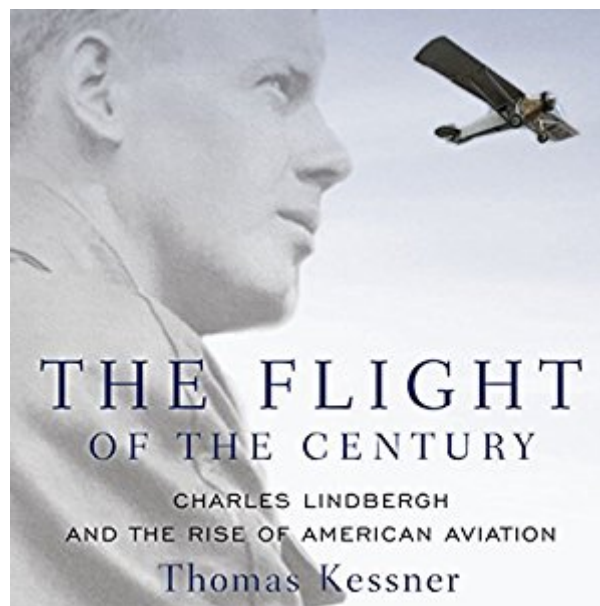


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The Flight Of The Century: Charles Lindbergh And The Rise Of American Aviation: Oxford University Press: Pivotal Moments In US History



Synopsis

In late May 1927, an inexperienced and unassuming 25-year-old Air Mail pilot from rural Minnesota stunned the world by making the first non-stop transatlantic flight. A spectacular feat of individual daring and collective technological accomplishment, Charles Lindbergh's flight from New York to Paris ushered in America's age of commercial aviation. In *The Flight of the Century*, Thomas Kessner takes a fresh look at one of America's greatest moments, explaining how what was essentially a publicity stunt became a turning point in history. He vividly recreates the flight itself and the euphoric reaction to it on both sides of the Atlantic, and argues that Lindbergh's amazing feat occurred just when the world - still struggling with the disillusionment of World War I - desperately needed a hero to restore a sense of optimism and innocence. Kessner also shows how new forms of mass media made Lindbergh into the most famous international celebrity of his time, casting him in the role of a humble yet dashing American hero of rural origins and traditional values. Much has been made of Lindbergh's personal integrity and his refusal to cash in on his fame. But Kessner reveals that Lindbergh was closely allied with, and managed by, a group of powerful businessmen - Harry Guggenheim, Dwight Morrow, and Henry Breckenridge chief among them - who sought to exploit aviation for mass transport and massive profits. Their efforts paid off as commercial air traffic soared from 6,000 passengers in 1926 to 173,000 passengers in 1929. Kessner's book is the first to fully explore Lindbergh's central role in promoting the airline industry - the rise of which has influenced everything from where we live to how we wage war and do business. *The Flight of the Century* sheds new light on one of America's fascinatingly enigmatic heroes and most transformative moments.

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Customer Reviews

I generally don't write reviews, but after reading *Flight of the Century*, I was puzzled as to why it receive such high ratings. A new genre of history books has emerged in the past decade that basically anthologizes past books and research on a subject, offering little new information. This is one of them. Worse, it seems to me to cast Charles Lindbergh as far more influential to the development of commercial aviation than he actually was. Granted, Lindbergh was an exceptionally gifted flyer, who combined meticulous preparation with almost supernatural navigational skills. He also devoted extraordinary efforts as a good-will ambassador to publicize commercial aviation following his transatlantic flight. His cross-country travels and tours over Central & South America were extremely dangerous yet helped develop new routes over uncharted territory. In some ways, Lindbergh made flying look too easy, since almost daily, other plane, pilots & passengers were going down for any number of reasons. The author suggests that only by the development of huge aviation conglomerates, in which Lindbergh participated with great financial reward, was commercial aviation progress to viability. True, but only to an extent. No other figures or technological breakthroughs in the development are mentioned. Thus, no Wiley Post, who advanced high altitude flight, no Jimmy Doolittle and the creation of Sperry's gyroscopic compass & artificial horizon. No Howard Hughes, or the development of high-octane gasoline. Worse, the author ignores the DC 2 & DC3, on which a small company named for it's genius owner, Donald Douglas staked it's success or failure.

'*Flight of the Century*' does an excellent job of examining the effect, the how and why and importance of both Charles Lindbergh and what his flight across the Atlantic in the Spirit of St. Louis meant. The flaws of the man and of the American press are not missed. Lindbergh's lack of empathy, aloofness and irritation with journalists and public intrusion on his privacy are acknowledged in many instances. This truly tells the tale of the beginnings of American aviation and of world wide celebrity. The flight itself is documented, especially Lindberg's connection with the Spirit of St. Louis is shown in how, even though his flight was solo, he constantly referred to it as We- his plane was his partner. Lindbergh's diplomatic triumph in Paris upon landing and in Mexico during one of his tours where he erased the stigma of anti-US resentment, resulting in the solving of a 10 year old oil controversy are well documented. He is given credit for many cities building air

strips and popularizing flying. During his tour of the US more than 40% of the population saw him and most changed their minds in favor of aviation. His help in building the civilian aviation industry of America is examined. His boyish good looks and the fact he was a solo hero, showing courage and even better, the fact he was a 'country' boy all contributed to the world wide infatuation with him and then with his wife Anne. The kidnapping of his son and the son's death and the effect on Anne and their relationship is covered. The book's introduction does a credible job in summing up his celebrity and the reason so many powerful men took him under their wing. An epilogue sums up his life from his escape from the US after his son's death and his fall from grace in the support of Germany and its' racist policies.

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