



# Empire of the Air

*Jenifer Van Vleck*

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## **Empire of the Air** Jenifer Van Vleck

Jenifer Van Vleck's fascinating history reveals the central role commercial aviation played in the United States' ascent to global preeminence in the twentieth century. As U.S. military and economic influence grew, the federal government partnered with the aviation industry to deliver American power across the globe and to sell the idea of the "American Century" to the public at home and abroad.

The airplane promised to extend the frontiers of the United States "to infinity," as Pan American World Airways president Juan Trippe said. As it accelerated the global circulation of U.S. capital, consumer goods, technologies, weapons, popular culture, and expertise, few places remained distant from Wall Street and Washington. Aviation promised to secure a new type of empire--an empire of the air instead of the land, which emphasized access to markets rather than the conquest of territory and made the entire world America's sphere of influence. By the late 1960s, however, foreign airlines and governments were challenging America's control of global airways, and the domestic aviation industry hit turbulent times. Just as the history of commercial aviation helps to explain the ascendance of American power, its subsequent challenges reflect the limits and contradictions of the American Century.

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