

American Airline Companies and South America:

Visualizing the Transition from “Good Neighbor” Policy to Cold War, 1930–1960

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BRIEF OVERVIEW

Through an analysis of U.S. airline advertisements for industry, business, and leisure travel students will trace the evolution of depictions of the people and places in Central and South America from the 1930s into the Cold War.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Primary Source Literacy:

- **Identify** and communicate information found in primary sources.
- **Critically** evaluate the perspective of the creators of primary sources.
- **Situate** a primary source in context by applying knowledge about the time and culture in which it was created.

Students Will:

- **Compare** how and why American airline companies built the idea of South America as a potential market for business travelers and as a familiar and intriguing destination for American tourists.
- **Evaluate** the social and cultural impacts of aviation in the mid-twentieth century.
- **Analyze** airline marketing strategies.

Source Digital Collections

For this exercise students will explore advertisements from the AdAccess digital collection. This collection contains advertisements from a number of American airline companies including United, Delta, Trans World, and American Airlines, Inc.

- **AdAccess Digital Collection:** Approximately 7,000 print advertisements predominately from U.S. publications covering five categories: radio & television, transportation, beauty & hygiene, and World War II propaganda that date from circa 1911 to 1955.



SESSION OUTLINE

This lesson plan is a scaffolded assignment that will culminate in students preparing a research proposal based on their research in prior exercises.

Activity:

PART I

Students are placed in small groups.

Students will explore Braniff, Pan American Grace Airways (Panagra) and other print advertisements found in the Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History's [Ad Access digital collection](#).

A. Students are given 30 minutes to explore the digital collection, select images they like, and consider the following questions:

- How is South America described in Braniff advertisements?
- What historical images are chosen by Braniff to represent South America in these advertisements?
- How is South America represented in Panagra advertisements?
- What role did representations of indigenous peoples play in Panagra advertisements?

B. After a 5-minute break, students will be given 20 minutes to answer the following questions in their groups:

- Who was the intended audience for these advertisements? And what are they trying to communicate?
- What image do they present of South America?
- What role does technology play in these advertisements?
- What commercial strategies are behind these representations?

PART II

Students watch the circa 1960s film “South America: Continent of Contrasts” produced by Pan American World Airways to promote Pan American–Grace Airways (Panagra), the airline’s commercial shipping subsidiary. The film is freely available through Internet Archive.

- [South America: Continent of Contrasts](#)

Students will consider the following questions:

- What was the purpose of the film?
- What were the main differences between South American countries according to the film?
- Why do you think the film was subtitled “Continent of Contrasts?”
- Put yourself in the position of CEO of an American consumer goods company in the 1960s. What did this film tell you about the possibilities of doing business in South America? Would you develop a business strategy for the entire continent or ones designed for specific countries?

Suggested Follow-Up Assignment:

Students will go home and do some research on their own. The only requirement is that they should limit that individual research to two hours.

Students will then submit a 500 word research proposal. Each proposal should include a short summary of the topic, a research question, and a bibliography of supplemental resources.

This module was developed as part of a Business History Conference Workshop, 2020.

QUESTIONS?

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