Javanese, Balinese and other migrants from the Indonesian archipelago and Malay world could be found in small numbers studying and working in early twentieth-century Europe. There were almost none living in the United States; the 1920 census registered only 19 Malays in the entire country. It is all the more noteworthy, then, that in interwar America, Java was considered, in the words of Stella Bloch (see Chapter 4 below), an ‘up to date’ topic, sitting happily alongside psychoanalysis, socialism, cubism, free love and anti-militarism in parlour conversations. Travel books about Java written in English and translated from Dutch were avidly read and discussed. Batik was taught in home economics courses around the country and exhibited in galleries and museums. Department stores created lines of batik-inspired products. A raft of Hollywood fictional films set in Java or featuring Javanese or part-Javanese characters were made in the 1920s and early 1930s starting with The Idol Dancer (1920), a D. W. Griffith South Seas picture starring a grass-skirted Clarine Seymour as a mixed race (French-Javanese) free spirit awakening to sexuality. A Hollywood Boulevard specialist shop called Javartam, abbreviated from Java Art in America, sold wayang puppets, batik and handicrafts.

Pre-war Americans pictured Java as the sailor’s Java of seedy entrepôts, shady deals, treacherous merchants, racial mixture, opium dens and loose morals, as depicted in Joseph Conrad’s novels and pulp fiction alike. The contributions of North American performing artists were instrumental in shifting such stereotypes of Java. Popular imagery of Java before these artists was dominated by jungle and South Sea port imagery; after them it was all Javanese princesses and rarefied customs.

Java’s entry to American imaginations was fostered by the opening of the island to the international travel industry. This was first signalled by the 1894 publication of an English-language guidebook to Java (Schulze 1894). This guidebook was limited to Batavia and nearby parts of western Java. Permits were easily available for visiting the botanical gardens in Buitenzorg (also known as Bogor) and the spas and plantations of the Priangan

M. I. Cohen, *Performing Otherness*
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highlands. But it was more difficult for travellers to gain permission to see the rest of Java – let alone other islands of the archipelago. The adventurous American traveller E. R. Scidmore (1986: 22) interpreted Dutch chariness of tourism as a way to avoid publicizing ‘disagreeable truths about Dutch methods and means’ of colonial exploitation.

Historian Robert Cribb (1995) links the rapid development of tourism in twentieth-century Java with the official endorsement of the Ethical Policy in 1901, which aimed to advance the welfare of indigenous Indonesians. The Official Tourist Bureau was created in 1908 to promote tourism and provide advice to tourists. In 1911 foreigners were able to travel without restrictions throughout Java, and in 1916 to other islands as well. Java was one of the most expensive destinations in Asia at this time due to the high costs of the steamer from Singapore and the expensive hotels and trains of Java. Early twentieth-century tourists travelled by rail from the hustle and bustle of Batavia through the refreshingly cool highlands of west Java to the ‘heartland’ of Javanese culture in central Java in Yogyakarta and Surakarta – whose royal courts were likened by travel promoters and authors to China’s Forbidden City. Some tourists also took the time to explore the volcanoes and sand seas of east Java.

Java’s novelty as a tourist destination made it a natural topic for travelogue lectures and films. The word ‘travelogue’ was coined in 1904 by American lecturer, photographer and film maker Burton Holmes to give a modern veneer to his travel lectures illustrated with magic lantern slides and films. Holmes’s erudite predecessor in the travel lecture business, John Stoddard, was known for his oratorical skills and historical learning. In contrast, Holmes emphasized visual spectacle and anecdote. His artful lectures and films – still imitated and parodied today – were narrative journeys that took ‘us’ (the lecturer and his audience) to places near and far. Holmes’s own travels might have taken place years earlier, but the tour was set in the present tense in its re-enactment – purporting to show how things are today. Audiences enjoyed the opportunity for virtual touring without any of the discomforts and risks of actual travel. The lectures prepped spectators for what they would see on actual trips and provided a model for how to structure and document journeys. Attendance at travel lectures affirmed membership in a cultural elite and provided the trappings of worldliness and erudition. The films eliminated distance and indirectly abetted imperialism through offering a sense of familiarity and ownership of the world (Barber 1993; Altman 2005 and 2006; Gunning 2006).

Burton Holmes’s first tour to Java resulted in his illustrated lecture ‘Java, the Eden of Netherlands India’, which he and his associate lecturers delivered to audiences around the country between 1908 and 1910. Slides and film footage of Batavia, the ‘famed botanical garden of Buitenzorg’, terraced rice fields, the ‘amazingly curious court life’ of Surakarta, ‘the commercial rush’ of Surabaya and the ‘desolate sand sea and the craters of Semeru and Bromo’