

Daniel K. Bubb. *Landing in Las Vegas: Commercial Aviation and the Making of a Tourist City.* Shepperson Series in Nevada History. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2012. xii + 157 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-87417-872-2.



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The story of the phenomenal growth and development of Las Vegas, Nevada, has approached the level of myth in the American psyche. What was once a dusty stop on the desert drive between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles has grown into the nation's premier gambling and entertainment venue. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Las Vegas became the fastest growing city in America and, despite a severe economic downturn, hosts over thirty million visitors each year. The reasons are many and complex.

Hollywood-driven popular understanding, sometimes based on reality, holds that organized crime played the predominant role in creating the modern Las Vegas. This approach overlooks the efforts of local, state, and national political leaders in forging a coherent plan for the city's growth. With Nevada as the only state for decades that offered legal gambling while sporting other attractions that were not legal in other states, Las Vegas had much to offer adult vacationers. The city's most pressing issue was how to get these visitors to Las Vegas's myriad attractions. America

wholeheartedly embraced the automobile in the twentieth century, but Las Vegas remains a long drive from any population center. In the years before air conditioning became a standard feature in automobiles, the intense desert heat was a significant barrier to overland travel. The answer to this question, argues author Daniel K. Bubb, came with the advent of regular commercial air service.

The airlines, which possessed modern, swift aircraft, were able to bring thousands and later millions of pleasure seekers to Las Vegas. Working with the airlines and the federal government to secure routes from the nation's population centers, city leaders also worked closely with state and federal officials to insure that the city had modern aviation facilities and suitable airports to handle the ever-growing mass of visitors. Beginning with the Air Mail Act of 1925 and the Air Commerce Act of 1926, commercial aviation had the solid support of the federal government. This support enabled airline pioneers to invest in this new industry with a good prospect for financial success. With the encouragement of the govern-

ment, the United States post office expanded its routes and began carrying passengers to help increase its revenue while the government slowly reduced its subsidy payments. This very successful policy led to the creation of a national network of airlines operating in the public interest and connecting most of the nation's population centers, including Las Vegas.

Over time, a close symbiotic relationship developed between the airlines and Las Vegas, each supporting the growth of the other. By the late 1950s, the advent of jet travel opened up untapped markets while the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978 removed federal economic regulation and opened the skies to competition and to low-cost airlines, which greatly increased passenger travel around the country. Las Vegas was one of many population centers to benefit greatly from these actions, as Bubb makes clear in chapter 4. Furthermore, a new generation of wide-bodied aircraft enabled far more people to travel affordably. The past three decades of such airline operations also opened up access to Las Vegas with direct flights to numerous international destinations. Clearly, air travel and the fate of this city are intertwined.

The revolutionary consequences of commercial air travel on the development of the United States and the world is a given yet it is rarely explored and interpreted. Bubb's work attempts to address this general omission using the example of Las Vegas as a case study. For this, Bubb presents a compelling case and thoroughly supports his thesis with a wealth of data often to the point where the reader is inundated with facts and figures at the cost of clarity. At times, the text wanders from subject to subject, yet the overall thesis is never lost--Las Vegas owes much of its success to the airline industry.

It is this fact that trips up the author. While Bubb outlines his case for the crucial role played by aviation in the making of Las Vegas, his basic understanding of aviation and aviation history is

flawed. To this reader, the problem, which occurs throughout the text, greatly mars what should be a fine work. For example, when correctly discussing the origins of the airline industry through the post office, Bubb states that the U.S. Army flew mail for the post office until 1926. They did not; the army flew mail only during the summer of 1918. Bubb also mistakenly states that the Air Commerce Act of 1926 regulated air fares. In discussing the McNary-Watres Act of 1930, he notes that Postmaster General Walter F. Brown reduced the number of transcontinental air carriers to four. The truth is just the opposite; there were no transcontinental airlines operating when Brown took office in early 1929. Brown created two new transcontinental lines: Transcontinental and Western Air (TWA) and American Airways. He was also able to support the operation of a third, United Air Lines, and later built a fourth, Northwest Airways, before he left office in 1933. Throughout his early chapters, Bubb confuses Transcontinental and Transport (TAT) and TWA. TWA was formed out of the forced merger of all of TAT with parts (not all) of Western Air Express. Western Air Express continued to operate separately, eventually becoming Western Airlines after 1934. TAT carried no passengers after the merger. All of its operational assets were incorporated into TWA, which operated the central transcontinental route with a life-saving air mail contract, which TAT did not have.

Many smaller errors abound as well: in the mid-1930s new aircraft were purchased but they were not pressurized. Donald Douglas, not "William" Douglas, formed Douglas Aircraft. In 1933, the DC-1 did not "appear on airline flight-lines" since only one was built. The production version, which was not a different design, was the fourteen-seat DC-2. Stretched to improve stability, it did see widespread service. While successful, the DC-2 was not "the workhorse of the airline industry" that could carry twenty-one passengers (p. 27). That twenty-one-seat workhorse was the similar but larger classic DC-3. Howard Hughes

formed Hughes Aircraft to build his record setting 1b (H-1) racer to break the absolute speed record for landplanes and set a transcontinental speed record, not to build an aircraft for an around-the-world attempt (p. 66). Hughes used a Lockheed 14 to fly around the world, not an aircraft of his own creation. Furthermore, jet fuel is made from kerosene, not kerosene and water (p. 64). Early jets used water injection to improve performance, but the water was not part of the fuel. Bubb talks about air mail subsidies in the late 1990s (p. 105): air mail subsidies ended in 1952. Although airlines continue to be paid for carrying the mail, that payment no longer contains a subsidy. In sum, in a work that covers a concise 124 pages of text, the number of simple, basic errors is disturbing.

While the errors are troubling, the overall handling of the subject is valid. Bubb states his thesis and supports his argument well. It is this fact that makes the blemishes all the more difficult to accept.

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