



# The Thrill Makers: Celebrity, Masculinity, and Stunt Performance

*Jacob Smith*

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Well before Evel Knievel or Hollywood stuntmen, reality television or the X Games, North America had a long tradition of stunt performance, of men (and some women) who sought media attention and popular fame with public feats of daring. Many of these feats—jumping off bridges, climbing steeples and buildings, swimming incredible distances, or doing tricks with wild animals—had their basis in the manual trades or in older entertainments like the circus. In *The Thrill Makers*, Jacob Smith shows how turn-of-the-century bridge jumpers, human flies, lion tamers, and stunt pilots first drew crowds to their spectacular displays of death-defying action before becoming a crucial, yet often invisible, component of Hollywood film stardom. Smith explains how these working-class stunt performers helped shape definitions of American manhood, and pioneered a form of modern media celebrity that now occupies an increasingly prominent place in our contemporary popular culture.

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