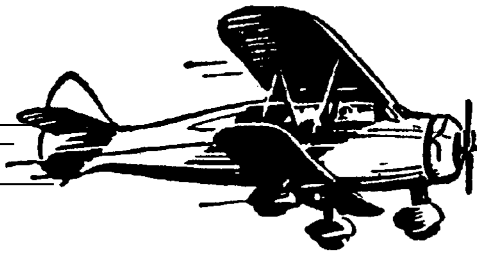
INTRODUCTION



An Entertainment Century

Who could have imagined the degree to which airplane antics, a passion for motion pictures, and an appetite for pleasure travel would shape a century?

Inauspicious Seeds, Powerful Fruit

In December, 1903, a motor-driven, heavier-than-air flying machine—built by Orville and Wilbur Wright and flown first by Orville—remained aloft for twelve seconds and traveled 120 feet. A handful of helpers observed the historic flight at Kill Devil Hills in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Most people ignored the achievement, even if they heard about it. In general, disbelief and an inexplicable lack of curiosity marked the debut of the delicate aircraft.

For the next few years the Wright brothers worked in relative obscurity at their home factory in Dayton, Ohio, while they improved their machine's capabilities. When the brothers formed an exhibition team of fliers who followed the circuit of country fairs, the Wright Flyer finally established itself in the consciousness of the country as entertainment. Races and tricks excited the cheering crowds, who accepted the flying machine as one more thrill in their expanding world of commercial amusements. The ticket

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buyers purchased seats in the grandstands and watched this fragile, often-unreliable machine climb and dive and loop. Few imagined themselves ever using an airplane for transportation.

While the Wright brothers experimented at Kitty Hawk in 1903, Edwin S. Porter projected an action-packed motion picture, *The Great Train Robbery,* before an audience unaccustomed to such sustained filmed energy, scene after scene, for twelve long minutes. The perplexed audience watched a theft at gun point, pursuit of criminals by lawmen on horseback, and the capture of lawbreakers as they struggled to piece the scripted segments into a story.

Before long, audiences understood the relationship of the scenes and integrated them into the intended narrative. They threw themselves wholeheartedly into the experience and paid hard-earned money to satisfy an unquenchable thirst for entertainment. Within a few years millions of people in many parts of the world were enjoying a great variety of silent film comedies and dramas. As a consequence, an international business complex of film producers, distributors, and exhibitors blossomed along with the novel entertainment medium.

In December, 1933, thousands of dedicated moviegoers trudged through huge snowdrifts and lined up in record-breaking cold weather to see the much-heralded Christmas show at New York's Radio City Music Hall, featuring *Flying Down to Rio,* a motion picture romance with spoken dialog and music. At the end of an elaborately plotted, boy-meets-girl story, in a breathtaking show-business climax, chorus girls danced on the wings of airplanes high above the heads of tourists at a resort hotel on Copacabana Beach near Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

A Hollywood studio, RKO-Radio Pictures, produced the film, and movie stars played the main characters in the story. This statement, commonplace to our ears and perfectly ordinary even in 1933, would have been unintelligible in 1903. The world had leaped beyond the agricultural rhythms of the nineteenth century, an era in which farmers and peasants had gradually conformed to the demands of an industrialized society. In the twentieth century, enter-

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tainment gained ascendancy as a shaper of people's behavior and expectations and as a determinant of social and cultural values.

At the turn of the last century such a transformation would have been beyond imagining. In only three decades, air travel, tourism, and Hollywood, with its production facilities, movies, and movie stars, staked their claims on the global consciousness.

Global Networks

Mass tourism, air travel, and movies, separately and in conjunction, exert a profound influence on the nature of daily life for a significant proportion of the earth's populace. As international businesses, they provide work and recreation for a worldwide population and engender aspirations, expectations, and behaviors that transcend national borders. Fledgling enterprises at the start of the twentieth century, they achieved global stature as economically and culturally powerful industries, with film companies inaugurating the expansion process.

The motion picture created a global community of shared interests. Over the course of the last century, hundreds of millions of people in numerous countries went to movie theaters, but they watched many of the same films. Tens of thousands of producers, directors, actors, animators, set designers, and so on made movies in any number of locations. They gathered at international film festivals, which, incidentally, evolved into tourist attractions for tens of thousands of fans. Moreover, those fans and aspiring actors and directors read about films and movie stars in newspapers and magazines and watched them on television.

The same—or other—multitudes took pleasure trips and served people who traveled. Increasingly, and most notably in the second half of the century, tourists traveled by airplane to their destinations, particularly to those locations beyond the borders of their own homelands. International travelers confronted unfamiliar and culturally diverse societies within hours of leaving home. Their encounters—variously engaging, voyeuristic, or negative—contributed to a sense of a shrinking world. The networks they

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wove enmeshed a substantial portion of the world's people in shared or similar experiences, though unequal and often contrived.

The thrill of awesome inventions such as motion pictures and airplanes and the challenge of unaccustomed actions and transactions swept people along the paths of discovery. Twentieth-century culture pioneers adopted new behaviors when they attended movie theaters, boarded passenger airplanes, or traveled for pleasure. They also invented or learned the vocabulary required to communicate in and about this unaccustomed universe. Their life choices became agents of change. Consider this thought-provoking possibility: Entertainment preferences, including which movies to see and what travel destinations to visit, exert an influence on one's circle of friends and potential marriage partners. Thus, we might conjecture that these new lifestyle options help to determine the genetic makeup of subsequent generations.

On the other hand, more hesitant or isolated population segments perhaps shied away from the changes that accompanied the early-twentieth-century emergence and expansion of aviation, movies, and tourism. If these powerful historical forces swept past them at first, the lag dissipated with time, and the world at large has encompassed many formerly self-contained societies.

As an example of the altered consciousness of global citizens fashioned by an entertainment century and the inclusion of remote populations into the entertainment mainstream, consider this contemporary news story. In May, 2002, an Irish musician accompanied a high-ranking U.S. government official (the rocker and the Republican, as the media termed the odd couple) on a ten-day, fact-finding trip to Africa. Bono (Paul Hewson), head of the popular Irish band U2, hoped to influence then–U.S. Treasury Secretary Paul H. O'Neill in the formulation of economic policy concerning the impoverished populations of the African continent.

More "world theater" than diplomacy, the trip fostered Bono's continued efforts to shape global development policy. The well-known, widely traveled musician intended to educate the less-recognizable cabinet official. When the two men met to plan the trip, Secretary O'Neill interrupted Bono to ask a question, prompting Bono's shocked companion to marvel, "The secretary

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cut right in, which people often don't have the guts to do with a rock star."[1]

That single sentence, hardly a profound statement of cultural or social history, nevertheless gives voice to a twentieth-century transposition in human relations and political status. That is, entertainment and entertainers achieved a stature unimaginable in 1900. Even conceding Bono's familiarity with Africa, the extent of his knowledge, and the sincerity of his concern for Africans, should O'Neill have hesitated to disrupt his train of thought? As treasury secretary of the United States, O'Neill's decisions dramatically affected the global economy. Yet, the cachet of celebrity elevated a rock musician to the position of mentor to a cabinet official of the world's most powerful country.

Rock stars, air travel, movies, and international tourism all represent milestones in twentieth-century cultural history and transformations of consciousness. Within a decade of Porter's *Great Train Robbery,* a visit to the cinema became a ritual. Within several decades of the Wright brothers' flight, people considered international air travel a right. Within a century we have become creatures of entertainment.

Entertainment and Historical Curiosity: The Film as Artifact

The movie *Flying Down to Rio,* product of an entertainment industry, affords the social and cultural historian an interpretive key to the twentieth century, much as historians of antiquity examine the details of coins to trace the paths of commerce. In 1933 an airplane trip from Miami to Rio represented a triumph of aeronautics, as well as a milestone in international travel. That year, RKO-Radio Pictures, with Pan American Airways board member Merian Cooper as production chief, planted Rio as a travel destination in the imaginations of millions of moviegoers. Cheerful chorus girls who performed on the wings of airplanes high above the Brazilian city conveyed a confidence in the reliability of the equipment that provided the thrill of flying. Moreover, the film's tourists were ordinary folk, not the elegant elites who traveled abroad by luxury liner. With an abundance of money and time,

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affluent tourists had boarded steamships in Europe or in North and South America and had enjoyed Rio de Janeiro's entertainment potential long before RKO-Radio Pictures and Pan American Airways joined forces to extend an invitation to travel by plane.

The beauty of the city alone attracted visitors; the liveliness of the Carnival season enhanced its appeal. As Rio's population doubled between 1900 and 1920, from one-half to one million people, the city's leaders followed the direction of numerous other urban modernizers. They replaced neglected, crumbling, colonial-era houses, churches, and narrow streets with broad boulevards and public buildings—including the impressive Municipal Theater, National Library, and Fine Arts Museum. The first grandly dramatic movie theaters opened in the same area in the mid-1920s. By then, tunnels through the mountains connected the beautiful beaches at Copacabana and Ipanema to central Rio.

By the 1930s many people identified Rio de Janeiro with tropical sensuality, the samba, and the excitement of Carnival revelries. European and African traditions mingled and gave Rio's carnival its distinctive culture. During the pre-Lenten season, neighborhoods formed street dance groups accompanied by their own percussion bands. They began to meet regularly and formed samba schools. By 1933 more than thirty costumed groups built floats, paraded, danced, and competed in the pageantry. The rhythms of the Carnival samba, like the Cuban rumba and Argentinean tango, moved beyond native shores and found new favor with musicians and dancers in far-flung locales.

RKO expended considerable resources to bring Rio de Janeiro to moviegoers. Photographers spent a month capturing the city's mood and attractions on film and then edited a location-setting montage of palm trees, seashore, exclusive shops, horse races, street peddlers, modern buildings, and nighttime city lights, all backed by lively Latin rhythms.

Flying Down to Rio, the musical comedy with a tourism-related plot, caught my attention and piqued my curiosity when I wrote *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba.* Working backward from 1933, I explored the history of its production and, as the pieces fell into place, assessed its significance. This probe

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into the movie turned up a fascinating story, less a history of aviation or film or tourism per se than their interaction within the context of the evolving entertainment culture. That is, the sciences of aerodynamics and optics yielded the technologies that underpinned the development of airplanes and motion pictures. As a global phenomenon, people in crowded urban centers or in scattered communities integrated the new technologies into their lives as forms of art and commercial entertainment. In varying degrees they gradually devoted greater time and energy to the pursuit of diversion. The multitude of new amusements included planned trips to attractive destinations (i.e., tourism). Thus, a collage of episodes, experiences, and ideas unveiled connections among technology, art, and twentieth-century cultural change.

Studying the film's production also widened my frame of reference on the Depression-era business climate and the interplay between culture and corporate profits. RKO-Radio Pictures expected the movie to deliver financial rewards, of course, with long lines of eager moviegoers lined up at the box office. Pan American Airways anticipated enhanced revenues from airline ticket purchases stimulated by the film. The airline operated profitably, thanks to U.S. government airmail contracts but sought passengers to fill the seats in its newer, bigger planes.

Pan Am, the only international airline operating from the United States in the 1930s, carried North Americans to Rio and other destinations in the Caribbean and Central and South America aboard comfortable, four-motor passenger planes that bore no resemblance to the Wrights' flying machine. The airline called its planes "Clippers," after the swift, ocean-crossing commercial ships of the nineteenth century. To lure prospective travelers, Pan Am circulated seductively illustrated brochures that offered the romance and excitement of foreign travel along with the safety and speed of flying.

Air Travel and the Promise of Romance

The plot and action of *Flying Down to Rio* reinforced the airline's sales messages. Gene Raymond, fair haired and pleasant

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faced, not unlike aviation hero Charles Lindbergh, played happy-go-lucky Roger Bond. The character more than filled audience expectations for a romantic fantasy hero. Endowed with good looks and wealth, Bond flies his own plane. He also writes music and leads a dance band called the Yankee Clippers, an obvious reminder of Pan Am's planes. Impetuous and supremely confident and an irrepressible playboy, Bond aggressively pursues his romantic inclinations, even though his dalliances sometimes interfere with band schedules. Fred Astaire plays Bond's witty, ironic, loyal sidekick, Fred Ayres, the band's accordionist.

The action begins when Bond and Ayres rush into a nightclub, having arrived in Miami in Bond's plane, just in time for the Yankee Clipper band's weekly radio show. The musical troupe plays in (and broadcasts on the radio from) the lavishly decorated Date Grove at the Hotel Hibiscus in the tropical tourist mecca of Miami, Florida.

If Bond is at all apologetic about his tardy arrival, he gives no hint of it but picks up his baton and starts the music. The first number communicates a mischievous nonconformity to both the nightclub audience and the movie viewer. Honey Hale (Ginger Rogers), glamorously dressed in an alluring, translucent outfit, sings the suggestive song lyrics: "In me you see a sinner, and music is my crime. . . . Music makes me do the things I never should do."

Indeed, the film's musical numbers stir romantic thoughts, rouse a desire to dance new dances with new partners, and tempt viewers to fly to Brazil—things that people might hesitate to undertake under ordinary circumstances.

Even as Honey Hale sings the playful words, Roger Bond's attention wanders. While he directs the musicians, he also assesses his romantic prospects in the nightclub. His roving eye falls on a lovely, regal Brazilian, Belinha de Rezende, seductively portrayed by Dolores Del Rio. The flirtation that follows sets up the plot and, more importantly, moves the story's location to Brazil.

Belinha has come to the Date Grove with several young North American girlfriends and her ever-watchful aunt and chaperone. Hale, the scrappy, liberated, working-girl vocalist contrasts in class, manner, and style with Belinha, but Hale's musical confession

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reaches Belinha. Contrary to the restraints her cultural background imposes but encouraged by her friends, she turns on the charm to entice Bond. He responds eagerly, hands the baton to Ayres, and moves from bandstand to Belinha's table and then to the dance floor. One of Belinha's female companions wisecracks, "What have you South Americans got below the equator that we haven't?"

Bond once again has breached a limit of professional conduct. An officious hotel manager who has forbidden employees to fraternize with the guests fires the entire band. "Here we go again," groans Ayres, as he, Hale, and the other musicians worry about their sudden unemployment. Reversals of fortune certainly played to the sympathies of the depression-era movie audience, but unlike the real-life viewers, the musical comedy plot rescued the actors. Belinha's father falls ill; the resort hotel he plans to open loses its orchestra; and Roger Bond receives a radiogram from old college friend Julio Rubeiro (Raoul Roulien) to bring the band to Rio, where a job awaits.

Unfortunately for Belinha, she has learned of her father's illness too late in the day to catch the scheduled Pan American Airways flight bound from Miami for Rio. Bond offers to fly her to Port au Prince, Haiti, to catch up with the plane on the airline's first overnight stop. (The absence of beacon lights precluded nighttime operations in 1933. The trip therefore took a week, with multiple overnight stops.) Belinha's aunt would follow on the next scheduled flight, along with the band. A hesitant Belinha, anxious about her father, accepts the offer.

Bond's instinct for conquest overcomes his gallantry. A pretense of engine trouble sets up an opportunity for both a romantic interlude and a pitch for Haiti as a tourist destination (via Pan American, of course). His plane conveniently carries its own piano, and on the lonely stretch of beach where he has made an emergency landing, the romantic lyrics and sensuous music of "Orchids in the Moonlight" almost make Belinha do things she should not even consider. She finally breaks the romantic spell and explains her reticence: Her life is arranged; she is promised to another man. That's the way of life in Brazil, and she cannot break with convention. Belinha goes to sleep—alone.

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In the morning a man carrying a golf bag informs her that the seemingly wild natives who frightened her into startled wakefulness are in fact energetic employees of the Haitian hotel on whose beach she has slept. They are headed for their morning swim. The helpful caddy, who inexplicably speaks British-accented English rather than French patois, also reveals that the Rio-bound plane is on the runway. Her reputation unsullied, Belinha flies Pan Am to Rio, while Bond continues the air journey solo.

Once Belinha, Bond, and the band are reunited in Rio, romantic wire-crossing moves the plot forward. Bond's old friend Julio is, of course, Belinha's betrothed, and the band's engagement is at her father's hotel. So, Bond's wooing of Belinha will be considered the betrayal of a friend when Julio learns of the relationship; moreover, Bond's aggressive pursuit of romance could cost the band another gig.

The move to Rio adds a political dimension to the otherwise customary Hollywood romantic triangle. Three unsavory Europeans, colluding with bankers to cause the financial failure of the new hotel so that they can take it over, plot against Belinha's father.

The villains' skullduggery hinges on the issuance of an entertainment permit without which the band cannot play at the hotel. If disappointed guests disparage the Hotel Atlántico's management and discourage future reservations, the loss of income will result in nonpayment of loans, foreclosure by the bank, and seizure of the property by the conspiratorial Europeans.

The menacing characters show up as shadows of men wearing top hats and carrying walking sticks. As their silhouettes fall across a poster announcing the hotel's opening, a workman comments solemnly, "The shadows of the buzzards." Moviegoers in December, 1933, understandably might have connected the Europeans who cast shadows on Brazil with the threat of fascist expansion into Latin America.

With the subplot of a threat to Belinha's father's business established, the story returns to lively Rio. The hotel has not yet opened, so the band members check out the musical competition at a Brazilian nightclub. The maître d' at the Carioca Casino

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warmly welcomes the band members as honored guests from a sister continent. ("Carioca" is the nickname for Rio's residents.)

The nightclub visit sets up the movie's spirited centerpiece, an eighteen-minute, lavishly costumed, and intricately choreographed musical extravaganza. The scene starts slowly, almost comically, and then gains momentum. Musicians and then the singers and dancers arrive on the bandstand a few at a time. The camera pulls back to capture the entire elaborate scene and to incorporate the movie audience into the nightclub setting. The tempo picks up. Singers warn the audience about the effects of the Brazilian dance called the carioca—"It's not a fox-trot or a polka; when you dance it, you find love." Then dozens of costumed dancers take up the beat while the camera moves in and out, alternating close-ups of feet and bodies with wide shots of the whole stage area. Singers and dancers fill the club and the screen.

The Yankee Clipper band players respond to the musical beat, and Fred Ayres says to Honey Hale, "Let's try it." They dance the captivating carioca, easily picking up the steps, of course, to the appreciative applause of the Brazilians, and the band members confess, "Our music can't top this."

Meanwhile, a welcome-home party for Belinha is underway at the Aviators' Club—an elaborate, multitiered banquet hall where uniformed attendants keep out the rabble and the orchestra plays from a large platform hung from the ceiling, simulating the basket of a hot-air balloon. Roger and Julio unhappily discover each other's involvement with Belinha. Moreover, Julio has sensed an aloofness in Belinha's behavior. He suspects Bond is the cause because his old friend has related his pursuit of a new Brazilian love, and Belinha has just returned from the United States.

Eventually they resolve their romantic rivalry through mutual self-sacrifice. Roger develops an understanding of and appreciation for Brazilian traditions and steps aside so that Julio and Belinha can marry. Then, when Julio realizes that Belinha really loves Roger, he pushes them into each other's arms and arranges for their marriage by the captain of a Pan American plane headed back to the United States.

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While the love story pairs the appropriate partners, Yankee ingenuity and a little rule bending save the Hotel Atlántico. Unable to obtain the proper entertainment permit for the hotel, Fred Ayres stages the opening-day show, with its contingent of beautiful girls, on the wings of airplanes *above* the hotel, rather than *in* it. The ingenious Yankee Clippers save Belinha's father's hotel from the scheming "buzzards," and Roger Bond marries Belinha. Thus, the film has reassured audiences that North and South America can live in harmony, with mutual respect and well-intentioned assistance when needed.

Flying Down to Rio's breathtaking finale dazzled moviegoers and film critics. Although the words on the screen proclaimed, "Hotel Atlántico presents the Yankee Clippers," with scenes of Rio behind the planes, RKO filmed the dance sequence in southern California with rear-projection technology. Hollywood beauties moved their torsos in choreographed syncopation on the wings of airplanes while wind machines plastered costumes against curvaceous bodies and hair flared backward behind lovely faces.

Dozens of chorus girls, strapped into safety harnesses, sang the title song, with its exuberant message of modernity: "An old sailor in old times would sing an old song, 'Rolling Down to Rio by the Sea.' A young sailor in these times would sing a new song, 'Flying Down to Rio.' Come with me. Got to get to Rio and got to make time. You'll love it, high above it."

Inspiration for the song's lyrics came from the pen of the romantic, nineteenth-century imperialist, intrepid traveler, and spinner of stories Rudyard Kipling. The poem at the end of *The Beginning of the Armadilloes,* one of Kipling's *Just So Stories* for children—this one set along the Amazon River—expresses a longing to roll down to Rio on one of the great white-and-gold steamers that left Southampton, England, each week. Kipling finally visited Rio in 1927, twenty-five years after he wrote the story and the poem and five years before he might have joined the modern travelers who flew to the grand city.

Old times, new times; sea voyages, air travel. Actors portrayed North American tourists, described stereotypically in script directions—women wear Sears Roebuck hats and men in horn-

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rimmed glasses, shorts, and sun helmets smoke cigars. They watch the pageantry from the terrace of a Rio seaside resort hotel and respond with appropriate expressions of awe and excitement. For moviegoers who longed to visit Rio, camera magic created a fantasy trip. Whatever the reality, the illusion thrilled audiences.

In 1933 RKO Radio Pictures connected tourism to air travel in *Flying Down to Rio.* By 1953 post–World War II prosperity, coupled with bigger, faster, and safer airplanes, extended the parameters of international tourism. By 2003—a century after the Wright brothers' flight—an international economic sector developed around tourist revenue, and the mass tourism industry depended in large measure on people's desires to be entertained, on sufficiently high levels of disposable income, and on a relatively peaceful world.

Flying Down to Rio stirred thoughts of air travel in 1933. Since then, significant segments of the world's population have incorporated practices, rituals, and values into their lives based on the development of aviation and the motion picture and tourist industries. They pass these behavior patterns and expectations on to new generations while understanding little of their origins. Meanwhile, the industries have achieved global proportions and exert exceptional social, political, and economic power. How might a book about movies, air travel, and tourism shed light on this process?

This book begins with those educational and exhilarating tourist attractions, the turn-of-the-century world's fairs. The wondrous Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition held in St. Louis in 1904 set lofty standards for visual impact and intense activity. Only slightly less dramatic and ambitious, trade and commemorative fairs at New Orleans, Omaha, and Buffalo made their own contributions to the development of event tourism.[2]

The short-lived expositions exploded on the urban landscape, energized people's consciousness for a number of months, and then ceased operations. However, we might compare the inventive and instructive impacts of their ephemeral existence to the phenomenon of beautiful objects dropped into a river. Although the objects themselves quickly disappear beneath the surface, they

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generate expanding ripples that intersect with other interruptions in the flow of life. At those fairs, the past collided with the future in unpredictable ripples.

The colossal exhibitions whetted appetites for novel and exotic entertainment and satisfied a growing thirst for travel. Along with the latest machinery, fair operators paraded tribal peoples from around the world before curious onlookers. Like the Paris exposition of 1889, Chicago's fair also assembled scholarly conclaves. Aeronautical pioneers exchanged visions and findings as part of Chicago's series of scientific and philosophical meetings. Frederick Jackson Turner presented his seminal essay on the closing of the frontier at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, held in Chicago in 1893 at the invitation of the fair's promoters. Edison's Kinetoscope—that early example of a motion-picture machine—made an appearance as well.

The St. Louis Fair devoted considerable space to a field for flight demonstrations, used new techniques of photographed visual effects in its displays, and brought the modern Olympics to the United States. New Orleans and Buffalo both focused on commercial ties to Latin America. Omaha integrated the conquest of the trans-Mississippi West into a larger, worldwide mission for the United States. Visitors to these fairs, numbering in the tens of millions, rewarded the visions of promoters and the confidence of investors, took their memories and impressions home with them, and spread the joys of pleasure travel to fellow Americans through postcards.

Airplanes and motion pictures added their own ripples to international cross-currents. Two chapters in this book track the evolution of scientific invention into spectator amusements like nickelodeons and barnstorming air circuses, which then became life-altering, economically powerful industries—film studios and commercial airlines. The interplay between them is embedded in the wider history of U.S. commercial and territorial expansion and international competition.

Experimenters, engineers, and entrepreneurs dominated aviation in the decades between 1893 and 1913. The Wright brothers' plane unleashed a fierce competition on both sides of the Atlantic

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Ocean that advanced the viability of flying machines and placed pilots in the vanguard of technology's heroes. Air meets drew tourists eager to see speed, distance, and altitude records broken or perhaps hoping to be taken aloft as passengers. By 1913 aerial competitors flew from city to city for prizes, an early indication that airplanes might develop commercial significance as transportation.

Also by 1913, established motion picture studios engaged in the international trade in multireel narratives. They created film stars and promoted them through movie magazines in order to ensure audience loyalty. They also incorporated airplanes into action films that featured breathtaking aerial stunts.

The loops and dives of stunt flying became real maneuvers in World War I, after which people and governments took the possibilities of commercial aviation more seriously. Airline companies formed in the 1920s and competed for investment capital, but airplane crashes took a tremendous toll on pilots and equipment. While movie plots based on midair robberies, chases, and crashes did little to assure audiences that planes were safe, Charles A. Lindbergh's 1927 trans-Atlantic solo flight drew attention to improvements in aircraft design that made sustained flight feasible.

Tourists formed a pioneering contingent in the nineteenth-century movement to explore the western United States, although few historians recognized their contributions to conservation and population growth. Forerunners of eco-, health-, and ethnotourism, they rode the railroads to national parks and the lands of Native Americans and went to California for winter warmth. In the 1920s some tourists traveled west by plane, while others traveled to Mexico and Cuba to outwit the agents of Prohibition.

The next chapter traces the histories of two companies that flourished in the period of air-mindedness and movie madness and became linked briefly in 1933. As market potential and improved production techniques turned the technological innovations of the 1910s into the airline and movie industries of the 1920s, Pan American Airways and RKO Radio Pictures rode an exhilarating, but risky, wave.

The politics and personalities entangled in their rise to promi-

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nence reflect the business optimism of a roaring decade. A generation steeped in technological utopianism overlay their financial ambitions with social purpose; that is, both airplanes and movies promised to bring people together in peace. On the other hand, the companies also represented the cutting edges of transportation and communications sectors that relentlessly contended for market domination, both domestically and internationally.

Given the connection between the companies, RKO's movies about airplanes are particularly revealing. Five films released in 1932 and 1933 suggest an attempt to redirect the public's attitude toward airplanes and air travel. At a time when increased passenger traffic required confidence in air safety, RKO's production chief, Merian C. Cooper, also sat on Pan American Airways' board of directors.

In 1932 Cooper brought to RKO a long-standing love of flying, experience in film production, and an idea for a project that imagined an epic battle between civilization and nature. In Cooper's *King Kong,* airplanes defeat the beast that threatens both fair womanhood and the metropolis that embodies modern society. RKO released *King Kong* in 1933.

The Lost Squadron, another film made under Cooper's aegis, criticized Hollywood's callousness toward the safety of stunt pilots. Thus, if planes crashed in movie thrillers, egotistical directors who fed the audience's desire for thrills could be blamed, not the planes themselves. *Christopher Strong* placed a beautiful woman in the cockpit, demonstrating how tame flying machines had become. *Flying Devils* transformed stunt fliers into contented airline pilots who protected passengers' lives and guarded their own. Finally, *Flying Down to Rio* combined safety, convenience, romance, and good times and wrapped them all in a tourism-driven musical fantasy.

Pan American Airways flew to Rio and all around Latin America in 1933, an area of the world—and a market—very much in the forefront of U.S. interests. Since the movie's themes reflect the larger world of commercial competition in the hemisphere, the next chapter embeds air commerce and tourism in the complexity of Depression-era international relations and then briefly

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addresses the ties among airplanes, movies, and international tourism on the eve of World War II. Even President Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted people to fly to Rio in 1933. This last chapter confirms the unusual perspective on U.S. foreign policy that *Flying Down to Rio,* with its airplanes and tourism, imparts to the curious historian.