



## Disaster Areas

**M**ODERNIZATION was President Johnson's solution to the problems of Appalachia when he visited that depression-ridden region a few weeks ago. And modernization might well be the answer for many of the depressingly dreadful films that are currently being offered the American moviegoer. No matter how hip the dialogue or how smart the settings, they seem to be rooted in a concept of entertainment that is not only past but *passé*. So long as this concept continues, it is almost pointless to speak about American films either as art or, for that matter, entertainment. The essence of both is freshness, challenge. Ironically, without these qualities, the commercial values tend to disappear as well. Movies that look backward to themes and approaches that have been successful in the past generally prove disappointingly familiar to their audiences and hence disappointing financially to their producers. Some, depending on budget, become major disasters.

No fact-finding committee would be long detained in detecting the pitfalls in Frank Sinatra's production of *Robin and the 7 Hoods*, for example. Sinatra, surrounded by such pack members in good standing as Dean Martin, Sammy Davis, Jr., Bing Crosby, and Hank Henry, has clearly reached the point where he feels it is sufficient merely to grace the screen with these presences and the audience will swoon out of gratitude. But relaxation is one thing when it is a style of performance and quite another when it is an approach to picture-making. As this protracted spoof of the gangster era pushes on past the two-hour mark, the effect is less one of relaxation than of sheer lassitude. Scenes slip by without the accents and emphases that might sharpen a gag idea into real humor. Lines are tossed off with bland disregard for relevance or intelligibility. And sequences are often haphazardly inserted, apparently on the assumption that they might be "fun."

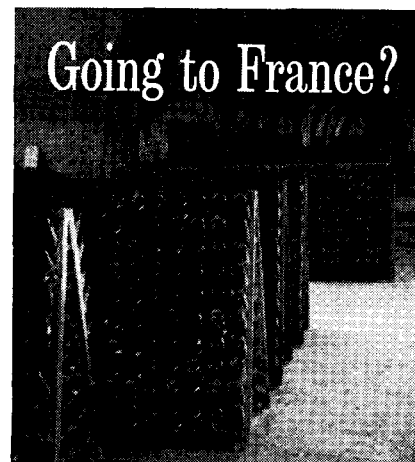
While there is every possibility that making *Robin and the 7 Hoods* might have been fun for Sinatra and his friends, precious little of it is transmitted to the audience. The deliberately arch script abounds with names like Robbo, Guy Gisborne, Little John, and Allen A. Dale as it vainly seeks a parallel between Chicago in 1928 and the days of Sherwood Forest. (But not too close a parallel: The arch-villain is made to be Maid Marian, valiantly played by Barbara Rush.) In halfhearted justification of the title, however, Robbo (Sinatra) is trans-

lated into a local Robin Hood when he turns over some of his ill-gotten gains to a Chicago orphanage, which also gives Crosby the excuse to croon one of his sentimental, inspirational, *Going My Way*-type ballads. For the rest, the merry pranks center about ways and means of dispatching rival gangsters and recalcitrant constabulary—plus one somewhat cumbersome sight gag when a gambling hall is transformed into a revival meeting during a police raid. As humor, it wears rather thin, and the languid stars do nothing to enliven it.

But even more tired than the stars is their material. The script seems to have sprung full-blown from the title and developed along the line of least resistance. It makes no comment upon the era it depicts that has not been made a hundred times before, generally more incisively. That the police and politicians of Chicago were eminently corruptible will surprise no one, and gangsters have so often been presented as amusingly childlike creatures with pure gold in their larcenous hearts that we almost believe the cliché. Even the speakeasy songs and dances have lost their charm through overexposure. To find all of these elements pasted together haphazardly in one script, with merely minor matters of detail to differentiate them from all that has gone before, is to realize how disarmingly dangerous the familiar can become. Where there is no excitement in creation, there can be little in viewing. Where there is no urgent sense of revelation on the part of the film maker, there can be no thrill of discovery on the part of the audience. The old-guard studio people—and it comes as something of a shock to realize that now Frank Sinatra must be included in that number—still like to say that messages are for Western Union, that they are in the business of turning out entertainment. The only difficulty is that when entertainment becomes purely business, it generally ceases to entertain.

Where *Robin and the 7 Hoods* banks on its all-star cast to hold the customers, *Never Put It in Writing* reverts to that most fundamental of all film forms, the chase—and still nothing happens. Pat Boone, implausibly working in Ireland for a British firm (insurance, I think), puts a letter of resignation in the mails, which he soon regrets. The film spins out his efforts to retrieve it, abetted by numerous Abbey players. One can only hope that the Dubliners used their money to mount a new production.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.



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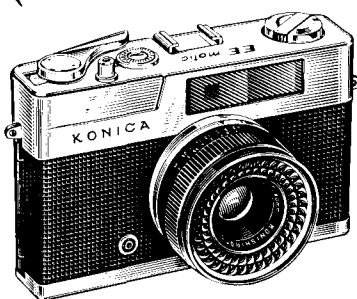
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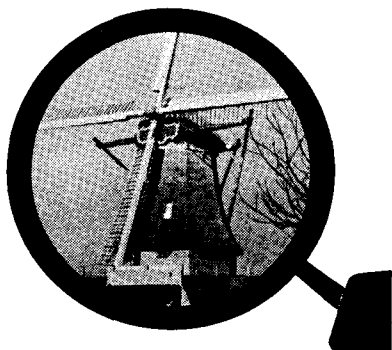
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## BOOKED FOR TRAVEL

### The British in Capricorn

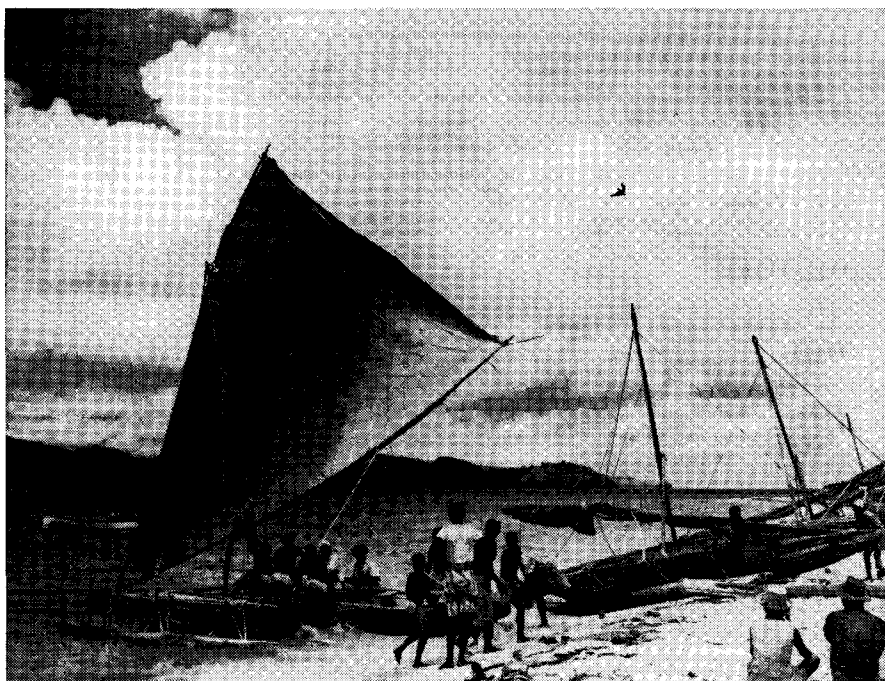
**I**N the dead of midnight the jets boom south out of Honolulu bound for Sydney. If they are Australian they will take the inside route via Fiji. If they are American they will vary their routings once each week to take the outside line by way of Samoa. The Samoans, who have a jet runway and a new airport, consider this something of a victory over Fiji, which used to get all the traffic and has long been considered the roundhouse of aircraft plying the South Pacific.

It takes six hours to fly south from Honolulu to Fiji, and four hours to fly north to Fiji from Australia. Even if the distances are a little longer, Fiji has many of the aspects of a Caribbean vacation isle in the making. It has fields of sugar cane, a combination of native cultures, and a few hotels and resorts. If anything, it reminds me of almost any island in the West Indies in the mid-Forties, full of ideas, possibilities, potentialities, and weather. The travel times from its nearest centers of population are hardly different from the schedules required by the piston planes that flew to Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Barbados from New York and Miami.

Like those West Indian redoubts of the old days, Fiji has some problems. For one thing, its airport is probably

farther from town than any terminal in the world. The jets land at Nadi (pronounced *Nandi*), while Suva, the capital, is on the opposite side of the island 138 miles distant, an hour away by air and seven hours on the winding dirt roads by car.

In the old piston days, a night in Nadi was a night in a steamy nightmare, for the hotels were humid, buggy, and miserable. Things have improved with the arrival of the jets and the building of Nadi's jet terminal, a facility that was in operation long before the new airport was opened in Honolulu. As for Sydney, it still hasn't come up with an air station to match the age. Nadi's tropical flophouse has been replaced by the Mocambo, which, while not exactly a replica of Round Hill, Jamaica, still has air-conditioned rooms, a swimming pool, a hairdresser and barber, and a program to keep its guests, should they be grounded there, free of ennui. There are cruises over the reefs of Nadi Bay, a nine-hole golf course nearby where one can play in the shadow of the glowering mountains, excursions by car into the Nausori Highlands, and a ride on the world's only free train. The train, whose principal mission is to carry sugar, runs a twice-a-week schedule through the neighboring cane fields, skirting sandy, coral-crested bays and



—Stinsons.

Fiji—"Full of ideas, possibilities, potentialities, and weather."