies entrepreneurial acumen and profound political commitment. The inheritance of his family's perfume store in Buenos Aires shaped his future endeavors as an industrialist and key figure of the French Resistance abroad. His experiences as a French soldier in the First World War solidified his opposition to fascism and

¹ Mihailo Vučetić is a junior at Macalester College double majoring in history and political science. His research focuses on comparative historical and political analysis, examining connections between Europe and Latin America. He is especially interested in social movements, political space, and the ways local struggles resonate across different regional contexts. He is currently considering pursuing a PhD to continue his studies.

² Robert C. Thornett, "In Argentina, a Lighthouse for the Hemisphere," *Commentary Magazine*, May 2025, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/robert-thornett/de-woking-rebuilding-latin-america/>.

positioned him as a leading advocate for Free France in Latin America. Guérin's ideological stance was heavily influenced by historical context and his individual experiences, leading to his successful activism and leadership.

This essay will explore how resistance can manifest far from the war's front lines, as demonstrated by Argentina, a nation widely viewed after the war as sympathetic to the Axis powers. I aim to explore Argentina's shifting wartime dynamics by analyzing its dual use of propaganda—domestic efforts to bolster resistance and foreign campaigns for political indoctrination. Such an approach seeks to uncover a significant yet often overlooked narrative, paradoxically linking extensive top-down U.S. propaganda strategies with Guérin's grassroots Free France movement. Such interchange challenges assumptions, demonstrates the global reach of resistance, and reminds us that even in overlooked places, some refused to subordinate themselves. My analysis will commence with the U.S. cultural-diplomatic influence before and during the Second World War, and then gradually move to Guérin's resistance committee.

The U.S. Response to Growing Nazi Influence in Latin America

Already in the 1930s, the United States was alarmed by the growing Nazi influence in Latin America and had to react as fast as possible to prevent having the enemy near its borders. In 1936, Carl Ackerman, a dean of Columbia University's School of Journalism, reported on Latin America after being asked by the State Department to increase U.S. contact with Latin American journalists.³ He underlined that “an alarming acceptance of European totalitarianism,” and how the next few years “will determine whether South America is to remain American or become Italo-Germanized.”⁴ Lee College Professor Dale Adams viewed Ackerman's report as crucial because it provided early evidence of the growing Nazi threat. By 1939, Roosevelt was becoming increasingly convinced that it posed a danger to the United States.⁵ Events in Hollywood contributed to Roosevelt's growing fears of Nazi influence. First, that same year, Anatole Litvak's movie “Confessions of a Nazi Spy” was banned in eighteen Latin American states, including what Adams underlined as “those of special interest to Nazi

³ Dale Adams, “Saludos Amigos: Hollywood and FDR's Good Neighbor Policy,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 24, no. 3 (2007): p. 290, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509200500486395>.

⁴ Adams, “Saludos Amigos,” p. 290.

⁵ Dale Adams's work from 2007 named “*Saludos Amigos: Hollywood and FDR's Good Neighbor Policy*” is one of the main secondary resources I will be using to substantiate my section on US foreign influence through cultural propaganda in Latin America. While I will also utilize other primary and secondary resources, Adams's work together with de Vignemont and Rueckert's essay from 2024 on “*How Exiles in Argentina Shaped France's Resistance to Nazi Occupation*,” will be main references of my analysis.

Germany,” which included Argentina.⁶ Second, even Charlie Chaplin’s movie from 1940, “The Great Dictator,” which was an assault on Hitler and his regime, was in 1941 banned in almost all of Latin America.⁷

Given Argentina’s strategic significance and the fragile geopolitical landscape of the time, the Rockefeller family—already deeply invested in expanding economic and business ambitions in Latin America since the early 1900s—played a crucial role in shaping U.S. interests in the region. The establishment of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913, initially aimed at humanitarian and cultural initiatives, further highlighted Rockefeller’s influence, especially after Nazi indications in South America placed Argentina, the country that in the 1920s ranked among the world’s top ten wealthiest per capita, at the center of American diplomatic and economic interests.^{8,9} However, Argentina’s increasing reliance on European immigration and forced displacement of indigenous communities, which I will explore further in the paper, exacerbated social tensions, income inequality, and labor shortages in its crucial agricultural sector.¹⁰ Thanks to land dispossession, Argentina developed a strong livestock export industry and extracted abundant resources. Ironically, however, these very factors that once propelled the country to the ranks of the world’s leading economies would drive it down the cycle of internal difficulties. Angel Cortes Sanchez, a columnist for *The Economist Review*, underlined the key contributors to Argentina’s fall in global economic prominence from the early twentieth century onwards.¹¹ Indeed, as a response to keep Latin American states aligned or neutral and in accordance with the Good Neighbor Policy, Rockefeller created the Motion Picture Division which worked alongside regular State Department clearance, and a self-censorship regulatory body the Production Code Administration tasked with “insur[ing] maintenance of content favorable to the inter-American program”.¹² Adams concurs that by 1940 the authority over censorship and regulation by this body would become unquestioned, preventing negative Hollywood images of Latin America from being

⁶ Adams, “Saludos Amigos,” p. 290.

⁷ Adams, “Saludos Amigos,” p. 290.

⁸ Rok Spruk, “The Rise and Fall of Argentina,” *Latin American Economic Review* 28, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40503-019-0076-2>.

⁹ Adams, “Saludos Amigos,” p. 290.

¹⁰ Cortes Sanchez, Angel. 2023. “Correcting Argentina’s Dark Past.” *The Economics Review*. January 25, 2023. <https://theeconreview.com/2023/01/25/correcting-argentinass-dark-past/>.

¹¹ Angel Cortes Sanchez, “Correcting Argentina’s Dark Past.”

¹² Adams, “Saludos Amigos,” p. 291; GPO, 1947. “History of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs.” Govinfo.gov. 1947. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-PR32_4600-33e5253c6cc8facd1d38a8ea0d846523/html/GOVPUB-PR32_4600-33e5253c6cc8facd1d38a8ea0d846523.htm.

exported to the region and vice versa.¹³ U.S. policy effort is better described here as a hemispheric information program rather than a project that aimed to “mold” Argentina, to be more specific, the executive order 8840 charged the OCIAA on 30 July 1941 with work on “the radio, the press, and the cinema” to strengthen “the bonds between the Nations of the Western Hemisphere” in the interest of hemispheric defense.¹⁴ On one profound level, by controlling narratives and content, the U.S. effectively improved its soft power strategy aimed at long-term fostering of cultural hegemony in the Americas. Such an approach went well beyond countering Axis influence; it proactively sought to embed American political values and economic interests within local communities, guiding them towards U.S. ideologies and commercial structures. This top-down approach from Washington set a precedent for using mass media and cultural tools to influence wider populations, foreshadowing the ways Guérin’s Committee would similarly employ propagandistic methods, regardless of his smaller, more grassroots level.

Disney’s Golden Screen in the South

The United States’ cultural outreach to Latin America during the 1940s was, as Adams notes, driven less by altruism and newfound ethnic consciousness but by mere economic and political pragmatism. With the European market for Hollywood movies deeply curtailed in the 1940s, Latin America became a great unexplored sphere that could fill that void.¹⁵ Amidst the crisis, studios and companies started producing Good Neighbor Policy-influenced movies, musicals, westerns, and even Walt Disney got involved with his cartoons. Two Disney movies emerged as epitomes of this period: “Saludos Amigos” from 1943 and “Tres Caballeros” from 1945.¹⁶ Interestingly, Disney became a chief propagandist of the United States in Latin America, sponsored almost entirely by Rockefeller’s OCIAA. The archival record supports a precise formulation that in 1941, this office financed Walt Disney’s South American research-and-goodwill tour with \$70,000 for the trip, and “entered into a further guarantee of \$150,000 against loss on a series of 12 film subjects.”¹⁷ Disney was extensively traveling to South

¹³ Adams, “Saludos Amigos,” p. 291.

¹⁴ Roosevelt, Franklin D. “Executive Order 8840—Establishing the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs in the Executive Office of the President and Defining Its Functions and Duties.” 30 July 1941. The American Presidency Project. University of California, Santa Barbara. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-8840-establishing-the-office-the-coordinator-inter-american-affairs-the>

¹⁵ Adams, “Saludos Amigos,” p. 292.

¹⁶ Adams, “Saludos Amigos,” p. 294.

¹⁷ GPO. 1947. “History of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs.” Govinfo.gov. 1947.

https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-PR32_4600-33e5253c6cc8facd1d38a8ea0d846523/html/GOVPUB-PR32_4600-33e5253c6cc8facd1d38a8ea0d846523.htm.

America, drawing similarities to Rockefeller's trips to the region a few years earlier. In *Saludos Amigos*, Gaucho Goofy developed as one of three main characters portraying Argentina, merging both traditions of Argentinian gauchos with the American cowboy archetype. This is a figure whose very design suggests it was conceived as a symbol of the U.S.-Argentine cultural commonality. However, because of the popularity of the first movie, by the time of the sequel, *Tres Caballeros*, Gaucho Goofy is notably absent and replaced by Mexican Panchito. This omission most plausibly reflects two pressures. First, after the 1943 military coup by Grupo de Oficiales Unidos (GOU), the new junta banned pro-Allied organizations and would have been very unlikely to permit the screening of a film that features a symbol of Argentine-American friendship. Second, from Washington's perspective, the character has become diplomatically strange given Argentina's sudden resistance to U.S. hemispheric alignment. As historian David Rock explains, the coup "brought a faction of anti-American nationalists to power" who resisted U.S. influence, attempting to even purchase weapons from Nazi Germany.¹⁸ Therefore, whether one emphasizes U.S. self-censorship or Argentine state censorship, the result was the same: Gaucho Goofy disappeared from screens.

Regardless of the severing of diplomatic ties with the Axis powers in January 1944—a step Argentina's junta took under sustained Allied pressure and not out of ideological alignment—relations with the U.S. continued to be tense. The increasing pressure on Buenos Aires fueled Latin American concerns of what Rock phrased as "returning to the bullying interventionism that had preceded the Good Neighbor policy."¹⁹ Even the earlier internal U.S. memoranda on the Economic Policy toward Argentina from March 1943 were already focused on critical materials and on conditioning economic concessions to Argentina's efforts "to prevent[] the use of its territory as a base for Axis subversive activities," rather than on reshaping Argentine foreign policy per se.²⁰ Such a situation soured Argentina's relations with its regional neighbors, like Brazil and Chile, as they continued to cooperate openly with the Allies. Thus, the strategic absence of Goofy demonstrates the way in which big cultural productions adapt to shifting geopolitical landscapes and leverage to sway broader public opinion. In doing so, Disney—together with the U.S. government behind it—not simply addressed immediate wartime necessities but cultivated an ongoing commitment to American values. By doing so, the U.S. effectively utilized film as a tool of diplomacy and even long-term influence in the region. Meanwhile, Argentina's inward turn following the junta strained diplomatic ties and set the stage for authoritarian governance. Against this backdrop, Disney's omission of Gaucho Goofy serves less as a

¹⁸ David Rock, ed., *Latin America in the 1940s: War and Postwar Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft567nb3f6/>.

¹⁹ Rock, *Latin America in the 1940s: War and Postwar Transitions*, p. 29

²⁰ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943, Volume V: The American Republics. Document 429. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1943v05/d429>

straightforward sign of U.S. realignment to Chile, Brazil, and Mexico alone than a revealing indication of how cultural productions adapted to intensifying anti-U.S. sentiment, censorship risks, and shifting regional politics.

Argentina's Identity Crisis

Argentina's struggle to define its national identity has long been seen in external pressures as well as in its internal tensions, particularly the persistent push-and-pull between tradition and modernization. This deliberate U.S. realignment in its approach did not occur in a vacuum; it is underlined by selective narrative construction shaping not only the external propagandistic picture of the state and dissenting voices from the region but also obscuring internal socio-political landscapes. This was problematic for Argentina, a state that, beneath its cultural complexities, grappled with significant internal tensions too. Already in the late 1800s, under President Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1868-1874), Argentina actively sought to impose European and U.S. ideals over rural and indigenous traditions. Sarmiento's presidency exemplifies this struggle of defining the Argentine national identity, capturing his vision in his seminal work "Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie."²¹ His work and ideals favored European "civilized" urban areas of Buenos Aires compared to rural gaucho traditions described as "barbaric."²² Sarmiento's close ties with the American thinker Horace Mann inspired his education policies and highlighted Argentina's commitment to a nation aligned with foreign ideals.²³ This vision, together with the growing U.S. influences, contributed to the legacy of internal divisions within Argentina, which culminated in the 1943 junta, whose nationalist officers officially prohibited all pro-Allied organizations and increasingly narrowed the space for symbols associated with U.S. internationalism. Seen in this light, the removal of Gaucho Goofy from *Tres Caballeros* also becomes legible as a practical response to the near-certainty that the film would have been censored outright had it featured a symbol of U.S.-Argentine unity. Over time, the tension between foreign-dominated visions and local identities deepened Argentina's internal divides.

Although official state-building narratives would emphasize Argentina as a European immigrant "melting pot," indigenous communities suffered displacement and marginalization. In the late 19th century, between the 1870s and 1880s, the so-called Conquest of the Desert took place under President Julio Argentino Roca (1880-1886, 1898-1904).²⁴ Conquest included military campaigns aimed at the violent removal of indigenous populations from the "frontiers" in Patagonia and the

²¹ Stan Veuger, "Rural Barbarism in Domingo Sarmiento's 'Facundo,'" American Enterprise Institute - AEI, 20 February, 2017,

<https://www.aei.org/society-and-culture/rural-barbarism-in-domingo-sarmientos-facundo>.

²² Veuger, "Rural Barbarism in Domingo Sarmiento's 'Facundo.'"

²³ Veuger, "Rural Barbarism in Domingo Sarmiento's 'Facundo.'"

²⁴ Veuger, "Rural Barbarism in Domingo Sarmiento's 'Facundo.'"

Pampas, opening lands for European settlers.²⁵ President Nicolás Avellaneda (1874-1880) was the one who distinguished earlier internal wars against indigenous peoples from the new state-driven conquest.²⁶ Interestingly, in chapter five of the book *The Conquest of the Desert*, Walter Delrio and Pilar Pérez noted that in 1879, addressing the soldiers, Avellaneda stated that “After so many years of war against the Indians, today it [the nation] comes out of the dark and a whole People is cheering the winners.”²⁷ Indigenous people were clearly considered a threat to the goods, people, and the social order of Argentina. Numerous indigenous communities were taken away and relocated from their lands during this period, and forced into rural labor under harsh conditions. Anthropologist Carolyne Larson concurs that these traditional narratives around the Conquest of the Desert were crucial in Argentine nation-building and “justified the erasure of indigenous voices from that national community after the 1880s.”²⁸ Understanding how this “modern” hierarchical vision—dependent even back then on foreign influences—of Argentina was established in the 19th century helps explain the new waves of foreign socio-political activity of the 20th century. Overlapping tensions—urban cosmopolitan against rural traditions, and external visions against local identities—set the stage for further foreign-influenced movements, including both those imposed from above by state actors and those driven by immigrant communities from within Argentina itself.

Albert Guérin & The Forgotten Front

The profound nineteenth-century socio-political complexities set the stage for the remarkable but lesser-known efforts of Albert Guérin’s Free French resistance movement in Argentina. Just as Sarmiento’s vision had privileged European immigrant communities over rural and indigenous traditions, Guérin’s committee drew primarily on Argentina’s French immigrant community and its Francophile allies, operating within a broad network shaped by those same longstanding hierarchies and agitations. This included not only European fascism but also Disney-like oversimplifications imposed by the U.S. cultural diplomacy narratives. While numerous resistance movements tend to be imagined as clandestine operations within Nazi-occupied Europe—such as the theater-based defiance in François Truffaut’s film *The Last Metro* (1980), in which Jewish theater director hides in the basement of his own theater in Nazi-occupied Paris, or the extraordinary survival strategy of Edith Hahn Beer (an Austrian Jewish law student who hid her true identity ultimately marrying a Nazi Officer to survive Holocaust)—the Southern Cone rarely comes to mind as an important center of resistance. Yet, after 1940, Buenos Aires became a Latin American hub of French resistance, thanks to Albert Guérin’s de

²⁵ Veuger, “Rural Barbarism in Domingo Sarmiento’s ‘Facundo.’”

²⁶ Larson, Carolyne R. 2020. *The Conquest of the Desert: Argentina’s Indigenous Peoples and the Battle for History*. Albuquerque: University Of New Mexico Press, p. 124.

²⁷ Larson, *The Conquest of the Desert: Argentina’s Indigenous Peoples and the Battle for History*, p. 124.

²⁸ Larson, *The Conquest of the Desert: Argentina’s Indigenous Peoples and the Battle for History*, p. 11.

Gaule Committee (Later renamed to the Free France Committee). This was the first such committee in the region, which highlighted the fragility of Vichy France's influence and actively distributed propaganda materials.²⁹

By 1943, Guérin's de Gaulle Committee had grown to around 4000 members and co-syndicated with other anti-fascist groups, such as Accion Argentina, whose members included figures like Celia de la Serna, the mother of famous Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara.³⁰ Vladimir Trouplin, a historian and head curator at Paris' Museum of the Order of the Liberation, in his 2024 interview with *New Lines*, said that for his war efforts, Guérin was amongst just a hundred people to receive the highest honor of France from de Gaulle, not as a soldier but as the first "Free France propagandist."³¹ But who was the man behind this movement, and how did he become so influential? Albert Guérin was born in Avignon in 1893, and in 1911, he moved for the first time to Argentina to take over his father's perfume business. He participated in WWI, where he received 55% disability due to gas poisoning.³² Thanks to his efforts in WWI, he received the Knight's Cross of the Legion and moved back to Argentina, where he was a chair of the Chamber of Commerce and the Committee of French Companies.³³ I believe that Guérin's activism did not occur in isolation. Despite a lack of resources, Guérin's family seems to have been steeped in republicanism and passed on their ideals to him.³⁴ The reflection of their values can be seen in his campaign against Vichy France and Nazi occupation, which he saw as a betrayal of France's republican legacy. His upbringing not only led him to Argentina in the early stages of his life but also gave him the foundation to confront fascism on foreign soil and fight for his heritage. Understanding Guérin's background highlights how his resistance movement intertwined with Argentina's broader socio-political environment. My work in sections about his Committee will primarily draw from the *New Lines* article "How Exiles in Argentina Shaped France's Resistance to Nazi Occupation" by journalists Diane de Vignemont and Phineas Rueckert, as well as detailed records from the Musée de l'Ordre de la Libération.

²⁹ Diane de Vignemont and Phineas Rueckert, "How Exiles in Argentina Shaped France's Resistance to Nazi Occupation," *New Lines Magazine*, 7 June 2024,

<https://newlinesmag.com/essays/how-exiles-in-argentina-shaped-frances-resistance-to-nazi-occupation>.

³⁰ Vignemont and Rueckert, "How Exiles in Argentina Shaped France's Resistance."

³¹ Vignemont and Rueckert, "How Exiles in Argentina Shaped France's Resistance."

³² "Albert GUÉRIN," *Musée de l'Ordre de La Libération*, 2024.

<https://www.ordredelaliberation.fr/fr/compagnons/albert-guerin#navbar>.

³³ "Albert GUÉRIN," *Musée de l'Ordre de La Libération*, 2024.

³⁴ Ordre de la Libération. *Concours national de la Résistance et de la Déportation: 1940. Entrer en Résistance. Comprendre, refuser, résister*. Edited by François Broche and Marie-Clotilde Génin-Jacquey. 2020.

https://www.ordredelaliberation.fr/sites/default/files/media/fichers/12MarsAM_CNRD_AFCL.pdf. p. 10.

Broadcasting Resistance

During the onset of the Second World War, communication tools played a crucial role in connecting exiled communities like Guérin's to broader resistance efforts across Europe and beyond. Among these, the BBC emerged as a particularly vital platform. De Gaulle used BBC radio to address citizens abroad about further actions, such as the establishment of the Free French government-in-exile. As de Gaulle proclaimed in his June 18, 1940 appeal, "France has lost a battle, but France has not lost a war," framing exile not as a defeat but as a continuation of the war.³⁵ Interestingly, Edith Hahn Beer in her book also mentioned how she listened to the BBC radio, where people like Thomas Mann would inform them about the situation in and outside Germany. However, for Edith, this was possible only in the months before the end of the war in Europe, but Guérin relied on the BBC from its early days. Through the BBC and telegrams, de Gaulle was trying to create a strong resistance support base abroad, important for French survival amidst Nazi occupation. As de Vignemont and Rueckert note, de Gaulle even wrote back to Guérin saying, "I congratulate you, confirm your appointment as Buenos Aires French group representative, and invite you to form a French action group and keep me informed of the situation."³⁶ Guérin initially decided to call it the "de Gaulle Committee," focusing on drawing greater support through propaganda from June 1940 onward. While the resistance in France was split between communist factions and centrist Gaullists, similar ideological tensions extended to Argentina. Despite his centrist stance, Guérin pragmatically collaborated with leftist-leaning groups—like already mentioned leftist Accion Argentina—creating a contentious and complex network. This situation highlights challenges in unifying work across ideological lines, especially in the region grappling with its own internal fractures. Through platforms like the BBC, Guérin's Committee gained critical information and raised funds for its Free France propaganda. By July 1940, Guérin became editor of the bulletin *Pour La France*, which distributed over 150,000 prints per issue in both Spanish and French.³⁷ Despite ideological differences, his efforts in sustaining morale and financial support for Free France from abroad underscore the crucial role of propaganda and communication networks in sustaining a strong resistance.

From Buenos Aires to The Frontlines

³⁵ UNESCO Memory of the World Programme. France and UK Appeal, 18 June 1940. PDF document.

https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/mow001/france_and_uk_appeal_18_june_1940.pdf, p. 2.

³⁶ Vignemont and Rueckert, "How Exiles in Argentina Shaped France's Resistance."

³⁷ "Albert GUÉRIN." Musée de l'Ordre de La Libération. 2024.

The profound historical and cultural ties between France and Argentina provide a compelling context for examining the role of the French community in Argentina during the Second World War. Historian at the University of San Andrés, Miranda Lida, explains that this connection is significant because, between 1857 and 1940, approximately 200,000 French immigrants moved to Argentina, with nearly all of them permanently settling in the country.³⁸ Indeed, Germans, Italians, and Spanish immigrants were also significant communities in the country. For that reason, Buenos Aires in the early 20th century was a vibrant cosmopolitan hub where these groups often interacted with the French community. For instance, Germans even had their own Spanish-language newspaper called *El Pampero*, which they could use to spread propaganda. However, despite the Germans' established media presence, Argentina has historically shared—and continues to share—strong cultural ties with France in many ways, setting the French community apart in its influence. This long-standing Argentine Francophilia, dating back to the era of Sarmiento, is evident in many aspects of the country's culture and history. Buenos Aires, with its grand boulevards and Beaux-Arts architecture reminiscent of Haussmann's Paris, echoes the sweeping elegance of the City of Lights. Even Argentina's national coat of arms holds a symbol of the French Revolution—the Phrygian cap—highlighting truly deep cultural and ideological connections between these two geographically distant nations. These enduring ties underscored the significance of Guérin's Free France Committee, which emerged as a formidable force when viewed against this historical backdrop. Such bonds were not reserved for Argentina but were regional, too. Luis Alberto Sanchez, Peruvian writer and former prime minister of Peru, even compared the fall of Paris under the Nazis to the fall of the Aztec Empire under Cortés and the Inca Empire to Pizarro's conquest.³⁹ This historical analogy underscores the significance of France's plight in the Americas. De Gaulle's Committee capitalized on these connections, playing a pivotal role in reigniting fervor for the Allies across Latin America. This wave of support is clearly reflected in the 400 volunteers who left the port of Buenos Aires, hailing from Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, and rural Argentina in support of the French liberation army.⁴⁰ The journey of these people from the cosmopolitan streets of Buenos Aires to the battlefields of Europe showcases transatlantic commitment to shared values of resistance and freedom.

Argentina's Wartime Paradox

Argentina's wartime paradox is reflected in its complex relationship with the de Gaulle Committee, where cultural ties with France clashed with growing fascist sentiment and internal divisions. If France fell, Argentina's young republic could too, and perhaps this was a trigger for support of the de Gaulle

³⁸ Vignemont and Rueckert, "How Exiles in Argentina Shaped France's Resistance."

³⁹ Vignemont and Rueckert, "How Exiles in Argentina Shaped France's Resistance."

⁴⁰ Vignemont and Rueckert, "How Exiles in Argentina Shaped France's Resistance."

Committee. Nevertheless, during the war, greater Argentine society was split between two factions: pro-Allies (aliadofilos) and pro-neutral (neutralistas). However, as Castillo, the president of Argentina's civil government in 1943, increasingly leaned toward declaring war on the Axis powers, tensions within the country's political and military elite reached a breaking point. His shift was likely influenced by Argentina's profound economic dependence on Britain and the U.S., both of whom exerted considerable pressure to align with the Allied cause. By this time, Argentina's lucrative export market, mainly in agriculture, had already started shrinking due to the wartime disturbances coupled with the mounting U.S. isolation and sustained propaganda efforts that tried to secure hemispheric unity against the Axis. Numerous people in high military ranks resented what they saw as British and American interference in Argentina's economy and politics, fearing that alliance with the Allies would only deepen these bonds. Seizing the moment of instability in 1943, they staged a military coup to take control of the state. This was greatly problematic for the de Gaulle Committee as anti-fascist movements in Argentina started being completely banned by the new regime. General Pablo Pedro Ramírez began his crackdown on media freedom immediately, making organizations like Accion Argentina one of the first banned groups.⁴¹ In 1944, *La France Nouvelle*, a newspaper that pointed out Argentina's complicity in the Nazi takeover of Europe, was banned in the country too. This newspaper was largely financed by Guérin, who drew his support for de Gaulle's war efforts in North Africa, becoming another target of censorship in Argentina.⁴²

Despite mounting U.S. pressure, Argentina initially refused to break relations with the Axis powers, even as the tides of war turned decisively against them, revealing an ongoing struggle with fascist sympathies. The Axis powers started facing defeat from all fronts and were routed westward across the prewar Polish border. Yet even then, in October 1944, the Argentine government established an administrative council to control Axis firms. It was not until March 27, 1945—just weeks before the end of the war—that Argentina formally declared war on the Axis powers.⁴³ This decision marked the culmination of a gradual shift in Argentina's foreign policy, signaling that the military junta had defined Argentina's definite break from its long-standing neutrality. This move was seen by many, including a historian at Universidad San Francisco in Quito, Ecuador, Christopher Minster, who described this as a calculated “ploy to place Argentine agents in place to help defeated Nazis escape after the war.”⁴⁴ In his work, Minster underscores many influential Argentines who were openly supportive of the Axis cause, pointing to figures such as Juan Domingo Perón—who served as a military attaché to

⁴¹ Vignemont and Rueckert, “How Exiles in Argentina Shaped France's Resistance.”

⁴² “Albert GUÉRIN.” Musée de l'Ordre de La Libération. 2024.

⁴³ Christopher Minster, “Why Argentina's Government Welcomed Nazis after WWII,” ThoughtCo, 4 April 2025, <https://www.thoughtco.com/why-did-argentina-accept-nazi-criminals-2136579>.

⁴⁴ Minster, “Why Argentina's Government Welcomed Nazis.”

Benito Mussolini in the late 1930s—as evidence of Argentina’s lingering fascist inclinations.⁴⁵ Argentina’s postwar role further complicated its contradictory legacy, as a nation torn between fascist tendencies and resistance movements. The country became a haven for fleeing Nazis like Adolf Eichmann, one of the primary organizers of the Holocaust, who managed to change his identity and flee to Argentina in 1950. His eventual capture by Israeli intelligence and subsequent trial and execution in 1960-61 highlights Argentina’s complex and at times contradictory role during and after the war—a nation concurrently grappling with fascist sympathies and the presence of resistance movements. This paradox underscores the broader Argentine Second World War collision of both domestic and foreign influences shaping the nation’s geopolitical stance and even its cultural identity. Argentina became a microcosm of the global struggle between democracy and totalitarianism, which, together with previously explained ties, deepened the stakes of this battle.

Public Sentiment & Political Tensions

Regardless of Argentina’s cautious stance and even sudden shift, the public reaction was markedly different. In August 1944, Argentines celebrated the liberation of Paris with great enthusiasm. Authors Vignemont and Rueckert highlighted that in Buenos Aires, the celebration was boisterous, with 200,000 people gathering spontaneously in Plaza de Francia in the Recoleta district—the largest such gathering of this cause in all of Latin America.⁴⁶ This massive public showcase of support underscores the disconnect between the Argentine government’s cautious neutrality—bordering on a tacit alignment with the Axis powers— and the pro-Allied sympathies that pervaded large segments of Argentine society. The October 17th, 1945, general strike, which propelled Perón to power, further highlights the profound dynamics of internal Argentine affairs, which, as I showcased, were shaped by such tensions. The working-class mobilization was driven by dire socio-economic conditions, described even as “ABNORMAL” by a U.S. commercial attaché in Buenos Aires, T. L. Hugh, exacerbated by the dislocation of labor in 1939.⁴⁷ This strike was even seen by some contemporaries, like historian Mark Alan Healey, as “surprisingly massive,” who attributed it to payoffs.⁴⁸ Rather than payoffs, this was, in my opinion, a clear example of culmination fueled by growing frustrations within the broader populace who lived in increasingly harder conditions, as documented in numerous economic analyses

⁴⁵ Minster, “Why Argentina’s Government Welcomed Nazis.”

⁴⁶ Vignemont and Rueckert, “How Exiles in Argentina Shaped France’s Resistance.”

⁴⁷ T. L. Hugh, “LABOR CONDITIONS in ARGENTINA, 1940,” *Monthly Labor Review* 52, no. 5 (1941): p. 1123, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41816517>.

⁴⁸ Mark Alan Healey, “The Fragility of the Moment: Politics and Class in the Aftermath of the 1944 Argentine Earthquake,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* (October 2002): p. 62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0147547902000200>.

of the time.⁴⁹ All these events demonstrate that even in socio-politically constrained societies—distant from the war and France yet profoundly influenced by cultural ties—resistance and solidarity can still emerge. Rather than passively reflecting European developments, Buenos Aires functioned as a key site for intellectual mediation, where, as Miranda Lida emphasizes, “los contactos transnacionales ocuparon un papel central en la vida de esta revista” (“transnational contacts occupied a central role in the life of this journal”), enabling French exile debates to be actively translated, republished, and politically reframed for an Argentine audience.⁵⁰ Argentina serves as a striking example of how global conflicts can intertwine with local identities and domestic political dynamics; the primary influence, as my essay has shown, ran from Europe and the United States into Argentina rather than the reverse; however, that does not diminish the significance of what Argentines chose to do with those influences. International wartime pressures deeply unsettled politics within a country, often treated as secondary to the central theaters of war.

Argentina’s Complex Neutrality & Role in Global Resistance Efforts

Argentina’s stance was not necessarily neutral but rather a delicate balance of its longstanding internal tensions. These tensions collided with the unbalanced diplomatic relations that were shaped by propaganda, particularly as demand for pro-Allied support in the 1930s and 1940s increased. Although officially neutral, Argentina’s actions—such as delays in severing ties with the Axis and hesitations in declaring war—reflected complex political and economic calculations. Ultimately, I concur that Argentina could never have been truly neutral, and indications of its support towards one side or another are easily evident in its diplomatic relations, specifically with other countries like the United States. This was particularly problematic because, as Adams points out, despite the name of Roosevelt’s policy, U.S. propaganda efforts were not merely aimed at fostering goodwill; rather, they aimed at actively shaping perceptions to counter growing Axis sympathies in Argentina. The omission of Gaucho Goofy from the Disney cartoon “Tres Caballeros” released in 1945 symbolizes a clear strategic shift in how the U.S. interplayed its cultural diplomacy to reflect changing geopolitical dynamics in the region. Considering that this propaganda not only emerged as a tool for shaping external relations but also for manipulating internal narratives to align them with broader U.S. objectives—rather than those of the Allies—many of these tactics continued to influence the region

⁴⁹ Healey, “The Fragility of the Moment: Politics and Class in the Aftermath of the 1944 Argentine Earthquake,” p. 62.

⁵⁰ Lida, Miranda. “Debates del exilio francés de Nueva York durante la ocupación nazi. Su recepción en la Revista de los intelectuales europeos en América (Buenos Aires, 1942–1946).” *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana* “Dr. Emilio Ravignani”, no. 55 (2021). Universidad de Buenos Aires / CONICET. <https://revistascientificas.filo.uba.ar/index.php/boletin/article/view/10878/9836>. p. 34.

during the Cold War. Argentina's wartime experience, specifically its exposure and struggle between different ideologies, primed the country for the next phase of rivalry. The United States, having established propaganda efforts not only in Argentina but also in almost the whole of Latin America, repurposed its channels to combat communist and Soviet threats during the Cold War period. This is how strategic propaganda tactics and internal divisions from Allies and Axis laid the foundation of the Argentine Cold War trajectory.

Despite Argentina's government's reluctance to actively engage important segments of Argentine civil society, led in significant part by Francophile networks, expatriated communities, and anti-fascist activists, who refused to take no for an answer and rejected the fall of France by increasing resistance against Nazi occupation abroad. Guérin's committee showcases the importance of grassroots organizing far away from the main war scenes. He succeeded in uniting diverse ideological factions, showcasing both pragmatic methods and the urgency of countering growing Nazi influence in Argentina and beyond, highlighting Latin America's significant, yet often overlooked, importance in global efforts against fascism. The Free French Committee, under the lead of Albert Guérin, underscores broader South America's pre-war significance as a region that, despite initial neglect, gained U.S. attention and revealed the potential of becoming a crucial center of ideological resistance. For this reason, to some extent, Guérin's use of propaganda efforts—through bulletins, financing of various anti-fascist groups, cultural ties, and leveraging close French-Argentine historical connections—ironically and even paradoxically mirrored that of Disney and the United States. The interplay between Guérin's grassroots activism and the United States' top-down cultural diplomacy efforts, despite their vertical difference, reveals a shared reliance on propaganda to build alliances and inspire resistance. Therefore, both Guérin's movement and U.S. propaganda campaigns indicate how resistance during WWII extended beyond battlefields to even geographically distant regions. Ultimately, demonstrating that Argentina's wartime narrative—often emphasized as pro-Axis when looked through the propaganda lenses of the U.S. efforts—is rather shaped by continuously competing ideological forces, underscoring the power of propaganda in its redefinition of political landscapes in resistance to oppressive regimes.



Fig. 1, Anonymous, *Three Caballeros - Donald Duck* - Walt Disney Cartoon - Movie Poster, 1945, eBay.



Fig. 2, Anonymous, *Albert Guérin*, photograph. date unknown, Ordre de la Libération.



Fig. 3 Propaganda Poster of Guérin's Comité de Gaulle, Anonymous, soft cover, Buenos Aires Libros, Buenos Aires.



Fig. 4, Eichmann's Argentinean worker's I.D. for Mercedes-Benz, issued in the name of Ricardo Klement, photograph, 1959, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.



Fig. 5, Workers union on October 17, 1945: The day the working people changed the history of Argentina, photograph, 1945, InfoGel Archive.