

Nevada

Historical Society Quarterly



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Nevada Historical Society Quarterly

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Historical Society Quarterly

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Front Cover: View from downtown Las Vegas of a mushroom cloud at the
Nevada Test Site, 1951. (*Las Vegas News Bureau*)

The Las Vegas Centennial Issue

Introduction

MICHAEL GREEN

Las Vegas: sin city, city without clocks, the all-American city, where what happens here stays here. It also is the home of about 1.7 million residents, with the nation's sixth-largest school district and eighth-busiest airport, and nine of the ten biggest hotels in the United States. And it is a mere child by historical standards. Indeed, on May 15, 2005, it celebrates its centennial, and this special issue of the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* commemorates that milestone.

Actually, the milestone is debatable. Of course, Native Americans have dwelled in the area for hundreds of years. The Spanish appear to have taken advantage of the desert oasis in the early nineteenth century, but they used it as a way station, not as a home. Mormons built a fort-mission there in 1855 (the Las Vegas Mormon Fort State Park celebrates its sesquicentennial this year), but left within three years, and only a few ranchers lived in the valley through the rest of the century. But on May 15, 1905, the San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad, co-owned by the Union Pacific and Senator William Andrews Clark of Montana, auctioned off the townsite that marked the beginning of Las Vegas as a real settlement.

How Las Vegas grew into the city it has become is the subject of a rich literature. It has been the object of serious scholarly study, hatchet jobs, excellent and dubious coffee-table and trade books aimed at the general public, documentaries focusing on everything from organized crime to luxurious hotel bathrooms, and works of fiction as diverse and rewarding as Hunter Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and Lee Barnes's *The Lucky*. Yet much remains unknown about this city that combines the unique and the commonplace. The first essay in this issue tackles the question of what knowledge needs to be pursued. As the author of *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas, 1930-2000*, the finest history of the city, Eugene Moehring is uniquely qualified to offer such an assessment. He published a similar article about Nevada in 1989, and now provides thoughtful suggestions for research on the state's largest city. With Las Vegas somehow ever changing—not everything is imploded, but the process of reinvention seems almost constant—scholars have trouble keeping up and, at times, lose the reality amid the mystique. Moehring, a professor of history at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, since 1976, provides much food for thought—and, we hope,

some ideas for future articles in this journal!

While a distinguished Las Vegas scholar offers thoughts for the future, two newer arrivals to Las Vegas scholarship examine different aspects of the past. Many in the labor movement look to Las Vegas as a model for union organizing: Its Culinary Union is among the nation's most powerful locals, and its members include a significant number of ethnic minorities—especially Latinos and Latinas—who come to Las Vegas in search of the American Dream. But at times that dream has been more like a nightmare. While the civil-rights movement in Las Vegas has received considerable attention, other aspects of the effort to promote equal justice for all in what was known as the Mississippi of the West are less well known. Jeffrey Sallaz, a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, is writing a dissertation entitled "Law, Luck, and Labor: Regulating Service Work in the Global Gaming Industry." His article looks at a consent decree involving the United States Justice Department, Las Vegas hotel-casinos, and the unions in the early 1970s—and at its successes and failures.

Amid the spectacle of Las Vegas, many forget that its economy is based on more than gaming and tourism. Many probably are unaware that one of the key moments in the development of Las Vegas's tourist economy was the building of Hoover Dam in the early 1930s. Hundreds of thousands came to marvel at the "eighth wonder of the world," then went on to sample the pleasures of Las Vegas, which catered to them. But the foundation of the modern West, and certainly Las Vegas, was World War II, when a series of federal projects prompted a massive population influx. Indeed, while Las Vegas's population has doubled or almost doubled with every census since its founding, by percentage the greatest growth came in the 1940s, when the town nearly tripled in size. Robert Nickel, a graduate student at University of Nevada, Las Vegas, analyzes these projects and how civic leaders sought and kept them. He ties these developments into regional, national, and international events, using a newer interpretation of western history by the distinguished urban historian Roger Lotchin.

While Moehring provides a guide as to where we should be headed, and two newer scholars offer different views of the city, plenty of books remain to tempt those interested in trying to understand Las Vegas. Several of these works are the subject of a review essay by Geoff Schumacher, the author of another new book, *Sun, Sin, and Suburbia: An Essential History of Modern Las Vegas*. Schumacher weighs several different approaches to and interpretations of Las Vegas from scholars and journalists alike—and he is an appropriate choice to do so, since besides writing history, Schumacher also is a respected Las Vegas journalist.

We also hope that you will indulge us as we make a special dedication of this issue. For more than two decades, Frank Wright was the curator of education at the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society in Las Vegas. He put together numerous short books and pamphlets on the history of the city and

state, and patiently took calls from journalists and interested citizens on Las Vegas topics great and small. For many years he wrote "Nevada Yesterdays," a history feature aired on KNPR, Las Vegas's National Public Radio affiliate, and funded by Nevada Humanities; *Nevada Yesterdays* will appear during the centennial celebration. To hold the centennial without one of Las Vegas's favorite historians leaves a void in the celebration—and indeed in the study of Las Vegas history. As the reluctant inheritor of his job of writing "Nevada Yesterdays," I can say that Frank's shoes cannot be filled—they are size thirteen at least, and he would be the first to tell you that that was the size of the boot that early Las Vegas Sheriff Sam Gay used to kick wrongdoers across the city limits.

That is fun trivia of the kind that Frank liked, but he also wanted Las Vegas history to be taken seriously. We hope that this centennial issue achieves that goal and would meet with his approval, and that it will meet with yours. All of these articles are meant to suggest that Las Vegas is sometimes admirable, sometimes disappointing, often misunderstood, and always fascinating. We hope that they will give you an idea of why it is such a contradictory and an interesting place.

Las Vegas History *A Research Agenda*

EUGENE MOEHRING

As Las Vegas prepares to celebrate its centennial in 2005, one is struck by the relative lack of scholarly publications concerning this most intriguing place. Except for a small handful of books and a somewhat larger collection of articles,¹ most of the historical literature about Las Vegas has been written for a popular audience. This contrasts sharply with many other American cities, where the number of monographs, theses, and dissertations could fill a small room.²

Part of the reason for this has been Las Vegas's comparatively recent emergence as a population center. In 1950, even with five hotels on The Strip and a crowded carnival of neon downtown, only forty-eight thousand residents lived in the city and its suburbs. Four decades later, it approached one million, and it now threatens to hit two million. Las Vegas's rapid growth as a metropolitan area undoubtedly took many scholars by surprise. In the 1970s and 1980s, historians produced a spate of books and articles on sunbelt cities, but they hardly mentioned Las Vegas at all. Even Carl Abbott's seminal work on the urban sunbelt, *The New Urban America*,³ scarcely mentions Las Vegas. In the 1990s, dozens of popular books, films, and documentaries showcased the resort city, but few important scholarly works appeared.

Today, virtually every aspect of Las Vegas history suffers from relative neglect. Take, for instance, the birth and early development of the town itself. No one has yet written a comprehensive history of early Las Vegas. Articles concerning individual subjects such as the 1922 railroad strike, early aviation, and

Eugene Moehring is Professor of History at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. A specialist in urban history, he has published numerous articles on the subject. Among his major publications are a 40-volume reprint series co-edited with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and another with Richard Wade. He has also published four books: *Public Works and the Patterns of Urban Real Estate Growth in Manhattan, 1835-1894* (1981), *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas, 1930-2000* (1989; 2000), *Urbanism and Empire in the Far West, 1840-1890* (2004), and, with Michael Green, *A Centennial History of Las Vegas* (2005). He is currently writing a history of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, which will be published in time for the school's 50th anniversary in 2007.

social activities have appeared from time to time, and a 2005 centennial history of the city contains four chapters on developments up to 1930.⁴ But these publications hardly substitute for a book-length study. Part of the problem has been lack of sources. After all, early newspapers, being understaffed, brief, and published only weekly or tri-weekly, never provided in-depth coverage of daily events. Family papers, pioneer reminiscences, and photographic collections housed in local libraries, though useful, are incomplete.

But the 1989 discovery of the so-called Union Pacific Railroad Collection by state senator and book dealer Bob Coffin, and its subsequent sale to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, greatly expanded the source material for early Las Vegas. This archive contains thousands of documents, photographs, and maps relating to the Union Pacific, Senator William Clark's San Pedro, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake Railroad, and its subsidiary, the Las Vegas Land and Water Company. That enterprise sold land and provided utility services to the semicompany town, and its records offer invaluable information about labor relations, real-estate development, infrastructure, policy making, and dozens of other subjects. This railroad collection not only would inform an early history of Las Vegas, but also could serve as the foundation for a much more important book. Indeed, despite the numerous studies of company towns, virtually no good studies of the symbiotic relationship between a railroad company and the major town have come out.⁵

Any such book would have to emphasize growth. Ironically, even though growth has been a hallmark of Las Vegas history since the late 1920s, few scholars have tackled this issue. How did Senator Clark's little railroad town develop into a metropolitan area? We know that the federal government created new distant communities at Boulder City (1931) and Basic Townsite-Henderson (1941) with Hoover Dam and Basic Magnesium, but exactly how did later suburbanization fill in the intervening desert?⁶ How did the suburbs east of The Strip begin to develop after 1945? And what about the dramatic expansion west, southwest, and northwest of The Strip after 1970? To analyze the explosive growth that has made Las Vegas the nation's fastest-growing metropolitan area for almost two decades, we need full-length histories of planned communities such as Summerlin and Green Valley; the unincorporated townships of Paradise, Winchester, and Spring Valley; and the cities of Henderson, North Las Vegas, and Boulder City.⁷ These works could systematically examine the dynamics of Las Vegas's suburbanization, including the role of developers, the patterns of growth, and the local, regional, and national forces contributing to it.

At present, Las Vegas lacks an in-depth survey of its real-estate history, including identification of key realtors and realty firms and lending institutions, and their relationship to the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), the Veterans Administration (VA), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and related federal agencies. The racial dimension also cries out for

scrutiny. Such legal issues as bank redlining, restrictive covenants, exclusionary zoning, and other segregationist practices also should be investigated into the 1970s, when Nevada's open housing law finally began to dismantle Jim Crow housing patterns, with further studies of what happened thereafter.

A related scholarly priority is the federal presence that has helped shape the metropolitan area's development since the construction of Hoover Dam. The dam and Basic Magnesium, along with their urban progenies of Boulder City and Henderson, are just a few of Uncle Sam's contributions to the Las Vegas area. But there have been many others, including a variety of New Deal projects, the Las Vegas Army Air Corps Gunnery School, Nellis Air Force Base, the Nevada Proving Grounds, and the possible nuclear dump.⁸ And certain federal programs and policies merit study: The FHA and VA loans, and the Bureau of Land Management's land auctions and purchases have greatly affected growth patterns along the metropolitan area's steadily retreating periphery.

Aside from its contribution to growth, the federal presence in Las Vegas has influenced local history in a variety of ways. An obvious example is the effort of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Internal Revenue Service to expose mob infiltration of Las Vegas's casinos, tax scofflaws employed in the gaming-tourist industry, and corrupt politicians. But the federal presence goes beyond this. The time is ripe for a well-researched volume detailing the effects of the Interior Department's policies upon Las Vegas's water supply, from the Colorado River Compact of 1922 to the controversies of Imperial Valley water use in the early twenty-first century. Related to water is the issue of recreational lands for a growing resort city. A survey of the Interior's policies regarding the creation and development of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area and Red Rock National Conservation Area would be useful, too.

This subject area also would include the environmental implications of growth for sensitive desert ecosystems. Commercial and residential encroachments upon scenic Red Rock Canyon, the proposed extension of the beltway into the northwestern foothills, and other issues have drawn the wrath of local activists such as the Sierra Club's Jeff Van Ee. While this aspect of Las Vegas's growth went largely unnoticed until the last decade or so, these kinds of environmental issues, which have influenced the recent history of Portland, Denver, and other cities, should interest more scholars in America's fastest-growing city.⁹

Of course, a better understanding of federal court records is also vital, not only for the mob connections they might reveal, but also for judicial rulings concerning racist practices in employment, education, and housing, as well as for gender, age, and other forms of discrimination in local housing and labor markets. We also need studies of major judges like Roger T. and Roger D. Foley, Philip Pro, and Lloyd George. Finally, the policies of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization have also done much to influence the recent influx of Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, Eastern European, and African immigrants

to the valley since 1970. Unfortunately, past scholarship on this subject has focused mainly on other states. This immigration has not only helped make Las Vegas a metropolis, but has also provided pools of cheap labor and sources of ethnic capital to boost the local economy even more.

Prosperity and jobs brought these migrants here. But, ironically, even though Las Vegas's booming economy was largely responsible for the city's vault to metropolitan status, we have no comprehensive study of the valley's economic development. While various statistical papers and reports have outlined selected factors promoting the valley's growth, these are merely sources for documenting the larger analytical study that waits to be written.¹⁰ How did Las Vegas make the transition from railroad town to world tourist mecca in fewer than fifty years? Specifically, how did it exploit the trigger effects generated by Hoover Dam, the New Deal, World War II, the Cold War, and the building of new resorts?

While gaming and tourism have been the major engines driving Las Vegas's urbanization, what about diversification? We still lack good histories of the Chamber of Commerce, the Nevada Development Authority, and the Southern Nevada Industrial Foundation. In terms of recruiting businesses, what about the efforts of Las Vegas, Henderson, and North Las Vegas to build industrial parks and compete with one another to attract out-of-state companies? Within the resort sector itself, no in-depth study of publicity exists, especially of the Live Wire Fund and the work of Steve Hannegan, J. Walter Thompson, and other nationally prominent advertising firms, much less the promotional efforts of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA). There is plenty of documentation for interested scholars, and several publicity experts like Harvey Diederich and Don English are still available for interviews.¹¹

Of course, two of the most important agencies for boosting economic growth have been the convention center and the airport. In a farsighted move, Horseshoe Casino owner Joe W. Brown bought the land for the future convention center at a 1955 bankruptcy sale. However, because the site was south of Las Vegas's municipal limits, the city and county jointly developed a plan to build and manage the facility. They created a Fair and Recreation Board (today the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority) to oversee operations and publicize the town.

The authority's reports and other publications contain a treasure-trove of information about building policies, promotional schemes, and marketing strategies since the 1950s. The authority itself is a worthy subject for study, not only for its significance to tourism, but also because it reflects the political jousting between city and counties that has long afflicted government in the valley. Another topic is the Strip hotels that have invested millions in their own convention centers and jealously oppose the LVCVA's efforts to snare their expositions. The most outspoken critic of the LVCVA has been Sheldon Adelson of The Venetian, a former owner of the giant COMDEX computer show, who has



The Las Vegas Strip in the 1970s. The Circus Circus tent is in the upper-left corner.

consistently threatened litigation against the authority. For many years, William Bennett of Circus Circus also opposed the strategy of recruiting conventions that filled hotel rooms with penny-pinching delegates, who preferred buffets and snacks to gambling and shows. At the same time, as state and local growth has strained budgets in Carson City, pressure has mounted for the LVCVA to share some of its enormous revenues from room taxes. In 1997, LVCVA officials reluctantly agreed to a 1 percent increase in the hotel-motel room tax to help fund the spiraling cost of building new schools. It is amazing that we have no scholarly studies of this powerful agency or its leading executives.¹²

Since the dawn of the jet age in the early 1960s, the airplane has been the vehicle of choice for delivering most of Las Vegas's conventioners and many of its tourists. Although Frank Wright of the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society in Las Vegas wrote an informative short history of early aviation in the area, there is no major work on McCarran International Airport. We have an article and a master's degree thesis on the subject, but the airport's development is a big story that requires more research.¹³ The airport and its expansion have been crucial to the valley's development. Such topics as the charter business, resort carriers like Hacienda Airlines, the hub effect of America West and Southwest Airlines, and the growth of international service and tourism



Mayor Ernie Cragin and Senator Pat McCarran break ground at Nellis Air Force Base. (Mr. and Mrs. E.W. Cragin Collection)



Pat McCarran at the entrance to the airport that bears his name in the 1940s.

deserve more scrutiny. The same is true of McCarran's important role in making Las Vegas a sorting operations center for mail to and from southern California and the extreme southwestern portion of the country.

In addition to inspiring large new facilities for the United States Post Office, United Parcel Service, and Federal Express, the airport has influenced land use along its periphery by encouraging the construction of office parks, warehouses, and air-transit-related businesses. At the same time, the airport's location at the end of The Strip has affected larger real estate patterns in the southern portion of the metropolitan area. Since the 1970s, for example, McCarran's runways have acted as a barrier to Maryland Parkway's march southward. While this road remains a vibrant commercial artery for much of its route between UNLV and the city line, it declines into a virtual no man's land of small apartments south of the school because the presence of the airport forces it to dead end for a mile or two. By contrast, the willingness of airport officials in the 1990s to build a tunnel under the runways at nearby Paradise Road created a connection to the new beltway that promoted land development southward onto county lands. This is something the Clark County Commissioners, who double as the airport's governing board, wanted in order to expand their tax base and spawn commuter suburbs in the then relatively empty southwestern portion of the valley. To be sure, it is unusual for metropolitan planners to route thousands of rush-hour commuters through a busy airport—an action that invites closer scrutiny.

Besides the convention center and airport, the resort industry itself has been a powerful force in creating modern Las Vegas. The town is famous for its great hotel-casinos, but surprisingly little has been written about their origins. In the late 1970s, George Stamos, a graduate student in history, wrote a series of columns in the *Las Vegas Sun* outlining the development of the El Rancho, Flamingo, Sands, and other famous Strip resorts. Space constraints made his coverage necessarily brief, as it did for later authors, whose efforts to survey the broader subject of Las Vegas history left relatively little room for the evolution of individual resorts. And while David Schwartz has written about The Strip as suburb, we need to know more. Aside from the usual questions about mob involvement, we need to know more about the conception, design, and intended market of these resorts. How did each hotel grow? What new departments and activities did it add? How did it remodel? In what ways did competition force the resort to change with the times or re-invent itself? Why did some places face implosion, while others did not? Answers to many of these questions lie in the records of Harrah's, the Sahara, MGM Grand, and other resorts whose papers fill the UNLV library's Special Collections and other local repositories.¹⁴

The same also holds true for biographies of the significant resort builders who changed the face of Las Vegas. In the 1990s, short essays chronicling the careers of Benny Binion, Sam Boyd, Jackie Gaughan, Kirk Kerkorian, Steve

Wynn, and others appeared in Jack Sheehan's *The Players*,¹⁵ but many of these men deserve full-length biographies, as do other resort operators such as William Bennett and Sheldon Adelson, studies that might double as business histories. Not only would these works contribute to our knowledge of how and why these executives succeeded, but a well-researched biography also drops a plumb line into the society in which the person lived. In short, biographies would tell us much about what Las Vegas and the casino industry were like in any given decade.¹⁶

Directly related to resort history is hospitality—an important subject that historians often overlook or even dismiss. Obviously, Las Vegas has become a leader within the larger hotel industry, especially in the past few decades as American chains such as Hyatt, Hilton, Holiday Inn, and Marriott have globalized industry standards. In many respects, Las Vegas resorts have not only pioneered gaming rules and law, but also advanced efficient hotel management. In 2004, Las Vegas claimed eight of the ten largest hotels in the world.¹⁷ Students from every major country attend UNLV to learn how to run these behemoths that boast more departments than almost any of their counterparts elsewhere. The Strip's megaresorts have not only rooms, casinos, pools, restaurants, and shops, but also malls, wedding chapels, convention facilities, catering services, and high-roller operations on a scale that would dwarf anything offered by even the largest out-of-state hotels. The MGM Grand, more than double the size of the towering New York Hilton, is an enormous place where employees clean more than five thousand hotel rooms daily in addition to the resort's casinos, convention facilities, restaurants, showrooms, and the lions' den.



The El Rancho Vegas (McWilliams Collection)

While the convention center, the airport, and the hotel industry have all promoted the expansion of Las Vegas, today's metropolis could not exist without water, and lots of it. Thirty years ago, the former newspaper reporter Florence Lee Jones and her husband, John Cahlan, wrote a multivolume history of water in Las Vegas. Given the valley's mushrooming growth since the 1970s, we need a new, more detailed work that covers the last three decades, during which consumption and supply have again become pressing issues. Unfortunately, Jones never finished her history of the Southern Nevada Water Project, whose final construction phase was not completed until the early 1980s. Nor did she fully integrate the politics that almost scuttled it, including pressure by some congressmen to block funding in 1965—addressed by Gary Elliott in biographical studies of Allan Bible—and President Jimmy Carter's abortive effort in 1978 to cancel the final construction phase.¹⁸ Moreover, the creation of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, the implementation of increasingly stringent water restrictions, the issue of exemptions for golf courses and other tourist-related infrastructures, efforts to buy water from other counties and states, changing federal policies, and myriad other issues require comprehensive treatment, as do agencies such as the Southern Nevada Water Authority itself and the Colorado River Commission.

In fact, the whole range of public and private utility services calls for attention. Obviously, water mains are not the only lines under the streets. It would be instructive to trace the building patterns of Southwest Gas, Nevada Power, and Sprint-Central Telephone in the midst of Las Vegas's mushrooming growth, and in the case of the last two, the activity of their joint operations during the town's first quarter of a century. Even more revealing than the building policies of these utilities are the valley's publicly financed sewers, because the availability of the pipes has done much to determine the directions of Las Vegas's growth over the past five decades. For years, city and county politicians have built expensive sewer systems through open desert lands to divert future development to their jurisdictions. This was true of North Las Vegas's failed effort in 1962 to capture the future site of Sunrise Manor at the base of Sunrise Mountain by annexing the lands in between—a move that incurred the wrath of Las Vegas and Clark County Commissioners.¹⁹ A quarter century later, direct connections to Las Vegas's sewer system and wastewater treatment plant influenced the Howard Hughes Company's decision to join its new Summerlin community to the city of Las Vegas. More than a decade after that, Henderson's earlier prowess at laying sewer mains in strategic locations helped prompt Hank Greenspun's American Nevada Corporation to permit that city to annex Green Valley. Currently, we have too little information about the factors underlying these far-reaching decisions.

One of the most neglected subjects in the service area remains the valley's five fire and four police departments. What forces prevented the creation of truly area-wide metropolitan departments for police and fire? Within today's

existing ones, what was the time lag in building new stations in fast-growing suburbs? How long did the less affluent and less politically powerful communities in the Westside and North Las Vegas have to wait? Identifying disparities in service and response times is critical to understanding variations in fire and theft insurance rates, which relate directly to the cost of doing business in different parts of the valley.

The fragmentation of government afflicted not only these services, but the planning process as well. Questions abound regarding the nature of this process. To what extent was planning done by variance? And what about the always controversial issue of eminent domain for highways, resort structures, and downtown redevelopment? While we know that each government, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, drew up autonomous plans that rarely dovetailed with those of neighboring jurisdictions, some valley-wide problems required intergovernmental coordination. How did city and county politicians unite, or fail to unite, over how, when, and where to build roads, highways, flood control projects, and other public works? Histories of the Clark County Flood Control District, the Regional Transportation Commission, and other efforts at cooperation should be recorded, as well as current efforts to decide if, when, and how population growth controls can be put in place.

The politically fragmented context shaping the distribution of services resulted from several factors. Jealousy, fear of favoritism, cost efficiency, higher taxes, and other motives long ago divided the Las Vegas Valley into a maze of county, city, unincorporated township, and other governments that has resulted in needless duplication of bureaucracies and overlapping functions.²⁰ This problem, first documented by the Chicago-based Public Administration Service consultants in their 1968 Report, should be rigorously analyzed from the mid-twentieth century to the present.²¹

Of course, fragmentation was not unique to the Las Vegas area, and suburban politicians resorted to many of the same mechanisms as their counterparts in southern California and elsewhere to keep their central city at bay. One popular device has been the special service district, a useful tool for bridging jurisdictional gaps. No one has yet attempted a thorough history of the library district, the health district, the school district, and other similar entities that require valley-wide cooperation. Interested scholars might also investigate how the presence of special service districts has allowed Henderson, North Las Vegas, and unincorporated county lands to remain historically free of the City of Las Vegas's control.

Education deserves particular attention. Aside from a few theses written for degree programs in education and public administration, there are no full-length, comprehensive histories of the Clark County School District and its host of pre-1955 predecessors.²² The district itself reveals much about the social dynamics within Las Vegas. Besides supplying data on its major administrators, organizational restructurings, construction patterns, and shifting

priorities, the school district serves as a useful vehicle for learning more about the local civil-rights movement, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, changing youth culture, bilingual education, new technologies, textbook-adoption politics, curricular reforms, multicultural pressures, and religious issues.

Whether it be the school district, planning, or government services, politics is the common denominator. For some reason, relatively little has been written about the valley's political history. While newspaper columns, magazine articles, and popular exposés abound with coverage of political bribery in connection with sting operations, illegal prostitution, and topless cabaret licensing, scholars have yet to take advantage of this material. What is lacking are solid histories of the valley's county and city governments and their political systems. More attention should be paid to electoral politics and to the lobbyists and powerbrokers who influenced policy making. In addition, we need biographies of Oran Gragson, Robert Broadbent, and other key political figures. Some preliminary work has been done in this area by the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* in its *The First 100* and by such books as Richard Davies's *The Maverick Spirit*, but more coverage is needed.²³

The same could be said of the valley's media, especially its newspapers. The time is ripe for histories of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* and the *Las Vegas Sun*, including their longtime stormy relationship. Earlier sheets like the *Las Vegas Age* should also be emphasized as well as suburban newspapers such as the *Henderson Home News*, *Boulder City News*, the 1950s-era *North Las Vegas News*, and *The North Las Vegas Valley Times*. In addition, the more community-oriented papers such as *The Sentinel Voice* and *La Voce* deserve attention, as does the increasing number of alternative weeklies, and city magazines, and trade journals. The valley has seen more than its share of colorful editors. Certainly, Hank Greenspun deserves his own monograph, as do Al Cahlan, Charles Squires, and Bob Brown. While Mike O'Callaghan's editorial career alone commands extended treatment, his significant political career is an embarrassing scholarly omission that needs to be addressed. Even seemingly minor publications like *Las Vegas Apartment Guide* and *New Homes Guide* are valuable for tracking rent history, housing patterns, and marketing techniques in the valley during recent decades.

Even more neglected than Las Vegas's political and economic history is its social history. Take, for instance, religion. Las Vegas's notorious image as America's sin city has inspired numerous authors over the years to sensationalize its vices. From Mario Puzo's vignettes of aging hookers and veteran cocktail waitresses recounting bygone trysts with celebrities to the accounts by Larry McMurtry or Amanda York of romance and love gone awry, by using Las Vegas as a setting for their sometimes lurid tales, these and other writers have contributed greatly to the city's infamous reputation.²⁴ Many still consider Las Vegas and organized religion to be mutually exclusive. Whatever the reason, little has been written about Las Vegas's spiritual landscape. Clearly, the casino

city presents numerous challenges for devout congregates and their religious leaders anxious to safeguard their own salvations and those of their converts.

Stanley Steward, an ordained Assemblies of God minister and trained historian, has written an insightful account of the charismatic movement in Las Vegas and how its members cope with the many challenges the city poses to pious Christians.²⁵ According to Steward, ministers and elders have long struggled with the beguiling snares of a secular culture that glorifies hedonism. Take, for instance, the numerous occupational threats that daily confront Christian residents, forcing them to compromise their beliefs for the sake of earning a living—the bartender who must serve alcohol, the topless dancer who cannot afford to quit, and the hundreds of ordinary workers whose lives and marriages have been scarred by drugs, gambling, alcohol, promiscuity, and co-dependency.

More historians of religion should explore the problems faced by evangelical, charismatic, and other popular, fast-growing denominations in the casino city, as well as such main-line Protestant churches as the Lutherans, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists. In addition, scholars should investigate the racial dimension of this subject, because, especially before the 1970s, African Americans who came to town as members of these religious groups faced intense Jim Crow pressures from their white brethren and, as a result, often had to form their own congregations.

Besides these major Protestant groups, Mormonism also claims thousands of followers in the Las Vegas area. To be sure, the Latter Day Saints (LDS) deserve a better book than Ken Ward's 2002 volume, in which the author compresses a long story into a comparatively short, biased account that bashes prominent Mormons like banker Parry Thomas for succumbing to the financial enticements of America's Babylon.²⁶ The LDS Church has been part of the Las Vegas scene since 1855, when pioneer missionaries erected the Old Mormon Fort as a way station for travelers to southern California and a mission for converting local Paiutes. In the twentieth century, however, the gambling industry posed challenges to church members noted for their piety and conservatism. This issue could serve as a useful theme for a broader study detailing the history of the Las Vegas church, including its major stakes, prominent members, political involvement, and leaders. The questions this work could address are legion. Perhaps the most intriguing, however, is why so many Mormons left the friendly confines of Utah and neighboring states to move to, of all places, Las Vegas? Given the long shadow cast by participation in the gaming industry, the uneasy relationship between Las Vegas Mormons and their more orthodox brethren in Utah is a matter of interest. The same is true of the church's amazing growth in the Las Vegas area. Mormon proselytizing, especially with regard to thousands of Mexicans and other Hispanic residents who have left the Catholic Church, also deserves attention. Too little is known about the reasons for this phenomenon.



The first Mormon Chapel in Las Vegas was begun in 1924 and completed in 1925 at the northwest corner of Sixth and Carson.

The Catholic Church in Las Vegas also requires scholarly treatment. Over the years, this institution, like its LDS counterpart, has produced such major political leaders as Governor Mike O'Callaghan, Supreme Court Justice John Mowbray, the judges Roger T. and Roger D. Foley, the longtime state senator Bob Coffin, and many others. But it, too, faces a range of problems, not the least of which is growth. Over the past decade and a half, southern Nevada has been the fastest-growing Catholic diocese in the United States. The influx of Hispanic residents to Las Vegas has put a tremendous strain on the church. In some parishes, the parishioner-to-priest ratio now approaches twenty thousand to one.²⁷ Under these circumstances, Catholic schools, which have been closing in many parts of the country, are incapable of admitting all the children who want to attend. And the only Catholic high school in southern Nevada, Bishop Gorman, will soon move to a larger campus in the distant southwestern suburbs. Since its birth in 1955, this school has educated numerous future leaders. For many years before other elite high schools opened, Gorman even taught the children of prominent Las Vegans who practiced other religions. For example, resort owner Steve Wynn, a Jew, sent his daughters to Gorman.

While Catholics and Mormons certainly have been important, no survey of religion in Las Vegas would be complete without a discussion of the Jews, a group that has influenced life at all levels in the community. Aside from their obvious contributions to the resort industry, Jewish Las Vegans have also been active in politics with the likes of Mayor Oscar Goodman, Representative Shelley

Berkley, and County Commissioner Myrna Williams; in development with Irwin Molasky, Hank Greenspun, and Mark Fine, and in health with hospital founders Nate and Merv Adelson, Molasky, Moe Dalitz, Milton Schwartz, and the doctors themselves. Then, too, in law, education, business, and media, and especially gaming, Jewish participation has been out of all proportion to the group's numbers in the general population.²⁸ Clearly, someone should survey the Jewish experience in Las Vegas, as well as the development of the various temples, and how the Jews interacted with other ethnic, religious, and racial groups. Oral histories, family papers, and the records of the B'nai Brith and similar organizations, as well as the issues of the *Las Vegas Israelite* and the *Jewish Reporter*, would all shed light on this subject.

Perhaps more than anyone else, political scientist Alan Balboni has demonstrated the value of ethnic history in revealing the communal side of Las Vegas and how it functions. His book *Beyond the Mafia* was the first to chronicle the majority of Las Vegas Italians, those who never relied on the mob for a living.²⁹ Balboni's insightful work looks at construction, waste removal, and a variety of other occupations, including the town's gambling industry. His volume is a case study of how casinos acted as mobility launchers for countless dealers who aspired to become pit bosses, shift bosses, and general managers. It emphasizes the importance of employee networks operating within the town's casinos, where connections were crucial to keeping a job and furthering one's career. Balboni has also written about how Las Vegas's Italians and Jews worked together to promote their interests in both gaming and nongaming enterprises.³⁰

But what about Las Vegas's other ethnic groups? Jerry Simich and Thomas Wright are publishing a new and informative anthology detailing the experiences of the Chinese, Slavs, Mexicans, Salvadorans, Filipinos, Greeks, and other groups who helped diversify Las Vegas's residential population.³¹ Thirty-page chapters, however, can hardly do justice to these contributions. Lengthier studies, including book-length treatments, are needed to document the achievements of the Filipinos, Vietnamese, Arabs, and numerous Hispanic peoples who now call Las Vegas home.

The same could be said for gender, which, like religion and ethnicity, remains a neglected part of the town's social history. For the past five decades, American scholars have published hundreds of books and articles detailing women's experiences in big cities like New York and Chicago, in the South, in the suburbs, in the rural Midwest, and in a variety of other contexts. But relatively few scholarly accounts have examined the lives of women in Las Vegas. This situation is slowly changing, thanks to UNLV's success in establishing a Women's Studies Department and in supporting faculty like Joanne Goodwin, who founded the Women's Research Institute of Nevada (WRIN) in 2000. The WRIN staff, working with their counterparts in the Lied Library's Special Collections, have identified dozens of women, as well as women's organizations, such as the Mesquite Club and Junior League, that have contributed to Las

Vegas history.

Through the acquisition of records, photographs, and oral histories, hundreds of sources have been collected to document women's experiences. For a number of reasons, Las Vegas is a convenient laboratory for studying gender and sexuality. First, the sin-city image of a place that for years officially countenanced prostitution, and still tolerates escort services, gentlemen's clubs, and topless revues, offers more of an opportunity to study gender in a transgressive setting than do traditional American cities.³² Then there is the issue of the resort industry's exploitation of female workers. For years, they were confined to the so-called girl's ghetto of keno running and cocktail waitressing—positions where they faced sexual harassment of near legendary proportions by male bosses who controlled job security.

The questions to be answered about these and other issues are numerous. What was the role of the Culinary Union in attacking this problem? And what about the resort industry's opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the determined opposition of the locally powerful Catholic and Mormon churches? Gambling itself has long been regarded as a highly individualized, male-oriented behavior. How have the casinos historically integrated women into their operations as employees, and how have the resorts attempted to lure female gamblers?

Claytee White, a doctoral candidate and oral historian at the UNLV library's Special Collections, has extended this discussion to race within the context of a resort city.³³ This contrasts with much of the present historiography on African Americans, which is set in commercial and industrial cities. Her research highlights the activity of black women, not only in gaming, but in education, business, and civil rights. White has emphasized the importance of recording not only the experiences of African-American leaders like educator Mabel Hoggard and dealer and casino-owner Sarann Knight Preddy, but also those of ordinary people who came to Las Vegas from Dixie and worked as room maids, waitresses, and in other service-sector positions. Other researchers, such as doctoral student Myoung-ja Lee Kwon, have studied Asian women in Las Vegas, including entertainers like the Korean Kim Sisters, who performed for years in Las Vegas lounges before opening for showroom headliners.³⁴ Still other historians are beginning to trace the experiences of Hispanic women and their efforts to surmount language barriers and traditional southwestern prejudices.

For specialists in gender studies, Las Vegas offers another advantage that few cities can match: an entertainment industry that has historically used female beauty and talent to lure male gamblers to the tables. But performers such as Lena Horne, Eartha Kitt, and Dorothy Dandridge appealed to women, too—symbolizing the important role of black women in the struggle for equality. Dinah Shore, Helen Reddy, Sophie Tucker, and many other strong, independent-minded performers also served as role models for the budding feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s.



Lido de Paris showgirls at the Stardust in 1980.

However, the show-business dimension of Las Vegas is also significant for cultural historians. Writers, promoters, and reporters have always portrayed Las Vegas in a variety of images. One of the most enduring has been Las Vegas as the "entertainment capital of the world." Surprisingly, we have no comprehensive history of the city's entertainment industry. While biographers, hotel publicists, and popular writers have published useful information about Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, Nat King Cole, Sammy Davis, Jr. and other stars, these accounts are but fragments of a larger story.³⁵ The staff at UNLV's oral history program and WRIN have interviewed former showgirls, dancers, lounge performers, and even headliners to assemble a growing body of data about these acts and their behind-the-scenes crew members. It is hoped that these efforts will lead to histories of key entertainment venues, including the Strip's showrooms and lounges and Fremont Street's lounges, during their heyday. Aside from interesting anecdotes about the stars, we know little about such legendary figures as the Sands entertainment director, Jack Entratter, and major stage-show producers like Donn Arden, Frederick Apcar, and Rocky Sennes; choreographers like Jeff Kutash; and company managers like Fluff LeCoque. Special Collections at UNLV contains a variety of materials relating to the city's glamorous stage shows, including photographs, sheet music, scripts, videotapes, sound recordings, and costume design drawings.

Even more important, the show-business side of Las Vegas reveals much about the racism, gender bias, labor conflicts, and other tensions that strained human relations in the community at different points in its history. Nat King

Cole and Dorothy Dandridge's various bouts with Jim Crow management practices, various showgirl walkouts, and myriad other events are instructive about civil rights, sexual harassment, and shifting cultural mores during Las Vegas's development. They are important because, despite its pretensions to being the nation's mythical refuge from everyday life, Las Vegas often reflected the darker side of American culture.

In other ways, too, Las Vegas pioneered new cultural innovations, not the least of which was casino architecture. By the 1960s, The Strip had begun to take the traditional architectural themes of the Old West or the desert spa—ideas that the El Cortez, Last Frontier, Desert Inn, and Sands had borrowed from Reno, Phoenix, and Palm Springs—in new directions. In the 1950s and 1960s, magazine writers, newspaper reporters, novelists, and others increasingly noted the distinctive architectural and interior design features of the Sahara, Riviera, Stardust, and other gambling emporiums on The Strip and downtown. Many of these same people also marveled at the dramatic signage, epitomized by the Golden Nugget's blazing neon. But it was Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour in the early 1970s who first made Las Vegas architecture a subject for scholarly debate.³⁶ In recent years, the Disneyfied exteriors of the Excalibur, New York-New York, and other resorts have attracted the interest of even more scholars. German architectural historians like Karin Jaschke and Silke Otsch have joined with Frances Anderton and other international scholars to go beyond Alan Hess's informative survey of the city's hotel-casino buildings and relate resort architecture more directly to contemporary culture. Using modern social science and literary theory, and informed by the casino-design writings of former gaming executive Bill Friedman, these scholars have begun to connect Las Vegas casino architecture to the work of Michel Foucault and other theorists to explain how the resorts have historically scripted casino spaces in order to manipulate customers.³⁷

Today's casinos still package popular culture and use its mass appeal to lure tourists of different classes, races, and nationalities to town. Once the visitors are inside the casino, every effort is made to surround them with a friendly environment conducive to gambling, leisure activity, and consumption. For cultural historians, this embodies a significant departure from traditional commercial retailing. Indeed, Las Vegas represents a new form of cultural production and exploitation. This is significant because the recent nationwide spread of casino gambling has diffused these new forms of leisure spending and behavior across the United States and other parts of the world.

The typical Las Vegas casino—with its signage, sports screens, showroom talent, and slot machines that use characters from television's golden age to surround gamblers with nostalgic environments—employs a wide variety of cultural texts. One could even argue that the resort hotels create subcultures of their own containing some qualities common to all of the casino industry, and others unique just to Las Vegas, The Strip, or an individual resort. All of these



Downtown Las Vegas in 1978. (*Las Vegas Sun Collection*)

subjects require more study. Connections among television shows, sporting events, Hollywood films, rock music, resort theming, signage, and modern culture need to be made and evaluated.

Las Vegas's contributions to casino architecture and American culture are significant enough to warrant protection, but, unlike the case in San Francisco, New York, and many other cities, historic preservation in the gaming metropolis has faced rough going. Founded in 1974 to help save the Old Mormon Fort of 1855, the Preservation Association of Clark County has struggled for years to convince politicians and property owners of the need to save historic city landmarks from the bulldozer. With exception of Elizabeth Warren's excellent volume on Las Vegas Springs,³⁸ relatively little has been written about the success of the preservation association, PACC, the Southern Nevada Historical Society, and other groups in getting an historic district established and in safeguarding other significant sites and structures. Even less is known about the movement's failures, including the resistance of developer and property owner resistance, political foot-dragging, misappropriation funds, wasted money, and broken promises. Too often, fire has determined the outcome of preservation struggles—to the delight of investors. The destruction of the early railroad buildings, the gutting of the Union Pacific ice house, the old city hospital, and the Moulin Rouge, and the implosion of the Dunes, Landmark, Hacienda, Sands, and other resorts have obliterated not only monuments to Las Vegas's history, but its culture as well.³⁹



The historic J. Kell Houssels House now is on the UNLV campus after being moved from 6th and Charleston. The Thomas and Mack Center is in the background.
(North Las Vegas Library Collection)

While Las Vegas's architecture and its built past reflect the changing culture of the past century, literature and film have also been important. Edward Baldwin has prepared an informative survey of the novels, plays, nonfictional essays, and films for which Las Vegas has served as the main subject or setting, from its earliest years to the mid 1990s.⁴⁰ But there is more to be done. All of this disparate work needs to be more completely integrated into its proper cultural context.

Perhaps the most notorious cultural legacy of Las Vegas's cultural past is its association in the national mind with organized crime. Even residents view the city's mob heritage with some nostalgia—witness their support of two-term Mayor Oscar Goodman. Las Vegas's relationship with some of the nation's most unsavory criminals was no fleeting matter. For decades, the gangs operated in town, making Las Vegas the target of every political reformer, outraged cleric, and crusading journalist.

Forty years ago, Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris published *The Green Felt Jungle*, their classic exposé of mob influence on The Strip and downtown.⁴¹ Over the decades, other publications have devoted portions of their texts to detailing Las Vegas's connections to criminal rings. This literature includes Jimmy "the Weasel" Frattianno's tell-all book, *The Last Mafioso* by Ovid Demaris, as well as Michael Drosnin's *Citizen Hughes*, and Steve Brill's *The Teamsters*. In *The Players*, a series of authors explore the influence of Moe Dalitz, Jimmy Hoffa's loans to Caesar's Palace builder Jay Sarno, Al Capone's links to Dunes owner Major Riddle, and Hoffa's business dealings with kingpin Mormon banker Parry

Thomas, among other themes.⁴² But there has been no solid history of the mob's influence during the four decades since *The Green Felt Jungle* appeared. The newspaper accounts of Ned Day and John L. Smith, as well as Nicholas Pileggi's *Casino*, no matter how revealing they might be, are no substitute for a comprehensive treatment that ties Sam Giancana, Marshal Caifano, Anthony Spilotro, and dozens of other people and events together in a persuasive conceptual framework.

Similarly, we lack a good interpretive treatment of Benny Binion and Milton Prell who came to Las Vegas from criminal, but non-mob, backgrounds. Who helped them? And, precisely how did the state and local criminal-justice systems handle their presence? More information about the FBI, IRS, and mob task-force activities would also be welcome. What about controversial law-enforcement officials such as the FBI's Joe Yablonsky, and the politics surrounding their missions? Estes Kefauver, Pat McCarran, Robert Kennedy, Ramsey Clark, and many other noteworthy figures are also part of this story that we know too little about.

This relates to an even broader subject: Las Vegas's historic relationship with federal and out-of-state politicians. Certainly, a chronicle of the anti-Las Vegas pressures exerted on the United States Congress by Bible Belt forces could fill a small book. So could a variety of other issues. What about the Kennedys and their brief, love-hate relationship with Las Vegas? And why was Congress, including liberals like Senator Ted Kennedy, so quick to impeach Federal District Court Judge Harry Claiborne, a former mob lawyer, who was convicted of tax evasion on relatively flimsy evidence? Bruce Alverson, a Las Vegas lawyer and history doctoral student, is preparing a biography of the colorful Claiborne that will shed some light on this matter.

But additional research is needed, because in the last decade or so Las Vegas's relationship with national legislators has become more important as the stakes have gone up. Specifically, how have Steve Wynn, Baron Hilton, and gaming-industry lobbyists like Frank Fahrenkopf and Richard Bunker pressured major politicians? How about the campaign contributions from Strip resorts to the national Republican and Democratic parties? After all, Congress continues to debate such controversial issues as tribal casinos, Internet gaming, sports betting, taxation of winnings, and other matters that affect the health of southern Nevada's gaming industry.

Then, too, as gambling has spread to other states, how have casino owners in Las Vegas worked with their longtime adversary, the culinary union, to legalize gambling and secure licenses in liberal states like New Jersey, Michigan, Connecticut, and Illinois, where Big Labor is influential? How have the unions themselves functioned and, granting occasional corruption, malfunctioned? Finally, how have Las Vegas casinos and their image makers worked to discredit traditional taboos about gambling, rehabilitating the industry's unsavory reputation so as to persuade enough voters and elected officials to change their

laws? The history of Las Vegas's role in the national spread of gambling since the late 1970s is an important topic worthy of a book.

All of these subjects and many others have been neglected for too long by historians and other scholars, who often bypassed Las Vegas in their zeal to study other cities. Perhaps some of them feared that Las Vegas's renowned exceptionalism would limit their ability to make generalizations about their findings. Other scholars no doubt recoiled at spending their research time in a vulgar neon jungle where familiar Main Street architecture yields to gaudy casinos dedicated to greed, lust, and self-indulgence. Or perhaps Las Vegas was just too small and isolated to merit academic attention. Whatever the reason, Las Vegas is no longer small or isolated or exceptional. Nor can anyone deny that Las Vegas has become both a national and international phenomenon that deserves more attention. As this maverick city celebrates its centennial, let us hope that Las Vegas's second century of life brings more insightful, scholarly studies than its first.

NOTES

¹A semipopular but still scholarly work is Gary E. Elliott, *The New Western Frontier: An Illustrated History of Greater Las Vegas* (Carlsbad, Calif: Heritage Media Corp., 1999); John M. Findlay, *People of Chance: Gambling in America from Jamestown to Las Vegas* (New York: Oxford University Press 1986); M. Gottdiener, Claudia Collins, and David R. Dickens, *Las Vegas: The Social Production of an All-American City* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1999); Eugene P. Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas, 1930-2000* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000); Hal K. Rothman, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-first Century* (London: Routledge 2002); Ralph Roske, *Las Vegas: A Desert Paradise* (Tulsa: Continental Heritage Press, 1986). This last study is like Elliott's work.

²For books on cities, see Howard Gillette, Jr. and Zane L. Miller, *American Urbanism: A Historiographical Review* (New York: Glenwood Press, 1987); Arthur P. Young, comp., *Cities and Towns in American History: A Bibliography of Doctoral Dissertations* (New York: Glenwood Press, 1989).

³Typical of the sunbelt anthologies that ignore Las Vegas are David C. Perry and Alfred J. Watkins, eds., *The Rise of the Sunbelt Cities* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc., 1977); Raymond Mohl, ed., *Searching for the Sunbelt: Historical Perspectives on a Region* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981). The situation gradually improved in the 1990s. Abbott refers to Las Vegas more than twenty times in his *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993).

⁴Eric Nystrom, "Labor Strife in Las Vegas: The Union Pacific Shopmen's Strike of 1922," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 44:4 (Winter 2001), 313-32; Frank Wright, *Desert Airways: A Short History of Clark County Aviation* (Henderson: Clark County Heritage Museum, 1993); Eugene P. Moehring, "Profile of a Railroad Town: Las Vegas in 1910," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 34:4 (Winter 1991), 466-87; Stanley W. Paher, *Las Vegas, As It Began—As It Grew* (Las Vegas: Nevada Publications, 1971); Michael S. Green and Eugene P. Moehring, *A Centennial History of Las Vegas* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005).

⁵See, for instance, Paul W. Gates, *The Illinois Central Railroad and Its Colonization Work* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934); Charles N. Glaab, *Kansas City and the Railroads* (Madison: Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1962); Richard C. Overton, *Burlington West: A Colonization History of the Burlington Railroad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941); Glenn Chesney Quiett, *They Built the West: An Epic of Rails and Cities* (New York: Appleton, 1941). See sections on Cheyenne, Reno, Spokane, and other areas in John Reys, *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). None of these works, however, provides in-depth coverage of the early symbiotic relationship between a railroad and the city it created. Even a book like John Fahey, *The Inland Empire: Unfolding Years, 1879-1929* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986) contains few chapters on the early history of Spokane and the railroad that are heavily reliant on city and railroad company records.

⁶City of Henderson and D. Matthew Lay, *Henderson: An American Journey* (Henderson: City of Henderson, 2004); William T. Dobbs, "Southern Nevada and the Legacy of Basic Magnesium, Incorporated," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 34:1 (Spring 1991), 273-303; Dennis McBride, *In the Beginning—A History of Boulder City, Nevada* (Boulder City: Boulder City Chamber of Commerce, 1981); Maryellen Sadovich, "Basic Magnesium, Incorporated, and the Industrialization of Southern Nevada (M.A. thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1971); Joseph Stevens, *Hoover Dam: An American Adventure* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

⁷See, for instance, Gottdiener, Collins, and Dickens, *Las Vegas*, 131-39 and 139-53 for Green Valley and Summerlin, respectively.

⁸Eugene P. Moehring, "Public Works and the New Deal in Las Vegas, 1933-1940," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 24:2 (Summer 1981), 107-29; *idem.*, "Las Vegas and the Second World War," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 29:1 (Spring 1986), 1-30; A. Costandina Titus, *Bombs in the Backyard: Atomic Testing and American Politics* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986). Mary Palevsky, director of the Nevada Test Site Oral History Project, is currently interviewing dozens of scientists, their families, and others involved in atomic testing to gather information about their experiences. For Nellis Air Force Base, see James Hinds, *Epitome of the History of Nellis Air*

Force Base (North Las Vegas: Nellis Air Force Base, 1977). See also Eugene P. Moehring, "Eagle over Main Street: The Federal Presence in the Las Vegas Metropolitan Area," in *Battle Born: Federal-State Conflict in Nevada during the Twentieth Century*, A. Costandina Titus, ed., (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1989).

⁹Rothman, *Neon Metropolis*, 219-25.

¹⁰See, for example, Albion Dahl, *Nevada's Southern Economy* (Carson City: University of Nevada Bureau of Business and Economic Research, 1969); Betty Yantis, *Fact Book for Las Vegas and Clark County* (Las Vegas: UNLV Center for Business and Economic Research, 1977).

¹¹Leta Lafay Ver Hulst, "The Creation of the Las Vegas Image: A Case Study of Harvey Diederich" (M.A. thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1999).

¹²See Eugene P. Moehring, "Growth, Services, and the Political Economy of Gambling in Las Vegas, 1970-2000," in *The Grit Beneath the Glitter: Tales of the Real Las Vegas*, Hal K. Rothman and Mike Davis, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 73-98.

¹³Daniel Bubb, "Thunder in the Desert: Commercial Air Travel and Tourism in Las Vegas, 1959-2001 (M.A. thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2001); *idem.*, "Hacienda Airlines: A First-Class Airline for Coach-Class Passengers," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 44:3 (Fall 2001), 238-49, and Wright, *Desert Airways*.

¹⁴See, for instance, George Stamos's essays on the Hotel Last Frontier and the Flamingo in *Las Vegas Sun Magazine* (15 April 1979), pp. 6-11, and (22 April 1979), pp. 6-11, respectively. David G. Schwartz, *Suburban Xanadu: The Casino Resort on the Las Vegas Strip and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁵Jack E. Sheehan, ed., *The Players: The Men Who Made Las Vegas* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1997).

¹⁶There are a number of works written primarily for a popular audience. See Michael Drosnin, *Citizen Hughes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1985); Donald L. Bartlett and James B. Steele, *Empire: The Life, Legend, and Madness of Howard Hughes* (New York: Norton, 1979); John L. Smith, *No Limit: The Rise and Fall of Bob Stupak and Las Vegas' Stratosphere Tower* (Las Vegas: Huntington Press, 1997); *idem.*, *Running Scared: The Life and Treacherous Times of Las Vegas Casino King Steve Wynn* (New York: Barricade Books, 1995).

¹⁷See "20 Largest Hotels in the World" at <<http://insidervlv.com/hotelslargestworld.html>>.

¹⁸Florence Lee Jones, *Water: A History of Las Vegas. History of the Las Vegas Land and Water Company*, 2 vols. (Las Vegas: Las Vegas Valley Water District, 1975); Gary E. Elliott, "Senator Alan Bible and the Southern Nevada Water Project, 1954-1971," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, (Fall 1989), 181-97.

¹⁹See *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (7 November 1969), p. 6; (11 November 1969), p. 1.

²⁰See Eugene P. Moehring, "Las Vegas Growth and Infrastructure: A Legacy of Poor Planning," *The Western Planner*, 18 (December 1997), 12-14; *idem.*, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 140-72.

²¹Public Administration Service, *Local Government in Clark County* (Chicago: n.p., 1968).

²²Harvey N. Dondero, *History of the Clark County Schools* (Las Vegas: n.p., 1987). See also Raymond Guild Gray, "The Organization of a County School District: A Case Study of District Consolidation and Administrative Organization" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1958), which examines the Clark County School District's creation in 1955.

²³A. D. Hopkins and K. J. Evans, eds., *The First 100: Portraits of the Men and Women Who Shaped Southern Nevada* (Las Vegas: Huntington Press, 1999); Richard O. Davies, *The Maverick Spirit: Building the New Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1998).

²⁴See appropriate sections of Mario Puzo, *Inside Las Vegas* (New York: Charter Books 1976); Anthony Glyn, *The Dragon Variation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969); Larry McMurtry, *The Desert Rose* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983); Amanda York, *Stardust and Sand* (New York: Silhouette, 1985).

²⁵Stanley Steward, "Where Sin Abounds: A Religious History of Las Vegas" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2003).

²⁶Kenric F. Ward, *Saints in Babylon: Mormons and Las Vegas* (Bloomington, Ind.: 1st Books Library, 2002).

²⁷*Las Vegas Review-Journal-Sun*, (21 December 2003), pp. 1D, 4D.

²⁸See Michael S. Green, "The Jews" in *Peoples of Las Vegas*, Jerry L. Simich and Thomas C. Wright, eds. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005).

²⁹Alan Balboni, *Beyond the Mafia: Italian Americans and the Development of Las Vegas* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1996).

³⁰Alan Balboni, "Southern Italians and Eastern European Jews: Cautious Cooperation in Las Vegas Casinos," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 38:3 (Fall 1995), 153-73.

³¹Simich and Wright, *Peoples of Las Vegas*.

³²The concept of Las Vegas as a "transgressive environment" is developed by Karin Jaschke in her essay "Casinos Inside Out" in *Stripping Las Vegas: A Contextual Review of Las Vegas Casino Resort Architecture*, Karin Jaschke and Silke Otsch, eds. (London: Verso, 2003), 109-32.

³³Claytee White, "The Role of African-American Women in the Las Vegas Gaming Industry, 1940-1980" (M.A. thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1997).

³⁴Myoung-ja Lee Kwon, "An Interview with Sook-ja Kim: An Oral History (Las Vegas: University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1997).

³⁵See, for instance, Adam Woog, *Frank Sinatra* (San Diego: Lucent Books, 2001); P. F. Kluge, *Biggest Elvis* (New York: Viking, 1996); Daniel Mark Epstein, *Nat King Cole* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999); Wil Haygood, *In Black and White: The Life of Sammy Davis, Jr.* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 2003).

³⁶Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas; The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); Frances Anderton and John Chase, *Las Vegas: The Success of Excess* (London: Ellipsis Konneman, 1996).

³⁷A summary of Bill Friedman's thought can be found in Jaschke and Otsch, *Stripping Las Vegas*, 69-86. See also Bill Friedman, *Designing Casinos to Dominate the Competition: The Friedman International Standard of Casino Design* (Reno: Institute for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gaming, 2000).

³⁸Elizabeth Warren, "The History of Las Vegas Springs: A Disappeared Resource" (Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 2001). The University of Nevada Press will be publishing an updated and expanded version of this work.

³⁹In 1977, the City of Las Vegas, at the behest of Mayor William Briare, commissioned an inventory of sites and structures worthy of preservation. See Charles Hall Page and Associates, Inc., *Historic Preservation Inventory and Guidelines: City of Las Vegas* (San Francisco: n.p., 1978). This report still serves as a reference for preservation activists and would be an excellent source for anyone writing about the area's preservation history and early architecture. Unfortunately, it is currently out of print and in need of updating. In addition, the inventory covers only the city of Las Vegas. We have no comparable volumes for Henderson, North Las Vegas, Boulder City, or Clark County.

⁴⁰Edward E. Baldwin, "Las Vegas in Popular Culture (Ph.D. diss., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1997).

⁴¹Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris, *The Green Felt Jungle* (New York: Pocket Books, 1963).

⁴²Ovid Demaris, *The Last Mafioso* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981); Drosnin, *Citizen Hughes*; Steven Brill, *The Teamsters* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); Sheehan, *The Players*. See also Peter Wiley and Robert Gottlieb, *Empires in the Sun: The Rise of the New American West* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1982), 191-216; Nicholas Pileggi, *Casino: Love and Honor in Las Vegas* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

Civil Rights and Employment Equity in Las Vegas Casinos

The Failed Enforcement of the Casino Consent Decree, 1971 - 1986

JEFFREY J. SALLAZ

INTRODUCTION

Alongside the explosive growth of Las Vegas during the midtwentieth century, there arose a cottage industry of popular, academic, and governmental exposés condemning the secret source of the city's success: financing by organized crime syndicates.¹ As publicly traded corporations have come to dominate the Nevada casino market since the 1980s,² the dominant narrative of this part of Nevada history has shifted in tone from denial to a mythology that treats mob funding as a necessary, even romantic, stage in the evolution of an industry long shunned by moralistic mainstream investors.³ Another of the industry's former stigmas has received similar treatment: the Las Vegas casinos' discriminatory practices toward racial minorities. Once labeled bosses of the "Mississippi of the West" because of their refusal to allow minorities to gamble in their stores, Las Vegas casino owners during the 1960s and 1970s—with a little prodding from civil-rights groups and progressive state politicians—opened up their pits to gamblers of all stripes. As with the usurpation of the mob's domain by corporate capital, the casino's "modernization" of their treatment of minority consumers is viewed as having been overdetermined by economic forces, namely, the profit motive: "For the casino owners, economic self-interest would beat out racial anxiety every time . . . The casino resort was now a truly democratic institution that took the money of all gamblers without regard to race, religion, sex, or creed."⁴ Today, the racial demographics of visitors to Las Vegas are remarkably representative of the population of the United States as a whole.⁵

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The main pit of the Sands, 1959. Prior to the 1960s, African Americans were officially excluded as both customers and workers from Strip casinos. (*University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections*)

Though it has received less attention, the struggle to integrate minorities as casino employees exhibits, at first glance, a history parallel to that of consumers. Long excluded from the best casino jobs, racial minorities—after a period of activism and mobilization in the late 1960s—now enjoy substantial representation throughout the casino.⁶ A closer examination of employment statistics, however, reveals that while nonwhite employment has increased substantially, very little progress has been made in integrating African Americans into the better jobs of the casino. They have, in a phrase, been leapfrogged by newer immigrants to southern Nevada from Latin America, east Asia, and even Africa.⁷ Consider the case of casino dealers, historically one of the more prestigious and top-paying positions in the casino (because of the tips—or tokens—that dealers receive). While African Americans constitute 10 percent of the state's population, they currently hold only 7 percent of all dealing jobs in the state; conversely, Asians, who constitute 5 percent of the population, represent 31 percent of the state's dealers.⁸

The under-representation of African Americans is puzzling, considering that they have been established in the Las Vegas community since the World War II era. It also reflects more than just inertia or habit on the part of casino managers, for the hiring and incorporation of African Americans into the pits has been an ongoing concern of civil-rights groups and the federal government for the past three decades. The apex of this struggle is generally acknowledged to be the signing of the civil-rights Consent Decree in June 1971,⁹ according to which the eighteen largest casinos and four main labor unions in Las Vegas were to modernize their labor practices to ensure employment equity. While the decree may be labeled a success in that it improved racial diversity in the casino, it must, in terms of its stated purpose of increasing the representation of African Americans on the casino floor, be considered a failure. Using histori-

cal analysis of the Consent Decree's genesis and subsequent administration, this article will explain the inability of the federal government and civil-rights groups in Nevada to enforce it. First, I describe the events leading up to the decree during the decade of civil-rights activism in the 1950s and 1960s. Second, I revisit the 1971 signing of the Decree itself. Third, the failed attempt by the federal government to expand the terms of the Decree in 1974 is recounted. Finally, I report upon a second failed attempt to enforce the decree, this time by a nonprofit organization representing African Americans in Las Vegas in 1984.

DUAL ATTEMPTS TO DESEGREGATE DURING THE 1950'S AND 1960'S

The End of Consumer Discrimination

We may discern two separate objects of civil-rights activism regarding African Americans during the 1950s and 1960s. The first focused upon their exclusion as consumers, the second as employees. The standard method of casino operation in Nevada prior to World War II entailed prohibiting the state's minorities from gambling in white-owned clubs. Though exceptions were sometimes made for Chinese and Native Americans, African Americans were routinely told to take their business elsewhere.¹⁰ Their play was restricted to clubs operated by Chinese businesspeople and clubs in west Las Vegas owned by African Americans—per a 1931 Las Vegas city resolution stating that casino licenses may be granted to “persons of the Ethiopian race [provided they] cater only to others of that race.”¹¹

The vast investments of federal capital in southern Nevada during the construction of Boulder Dam in the 1930s and the Basic Magnesium plant in the 1940s led to a mass influx of workers and job seekers. The share of African Americans in the state's population increased from 0.6 percent in 1930 to 4.7 percent in 1960, as they migrated from the South in search of work in both federal construction projects and the burgeoning casino industry, which was viewed as offering a chance to make “8 dollars a day in the shade.”¹² During this period, the segregation of minority gamblers intensified. Casino owners justified their practices through reference to the supposed prejudices of the new clientele: conservative tourists and white migrants from the South would be frightened away if asked to share a blackjack table with African Americans. As the editor John F. Cahlan remembered:

People who were operating the hotels and motels of the community were afraid that the tourists from the other parts of the United States—California especially—would resent having to visit a place that was occupied by a black It was just the fact that they wanted to keep their place what they called “clean.”¹³

State officials attempted unsuccessfully to integrate Nevada's casinos and hotels through legislation in 1939, 1949, 1953 and 1957.¹⁴ The election of a progressive governor, Grant Sawyer, in 1958 saw the beginning of the most

sustained attempt by state officials to alleviate consumer discrimination. Motivated in part by fears of adverse publicity preceding the 1960 winter Olympic Games at Lake Tahoe, Sawyer and his allies launched a campaign that eventually overcame the opposition of conservative members of the state legislature; they ultimately succeeded both in establishing a Commission on the Equal Rights of Citizens (CERC) in 1961 and in pushing through a state civil-rights law in 1965. Sawyer later admitted, though, that both were largely symbolic gestures, inadequately funded and enforced.¹⁵ The governor recognized that the only effective form of leverage against casino operators was not through general state labor law, but through the licensing function of the state gambling commission. In an important 1960 opinion, however, Nevada's attorney general Roger D. Foley ruled that the prohibition of discriminatory practices is outside of the purview of gaming regulation.

[Nevada law empowers] the Commission to attach conditions [to a state gaming license] only when those conditions are directly related to *licensing* and *controlling* gaming within the State of Nevada . . . For the Commission, as an administrative agency, to pronounce what civil rights must be observed by state gaming licensees is to extend the Commission's authority beyond the sphere of gaming.¹⁶ [emphasis in original]

The end of official consumer segregation was brought about not by state officials, but through activism on the part of the state's leading black advocacy group, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Through a series of public actions during the late 1950s—the most important of which was a threatened march down the Las Vegas Strip in 1960—the NAACP was able to exert enough direct economic pressure on the leading coalition of casino operators to extract a pledge to desegregate. This concession was solidified in a 1960 meeting at the Moulin Rouge casino. From all accounts, the Moulin Rouge agreement was a success, and casinos effectively desegregated for consumers after 1960. It is interesting, however, that several NAACP leaders later came to view their success as a Pyrrhic victory, insofar as the opening of Strip facilities to African-American consumers led to the disappearance of many Westside businesses.¹⁷

INITIAL ATTEMPT TO INTEGRATE CASINO WORKERS

Having succeeded in integrating casino clients, the NAACP leaders turned their sights to the situation faced by casino workers. The problem, in essence, was the widespread practice of segregating the internal labor market so that African Americans were excluded from the best-paying and most prestigious positions—typically those on the casino floor. While such practices were legally codified only during the first decade of legal gambling—during which the city of Las Vegas banned nonwhites as gaming employees in white-owned casinos—discrimination subsequently became an ingrained aspect of industry



Las Vegas civil rights leaders meet in the late 1950s. From left, attorney Charles Kellar, Woodrow Wilson, Clarence Ray, Jim Anderson and the Reverend Willie Davis. (*Clarence Ray Collection*)

practice.¹⁸ During the 1940s and 1950s African Americans were routinely employed only in “back of the house” jobs such as maids, porters, and cooks; only rarely did they work as dealers, slot attendants, casino cashiers, and other “front of the house” occupations.¹⁹ The immediate reason for such segregation was the “juice” system that organized casino labor markets. In brief, access to casino jobs was under the control of casino managers and pit bosses, who staffed the pits by drawing upon their personal networks organized around family, ethnicity, city of origin, or personal referral.²⁰ Through this system, Italian-American men came to dominate dealer and floor-management positions in the casinos during this era.²¹

The Las Vegas NAACP’s attempt to combat discrimination in the workplace received minimal assistance from Governor Sawyer or the state’s Commission on Equal Rights. The organization thus attempted in the first few years of the 1960s to reproduce its successful tactics in fighting consumer segregation during the preceding years. In 1963 James McMillan, president of the NAACP, planned a public picket line on the Strip to protest racially biased labor practices.²² Directly confronted, casino managers defended their hiring and job-placement decisions in several ways: Black dealers would scare away white patrons, lacked the necessary skills, and were unable to complete required training programs. It was even argued that African Americans lacked the inborn skills of numerical calculation necessary to deal the card games:



Nevada civil-rights leaders meet with Governor Grant Sawyer, concerning discrimination against black workers in Nevada's casinos, 1961. (*University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections*)

The personnel director of one of the [casinos] told me . . . "We have a black boy that we just think the world of . . . We all love to see him get ahead . . . We've spent a lot of time and money on him, and we tried to make a 'Twenty-One' dealer out of him . . . But," he said, "there's just one thing that you can't overcome . . . you've got to be able to count up to twenty-one. And," he said, "this boy just couldn't do it."²⁴

Nevertheless, as their plans for a public action progressed, the NAACP received a verbal commitment from casino management to begin training and employing African-Americans as workers, especially dealers. In 1966 the first African-American male dealer was hired on the Las Vegas Strip, followed in 1970 by the first African-American female dealer.²⁵ In general, however, such workers served as "tokens," as the overall percentage of African-American dealers increased only slightly in the 5 years following the 1963 verbal agreement.²⁶ As Clarence Ray, an African-American inspector for the Gaming Control Board, reported, "there were waiters and there were even black cocktail waitresses...[the casinos] were hiring blacks to do everything but deal."²⁷

Confronted with continued noncompliance, the NAACP in 1967 bypassed negotiations with the casinos and reliance upon state agencies; it instead filed suit with the National Labor Relations Board in San Francisco.²⁸ The casinos responded with further pledges to accelerate their hiring of African-American workers; in 1970, the Nevada Resort Association (NRA) even proposed a wide range of remedial measures such as diversity training for white managers, targeted job recruitment in west Las Vegas, and a \$75,000 grant to the Clark County

NAACP.²⁹ Again, however, there was no follow-through on the commitments. By 1971, African Americans represented just 4.9 percent of Strip dealers and less than 1 percent of floor managers,³⁰ leading the United States Justice Department to intervene in early 1971. During initial negotiations between the two sides, lawyers for the NRA advised casino owners that integration was inevitable. Casino management, however, continued to press for exceptions regarding dealer positions and the hiring of other minority groups besides African Americans.³¹ Justice Department officials refused, and it was in this context that federal authorities opted to file a complaint of civil-rights violations. The casino representatives in turn agreed to a remedial consent decree.



Because of the juice system, white men dominated dealer positions.
(University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections)



In the 1960s, casino operators claimed that African Americans lacked the numerical skills necessary to deal casino games. Here, Calvin Washington runs the crap games at the El Morocco Club in Las Vegas, Westside, 1954. (*University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections*)

THE CASINO CONSENT DECREE: 1971-1974

In the decade following passage of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, thousands of complaints were received from workers in every American industry. To deploy their limited resources most efficiently, federal authorities routinely attempted to avoid litigation against discriminators by instead negotiating consent decrees. Though less efficacious as an enforcement tactic, the decrees avoided the costs and time spent on lawsuits.³² The Consent Decree with the Nevada casinos, along with the accompanying complaint, was filed in United States District Court on June 4, 1971. The Nevada Resort Association was among those named as defendants, as were the following:

Aladdin (of Prell Hotel Corp.)
Castaways, Desert Inn, Frontier, the Sands, Silver Slipper (of Hughes Tool Co.)
Caesars Palace (of Desert Palace Inc.)
Circus Circus (added to the decree on June 28, 1972)
Dunes (of M & R Investments)
Flamingo (of Flamingo Resort, Inc.)
Hacienda (of Las Vegas Hacienda, Inc.)
The International (of Las Vegas International Hotel, Inc.)
Landmark (of Hotel Properties, Inc.)
Riviera (of Hotel Riviera, Inc.)
Sahara (of Sahara Nevada Corporation)
Stardust (of Karat, Inc.)
Thunderbird (of Dewco Services, Inc.)
Tropicana (of Hotel Conquistador, Inc.)
Local 995, Professional, Clerical, Ground Maintenance, Parkling Lot Attendants,
Car Rental Employees, Warehousemen and Helps
Local 720, International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving
Picture Machine Operators
Local 226, Culinary Workers Union
Local 165, Bartenders Union

As is standard protocol with antidiscrimination consent decrees, the complaint laid out a series of charges and the decree proposed remedial steps, though the defendants in signing the decree admit to no past wrongdoing: "This decree...shall not constitute an adjudication or finding on the merits of the case and shall not constitute or be construed as an admission by the defendants."³³

The complaint alleged a series of violations of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.³⁴ In general, while African-Americans workers achieved widespread employment in the casino work force (they held 3,600 of 20,000 total jobs, or 18 percent), they suffered from intra-firm discrimination: 90 percent of African-Americans, it said, "are limited to the lowest-paying, less desirable duties and occupations."³⁵ The complaint pointed to three sorts of business practices responsible for the reproduction of discrimination against African-Americans:³⁶ First, the personal-network juice system used for finding workers, i.e., "hiring employees for certain jobs by relying upon word-of-mouth referrals and

personal contacts of incumbents." Second, job placement of current employees according to race rather than objective qualifications. Third, failure "to provide opportunities for training, advancement and promotion to black applicants and employees equal to those provided white[s]." ³⁷

The decree in turn specified a series of steps to alleviate discrimination in the three areas of hiring, job placement and promotion. Regarding *hiring*, the system of selecting employees from the casino managers' personal network must end, as each casino was to "establish and thereafter maintain a central personnel office" to handle hiring. ³⁸ Job openings would be advertised in newspapers and on radio stations with predominantly black audiences in Clark County, and regular meetings would be held with the NAACP to further disseminate information on openings to the black community. ³⁹ Regarding *job placement*, the casinos must establish training programs for new African-American hires. For instance, each casino must set up a dealer-training program to teach sixty African-American trainees each year. And a quota system of job placement must be put in place: For each two new dealer openings, one African American must be hired until African Americans constituted 12.5 percent of all dealers. ⁴⁰ As for *promotions* into supervisory positions, word-of-mouth was no longer appropriate for selecting managers. Rather, notifications of vacancies must be posted "near the employee time clock or other location[s] to which employees have regular access." All current African-American workers would complete a skills inventory, and casino executives would "engage in affirmative recruitment of black persons for future vacancies [as] 'Officials and Managers.'" ⁴¹

To monitor the casinos' labor practices, the Consent Decree required the casinos to submit to the Department of Justice quarterly reports listing the racial composition of all job categories as well as the identities and personal details of all African-American job applicants. Copies of these reports were also to be sent to both the District Court in Las Vegas and the Nevada Commission on the Equal Rights of Citizens. In addition, the decree required that records must be kept of all personnel decisions, which could be inspected on site by government officials, "provided requests for such documents shall not be so frequent as to impose a burden or expense on defendants." ⁴² In turn, any casino that demonstrated that it had maintained a 12.5 percent composition of blacks in an occupation for a six-month period would be released from further monitoring of that category. And after three years, if all jobs had reached the 12.5 percent goal, the casino could petition for release from the Decree. ⁴³

During the first two years of the administration of the decree, all casinos named as defendants filed reports and established personnel offices. As Burton Cohen, then president of the Thunderbird Casino, recalled, "Like in sports, we figured the rules do sometimes change, and you have to adapt . . . we had to get it done and we did it." ⁴⁴ And it appeared, too, that the Justice Department was monitoring the casinos and believed, on the whole, that they were

complying. In response to a 1972 inquiry from Elmer R. Rusco, a professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, the department reported:

Copies of the quarterly reports from the resort industry are filed with this office, where they are given close attention and analysis. The reports themselves are keyed to Section VI of the Decree, which . . . provide a comprehensive picture of the employment practices of the respondents . . . In addition, we keep in close contact with the hotels concerning their performance under the decree.⁴⁵

CONSENT DECREE ENFORCEMENT: THE ATTEMPTED INTERROGATORIES OF 1974

In May 1974, the jurisdiction for monitoring the Consent Decree was switched to the new Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). In opposition to the claims of the Justice Department, Jennifer Gee, the lead attorney for the EEOC, reported that Justice had had no contact with the casinos over the previous eighteen months. While the San Francisco office of the EEOC received the files and reports from Washington during its first few months, it also established contact with the Las Vegas NAACP and Nevada Commission on the Equal Rights of Citizens. Both reported to the EEOC that they believed the casinos were not complying with the terms of the decree, and listed several allegations. First, casinos were employing blacks only temporarily in order to report them in the quarterly reports, after which they were fired: "a black individual could be hired into a position, for instance, as a keno writer and be fired a week later and his employment would still be reported to us." Second, no progress had been made in promoting black workers into managerial positions. Third, hiring was still done by pit bosses, while the "personnel office is just a bureaucratic establishment."⁴⁶

Gee and several other EEOC attorneys believed that confirmation of these allegations could not be achieved if based solely on the quarterly reports, which were not standardized and in a few cases were written out by hand. Nor did they have the resources at the time to conduct detailed on-site investigations of Las Vegas casinos. The EEOC opted instead to send each casino a series of interrogatories requesting more detailed information on casino labor practices. Packages were mailed in early July 1974 to each casino.⁴⁷ The forty-eight interrogatories in essence sought to elicit the procedural details showing how the casinos conducted their labor practices, in order to produce a larger picture of the extent to which casinos were complying with the spirit of the Consent Decree. The interrogatories were extremely detailed; an idea of the extensiveness of the questioning is conveyed by a typical example:

Interrogatory 15: Identity all job vacancies that have arisen in the jobs listed in Section II, Paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 of the Consent Decree since June 4, 1971, and for each vacancy state:

- (a) The date the vacancy arose;
- (b) The date the vacancy was publicized to the employees;

- (c) The date the vacancy was filled;
- (d) The name, address, race, previous job, and date of hire of the person hired or upgraded to fill the vacancy;
- (e) Whether the person who filled the vacancy was promoted, newly hired or had changed jobs;
- (f) How the person who filled the vacancy learned of the vacancy;
- (g) The name, address, position held at that time, and the date of notification of each Black employee notified of the vacancy;
- (h) Whether the person who filled the vacancy was related in blood or kinship to another employee in a supervisory or managerial position.⁴⁸

In August 1974, attorneys for the casino defendants filed in United States District Court motions for protective orders from the interrogatories. They argued for protection on three counts. First, no action was pending before the court and thus the EEOC had no ground for expanding the decree's requirements. Second, the Consent Decree specified that plaintiffs could inspect defendants' records and files provided it imposed minimal costs or burdens on casinos, but compiling the detailed procedural information required by the "overly broad" interrogatories would be "oppressive and burdensome."⁴⁹ Third, the casinos were in fact complying with the decree, as evidenced by the "detailed and voluminous records . . . filed with the court," while additional information could be requested only with a "prima facie showing by the aggrieved party of disobedience of the order."⁵⁰

The EEOC immediately filed a motion to compel answers to its interrogatories. In several memoranda, it addressed each of the casinos' three defenses. First, a Consent Decree by its very nature is always pending before the court, which in turn is empowered to expand or change the reporting requirements. Second, while admitting that compiling the requested information would be burdensome for casinos, the EEOC argued that the burden must be weighed against that upon the EEOC itself: "Though the Interrogatories may be burdensome on the Defendants, the burden would be overwhelming for the Commission." Third, as proof of the casinos' disobedience, the EEOC offered five affidavits from African Americans who claimed to have been denied employment at or fired from Las Vegas casinos because of their race. The EEOC claimed that "a prima facie showing has been made herein by the attached affidavits of persons who allege discriminatory treatment . . . The significance of these affidavits is sufficient to invoke this Court's ancillary jurisdiction and enable it to compel answers to the Commission's Interrogatories."⁵¹

In response to the EEOC's motion to compel discovery, the casinos attacked the commission on two broad counts. First, the affidavits were insufficient as evidence to prove disobedience. In a memorandum to the court dated January 1975, attorney for the defendants pointed out that one of the affidavits alleged discrimination at the Mint Casino, which was not even a party to the decree, and thus was immaterial. The remaining four affidavits were then framed not as providing evidence of systematic discrimination, but as "so-called evidence [that] at most hints at the possibility of *individual acts* of discrimination, not acts

by [casino] defendants."⁵² The casinos also argued that the EEOC advanced a "fallacious interpretation of the Consent Decree" by pointing out that many job classifications were not currently above the 12.5 percent threshold:

The Decree has been fully complied with . . . once a defendant has achieved 12.5% for six months in any twelve month period. Thus to select, as the EEOC has, the most recently ended quarterly period and then to set forth current ratios is an irrelevant exercise. Such figures cannot demonstrate noncompliance since the hiring paragraphs of the Decree may have lapsed as to particular defendants. With respect to the majority of classifications at the properties of the defendants . . . this has been the case.⁵³

After nearly a year of dispute over the interrogatories through memoranda and hearings, Magistrate Joseph L. Ward on May 9, 1975, granted all of the defendants' motions for protection from the interrogatories, denying the EEOC's motion to compel answers on the grounds that they were in fact oppressive and burdensome relative to the terms originally laid out by the decree. Having suffered a defeat in its attempt to force the casinos to document the procedures of their labor practices, and lacking the resources to systematically audit them, the EEOC subsequently made minimal attempts to monitor compliance with the decree, preferring instead to handle complaints from minority workers on a case-by-case basis.⁵⁴

ENFORCEMENT ATTEMPT BY MINORITIES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

During the ten-year period following the denial of the EEOC's attempt to force answers to its interrogatories, there was little official action on the Consent Decree. The casinos continued to send reports to the EEOC, although as of 1982 they were sent on a semiannual, not quarterly, basis. As they reached their target 12.5 percent quotas for a six-month period in each occupation, the casinos were released piecemeal from the Decree. This slow dissolving was hastened in 1978 when several of the Summa Corporation hotels petitioned for and received a release from further monitoring, per the original stipulations of the decree. In addition, as new casinos were built and commenced operations in Las Vegas, they were not included as parties to the decree. To do so would have entailed separate filings and hearings for each new property, which the EEOC lacked the time and resources to accomplish. Thus, while the eighteen casinos listed as defendants on the original decree represented practically the entire Las Vegas market as of 1971, their share decreased with the opening of new casinos during the 1980s. In 1981, a separate decree was negotiated for women workers, and compliance was achieved so quickly that it was dissolved by 1986.⁵⁵ Regarding race, however, the casinos' compliance reports demonstrated that by the early 1980s, African Americans still were not reaching proportionate representation in the key positions for which the Consent Decree had been created.⁵⁶

In 1984, one last attempt was made to resurrect the Consent Decree for African-American workers. An African-American woman with a background in law enforcement, Ella R. Pitt-Williams, applied at casinos throughout Las Vegas for work in security or cashiering. According to her affidavit of October 17, 1984, she was not only unable to receive a single job interview, but was told directly by an official at the Frontier Hotel that black females were never hired in personnel, security, or credit positions regardless of their qualifications. In the course of investigating her legal options, she happened upon the 1971 Consent Decree, "for all intense [*sic*] and purposes, dead, unenforced and without effect for want of proper supervision and enforcement."⁵⁷ Pitt-Williams then contacted the EEOC, whose attorneys told her that the agency no longer systematically monitored the casinos, but suggested as a possibility that, given her law enforcement experience, she could herself form a nonprofit corporation and apply for intervention to take over the monitoring of the decree.

On August 14, 1984, Pitt-Williams and two others incorporated the Minorities Research and Development Corporation (MRDC). On October 15 of that year they applied in the District Court in Las Vegas for permissive intervention to monitor and enforce the 1971 Consent Decree. In its application the MRDC leveled several broad accusations and complaints against the casinos, many of which had first been voiced by EEOC lawyers in their interrogatory attempt a decade earlier. First, African Americans were hired only temporarily in order to meet reporting quotas. If the MRDC were granted intervention, however, "no longer will black employees be herded like cattle into employment to meet numerical criteria and discharged after the end of the reporting period." Second, discrimination in hiring and job placement remained rampant, as African Americans continued to be concentrated in menial positions without effective training programs or affirmative recruitment into managerial positions. Third, the compliance reports were routinely fabricated because casino managers had no fear of independent verification by the EEOC. Curiously, the MRDC stopped short of fully blaming casino management for not hiring African-American workers; it admitted that, because of "years of ghetto environment and isolationism, the majority of African-American applicants possessed inferior communication skills and demeanors." Yet the casinos had established none of the training programs to which they had committed in the Decree; these would have provided African Americans with the "skills necessary for positions requiring mental skills."⁵⁸

On September 25, 1984, counsel for the EEOC filed a motion in support of the MRDC's request to intervene. On the one hand, their argument attempted to link intervention to the notions of "small government" and deregulation prevalent during the presidency of Ronald Reagan. All parties would benefit, efficiency would increase, and cost-effectiveness would be maximized. "Complaints from charging parties oftentimes could be resolved on a very informal, effective basis, through the accessibility of a local entity." On the other

hand, the EEOC admitted that the original decree was weak in terms of providing subsequent leverage for proving discrimination—"the Consent Decree memorialized the position of the defendants in that they did not discriminate against blacks"—while the EEOC's own culpability may be pointed out as a reason for the past and ongoing failure to monitor Las Vegas labor practices—"Economic costs make on-site inspections and viable working relationships with employers through frequent contact, more of a future goal than an immediate one."⁵⁹

Counsel for the casinos responded through a series of countercharges. First, the attempt by the MRDC was untimely, coming after a "thirteen-year unexcused, unexplained delay in seeking intervention." Second, the MRDC was less an objective party capable of effectively monitoring the decree than a disgruntled job applicant unqualified for the positions for which she had applied. Pitt-Williams, rather than pursuing the proper channels of seeking remedy with the Nevada Commission on Equal Rights, formed a "sham corporation with a fancy, important sounding name" which is in fact "no more than three individuals with an attorney." Third, the EEOC was using the MRDC as a scapegoat by which to shirk its own duty to monitor the terms of the Consent Decree. Rather than bringing in a new party, attorneys for Summa Corporation argued, "if the EEOC is not willing to carry out its responsibilities, the dissolution of the Decree is the more appropriate response."⁶⁰

On November 6, 1984, United States District Court Judge Roger D. Foley ruled in district court for the MRDC, granting it permissive intervention to monitor casinos' compliance with the Decree. Counsel for defendants promptly appealed, and nearly two years later, on June 20, 1986, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the decision. The court's justification for this ruling focused upon procedural miscues by Pitt-Williams and the MRDC. First, the court rejected the defendants' argument that the MRDC was a "sham corporation" with no rights to bring action under the terms of the Consent Decree. Relying upon civil rights case law, the court ruled that an organization such as the MRDC could bring suit even if it itself has not suffered harm.⁶²

The MRDC therefore had the right to intervene on behalf of Pitt-Williams in defending her Title VII claim of discrimination based upon her race. Title VII claims by individuals, however, must first be pursued through filing a complaint with the EEOC.⁶³ Only after exhausting such channels could a third party then intervene. During her extensive initial communications with the EEOC prior to forming the MRDC, Pitt-Williams apparently had never filed an official discriminatory complaint. The Court thus ruled, "There is no evidence Pitt-Williams filed charges with the EEOC [therefore] MRDC cannot rely on Pitt-Williams' Title VII claim as an independent basis for jurisdiction over its petition for intervention." Neither Pitt-Williams nor the MRDC appealed this decision, effectively bringing to an end legal action related to the 1971 Consent Decree.

CONCLUSION

The 1971 casino Consent Decree still technically remains in effect. However, only two casinos—the Tropicana and the Riviera—still send out the required semiannual reports. A caller to the Los Angeles office of the EEOC, meanwhile, will be hard pressed to locate anyone with knowledge of the decree's existence. Rather than proactively monitoring the labor practices of casinos, EEOC officials view their role as one of collecting and storing data on work-force demographics (mainly through annual compiling of the EEO-1 documents by which employers self-report the race and gender composition of their workers) to be used as evidence should they receive individual complaints from workers who wish to pursue litigation against employers. The agency receives approximately eighty-five thousand individual charges of discrimination each year, of which fewer than four hundred are litigated. The chances that any individual business will go to court over its employment practices, in short, are a long shot.

This is not to deny that changes have occurred in the Las Vegas casino industry. Whites are now a minority among low-level workers (though not in the management hierarchy), while all casinos now have personnel offices and engage in assiduous record keeping on their employment practices. By comparing the state of the industry today with the requirements of the Consent Decree, however, we see that beneath such surface diversification and modernization there is a high degree of continuity with past practices; African Americans continue to be under-represented in positions such as dealer, and the personal-network-based recruitment and hiring procedures still persist. Aspiring dealers, for instance, will look in vain for work by walking into a personnel office off the street and filling out an application form; some form of personal contact with a current manager is still necessary. "The juice system may be on life support," a current casino manager told me, "but it ain't dead."⁶⁴

In general, the Consent Decree failed in its stated objectives because of inadequate federal resources devoted to monitoring compliance with its requirements. The two failed attempts to enforce compliance—the 1974 interrogatories and the 1984 intervention by the MRDC—display similar strategies on the part of the EEOC to outsource the task of collecting information (in the former case, by delegation to the casinos themselves, and in the latter, to a local organization). This lack of enforcement contrasts with that found in other casino jurisdictions, where the casino license privilege is explicitly tied to various employment policies. In Detroit and in Windsor, Canada, for example, licenses were granted to Nevada corporations on the condition that casinos permit union organizers access to their premises—a policy long resisted in Nevada itself. And in postapartheid South Africa, casino licenses were issued only in conjunction with detailed affirmative-action plans for advancing minority workers into all occupations and management positions, while provincial gambling

boards conduct monthly on-site visits to ensure that such quotas are met.⁶⁶ It is also useful to contrast the attempt to integrate casino workers with parallel attempts to end the segregation of casino clients. While the latter was accomplished quickly and for the most part painlessly, the former was attempted only begrudgingly and with minimal success. The history of the 1971 Consent Decree has suggested that for Nevada casino firms, minority civil rights will be fully granted if and when they are perceived to be compatible with increasing the bottom line.

NOTES

¹For example, Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris, *The Green Felt Jungle* (New York: Trident Press, 1963); Estes Kefauver, *Crime in America* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1951), 229-37.

²While corporations operated the majority of Las Vegas casinos by the late 1970s, the official end of the "wise guy" era in Nevada is commonly dated to the break-up of the Stardust skimming operations during the 1976-79 period. See Hal K. Rothman, "Colony, Capital and Casino: Money in the Real Las Vegas," in *The Grit beneath the Glitter: Tales from the Real Las Vegas*, Hal K. Rothman and Mike Davis, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 324-27.

³William R. Eadington, "The Casino Gaming Industry: A Study of Political Economy," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 474 (1984), 23-35; Hal K. Rothman, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 14-22.

⁴David G. Schwartz, *Suburban Xanadu: The Casino Resort on the Las Vegas Strip and Beyond* (New York: Routledge 2003), 131. For other historical accounts emphasizing the casinos' profit motive as a driving force behind consumer desegregation, see James B. McMillan, "Fighting Back: A Life in the Struggle for Civil Rights," (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1997), 93; Earnest N. Bracey, "The Moulin Rouge Mystique: Blacks and Equal Rights in Las Vegas," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 39:4 (1996), 272-88.

⁵Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, *Las Vegas Visitor Profile* (San Francisco: GLS Research, 2002), 88.

⁶Eugene P. Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas 1930-1970* (Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1995), 185; Claytee D. White, "The Roles of African -American Women in the Las Vegas Gaming Industry, 1940-1980," (M.A. thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1997); Rothman, *Neon Metropolis*, 73.

⁷For an analysis of similar dynamics among African Americans and new immigrant groups in New York City, see Roger Waldinger, *Still the Promised City: African-Americans and New Immigrants in Postindustrial New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁸Figures on population are based upon U.S. Census 2000; figures on dealing demographics derive from the author's own survey of a random sample of twenty-five casinos in Las Vegas.

⁹Consent Decree, Civil Action 1645, U.S. District Court, Las Vegas, filed June 4, 1971 (hereafter, cited as Consent Decree.)

¹⁰Eric N. Moody, "The Early Years of Casino Gambling in Nevada, 1931-1945" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 1997), 232.

¹¹"Definite Policy Outlined Last Night at Meeting," *Las Vegas Evening Review and Journal* (10 April 1931), p.1.

¹²U.S. Bureau of the Census; White, "Roles of African -American Women."

¹³John F. Cahlan, "Fifty Years in Journalism and Community Development" (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1987), 226; see also Dwayne Kling, ed., "Every Light Was On: Bill Harrah and His Clubs Remembered" (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1999), 63.

¹⁴Moehring, *Resort City*, 176.

¹⁵Grant Sawyer, "Hang Tough!: Grant Sawyer: An Activist in the Governor's Mansion" (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1993) 97, 103; see also Clyde H. Mathews Jr., "Oral Autobiography of a Modern-day Baptist Minister" (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1969), 174; James W. Hulse, *Forty Years in the Wilderness: Impressions of Nevada, 1940-1980* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986), 93; Elmer R. Rusco, "Racial Discrimination in Nevada: A Continuing Problem," Bureau of Government Research, *Governmental Research Newsletter*, 11:5 (1973), 9.

¹⁶State of Nevada, *Official Opinions of the Attorney General*, #143 (8 March 1960); see also "Gaming Board Cannot Forbid Discrimination," *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (11 March 1960), p.1; "Imperial Palace Bias Charge Turned Over to Equal Rights Panel," *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (14 December 1988), p.5; Sawyer, "Hang Tough," 102, 104.

¹⁷For insider accounts of the Moulin Rouge agreement, see McMillan, "Fighting Back," 90-93;

Lubertha Johnson, "Civil Rights Efforts in Las Vegas: 1940's to 1960's" (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1988), 61-65.

¹⁸"Aliens Banned as Employees in Gambling Palaces," *Las Vegas Evening Review and Journal* (9 April 1931), p.1.

¹⁹Johnson, "Civil Rights Efforts," 36; "Many Black Hotel Workers Charge Loss of Jobs Due to the Color of Their Skin," *Las Vegas Sun* (19 February 1979), p.13. Black entertainers were of course permitted in the front-stage areas of the casino, though they were not permitted to stay after their shows. See Moody, "Early Years," 132.

²⁰For two of the more insightful and entertaining accounts of the working of the juice system from the inside, see Lee Solkey, *Dummy Up and Deal* (Las Vegas: GBC Press, 1980), 38-47; H. Lee Barnes, *Dummy Up and Deal: Inside the Culture of Casino Dealing* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002), 112.

²¹Alan Balboni, *Beyond the Mafia: Italian Americans and the Development of Las Vegas* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1996).

²²McMillan, "Fighting Back," 128.

²³Sawyer, "Hang Tough!," 98; Andrew Michael Nyre, "Union Jackpot: Culinary Workers Local 226, Las Vegas, Nevada, 1970-2000," (M.A. thesis, Department of History, California State University at Fullerton, 2001), 32-33.

²⁴Robbins E. Cahill, "Recollections of Work in State Politics, Government, Taxation, Gaming Control, Clark County Administration, and the Nevada Resort Association" (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1977), 1395.

²⁵White, "Roles of African-American Women."

²⁶Nevada Equal Rights Commission, *Biennial Report* (Carson City: Government Press, 1969).

²⁷Clarence Ray, "Black Politics and Gaming in Las Vegas, 1920's to 1980's" (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1991), 95.

²⁸Moehring, *Resort City*, ch. 6.

²⁹Rusco, "Racial Discrimination," 9.

³⁰Figures compiled from quarterly reports submitted per the 1971 Consent Decree.

³¹Cahill, "Recollections," 1383-88.

³²John D. Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 85-142.

³³Consent Decree, 3.

³⁴Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C., sec. 2000e (hereafter cited as Title VII"); Complaint, Civil Action 1645, U.S. District Court, Las Vegas, filed 4 June 1971 (hereafter cited as Complaint).

³⁵Complaint, 7.

³⁶Because of space constraints, this article focuses only upon the complaints against the hotel casinos, and not those against the labor unions. The complaints against the two parties were very similar, although the main complaint against the unions was the practice of not sending out African Americans for jobs.

³⁷Complaint, 6.

³⁸Consent Decree, 6.

³⁹Consent Decree, 14.

⁴⁰Consent Decree, 11.

⁴¹Consent Decree, 9.

⁴²Consent Decree, 15.

⁴³Consent Decree 10, 19

⁴⁴Burton Cohen, interview with author, Las Vegas, 8 December 2003.

⁴⁵U.S. Department of Justice to Elmer R. Rusco (25 February 1972), University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Leid Library, Special Collections, Box T-123.

⁴⁶Transcript of proceedings held before Magistrate Joseph L. Ward, U. S. District Court, Las Vegas (26 March 1975). This and all subsequent source materials on the Consent Decree are found in the National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Region, Case file CV-S-71-1645, Box 1 of 51 (hereafter cited as NARA).

⁴⁷See, for example, letter dated 2 July 1974, from June Wooliver, assistant regional attorney for the EEOC, to Burton M. Cohen, president and general manager of the Thunderbird Hotel (NARA).

48"Plaintiff's Interrogatories," U.S. District Court, Las Vegas (2 July 1974, NARA).

49"Motion for Protective Order," Lionel, Sawyer, Collins, and Wartman, attorneys for Nevada Resort Association *et al.*, U.S. District Court, Las Vegas (5 August 1974, NARA).

50"Motion for Protective Order," Gibson, Dunn, and Crutcher, attorneys for Hughes Tool Co., U.S. District Court, Las Vegas (29 August 1974, NARA).

51"Memorandum in Support of Plaintiff's Motion to Compel Discovery," EEOC (19 August 1974, NARA). See also EEOC memorandums dated 21 August 1974 and 3 February 1975.

52"Memorandum of Points and Authorities of Certain Defendants in Opposition to Plaintiff's Motion to Compel Discovery" (13 January 1975, NARA).

53"Memorandum of Points and Authorities of Certain Defendants in Opposition to Plaintiff's Motion to Compel Discovery," Gibson, Dunn, and Crutcher, attorneys for Hughes Tool Co. (14 February 1975, NARA).

54EEOC attorney responsible for western region compliance, interview with author, 24 November 2003

55U.S. EEOC *v. NRA et al.* 13 January 1981, CV-LV-81-12-RDF.

56Consider the percentage of black dealers as of 1981 for the following casinos: Circus Circus (5.9 percent); the Aladdin (7.8 percent); the Stardust (4.5 percent); Tropicana (9.8 percent); Sahara (11.5 percent). All figures compiled from the compliance reports on file at U.S. District Court, Las Vegas.

57"Reply to Defendants' Opposition to Motion to Intervene" Gary E. Gowen, Attorney for Minority Research and Development Corporation, U.S. District Court, Las Vegas (17 October 1984, NARA).

58"Memorandum in Support of MRDC's Attempt to Intervene," (21 December 1984, NARA).

59"Motion to Court in Support of MRDC's Attempt to Intervene," EEOC (25 September 1984, NARA).

60"Memorandum to Court in Opposition to MRDC's Attempt to Intervene," Gibson, Dunn, and Crutcher, attorneys for Summa Corporation (9 October 1984, NARA).

61U. S. District Court, District of Nevada, No. LV-1645 RDF.

62EEOC and MRDC *v. NRA et al.* 792 F.2d 882 (9th Circuit 1986)

63Title VII charges by private parties are governed by 42 U.S.C. sec. 2000e-5.

64Anonymous casino executive, interview with author, November 2003.

65John Bebow, "The Roots of the Windsor Strike," *Casino Executive*, 1 (May 1995), 17.

66Adrian Kenyon, "Waiting for the Curtain to Rise in Gauteng," *Gaming for Africa*, 10 (March 1997), 12.

Dollars, Defense, and the Desert

Southern Nevada's Military Economy and World War II

ROBERT V. NICKEL

Modern Las Vegas has come to inhabit a unique place in the American imagination. A neon mirage glittering amid the desolate Mojave Desert, Sin City is both celebrated and scorned as an oasis of gambling, nightlife, and entertainment. Consistently ranked among the nation's fastest-growing metropolitan areas, Las Vegas has experienced sensational economic, infrastructural, and demographic growth in recent years. The dizzying pace of this development makes it difficult to imagine that the city was once anything other than the bustling urban playground it is today. Like many great western cities, Las Vegas came of age during the World War II era. A mere hamlet of 8,422 residents in 1940, it had nearly tripled in size by 1950.¹ Many believe Las Vegas to be synonymous with its gambling economy, but war, not wagering, triggered the city's first period of dramatic growth. A sizeable military presence, established during World War II and sustained by the Cold War, took root in southern Nevada. Though never as visible as the area's high-profile gambling industry, this military economy was a vital factor in the development of the nascent metropolis.

The spectacular resorts of The Strip have made Las Vegas famous throughout the world, but few of the city's millions of visitors recognize the massive influence the military has exerted on southern Nevada. Las Vegas has played host to countless gamblers and conventioners who likely never realized that this city of leisure and excess has also been home to the nation's busiest air force base, the world's largest magnesium plant, and the continent's foremost site for testing nuclear weapons. Although the neon glare of casino revenues has since overshadowed the military's economic impact on the area, World War II and its subsequent defense boom "really transformed the sleepy little desert town," notes economic historian Gerald Nash.² Strong local support and political leadership attracted lucrative defense contracts and military installations to southern Nevada, giving rise to a powerful military economy that helped

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A strategic photo of the Las Vegas area, October 15, 1942. (Nellis AFB Collection)

shape the growth of Las Vegas. Large government payrolls and the influx of soldiers and war workers fueled the early development of the local gambling economy at a time when wartime economic changes could easily have smothered it.³ The boom continued long after the conflict, however, as the Cold War and the accompanying proliferation of nuclear weapons created a perpetual war economy that ensured a continuing flow of federal dollars into Las Vegas coffers. Bringing revenue, population, and industry, the military sector has been a crucial prop to the southern Nevada economy.

Las Vegas, like much of the West, experienced its most dramatic growth during and after World War II. Nash identifies this era as the defining moment in the story of western economic development. World War II, Nash declares, "accomplished a reshaping of the region's economy that would have taken more than forty years in peacetime."⁴ The war certainly provided the West with a windfall of federal spending. "It was as if someone had tilted the country," observes western historian Richard White, "people, money, and soldiers all spilled West."⁵ During the war, western states received \$60 billion in federal

funds. California epitomized the West's wartime boom, achieving a doubling of per-capita income and a tripling of manufacturing output from 1940 to 1945. Los Angeles alone garnered \$312 million in aircraft contracts.⁶ Such defense spending created thriving new industries in the West, diversifying a regional economy traditionally dominated by natural-resource extraction. The rise of a manufacturing sector drew throngs of war workers to the West, expediting the growth of vast urban centers. Strengthened by teeming cities and its new industrial clout, the West was at last freed from its colonial subordination to the East. According to Nash, the West emerged from World War II as a "path-breaking self-sufficient region with unbounded optimism for the future."⁷

The urban historian Roger Lotchin, however, proposes a different model for understanding wartime development in the West. Federal defense spending in World War II, he argues, helped create a new relationship between western cities and the military. Realizing the potential benefits of hosting a military installation or major defense industry, city governments actively pursued involvement with the armed services. Hardly passive colonies accepting gifts from the East, western cities consciously strove to attract federal spending. As contracts became more lucrative, the competition turned increasingly fierce. Lotchin reveals how the focus often shifted from "warfare to welfare" as cities began to view military spending as a form of social spending.⁸ Since military expenditures tended to boost the local economy, city officials saw defense spending as a way to finance both guns and butter. The allocation of military spending came to be influenced not by a monolithic military-industrial complex dominated by powerful corporations, but rather by a "metropolitan-military complex" born from the Darwinian competition among growth-seeking cities.⁹ The result, Lotchin suggests, was the rise of a new phenomenon: the "martial metropolis."¹⁰ By forging political and economic partnerships with the military, city officials were able to capture their share of federal largesse. These alliances ensured that military spending would be influenced by political as well as economic and strategic concerns.

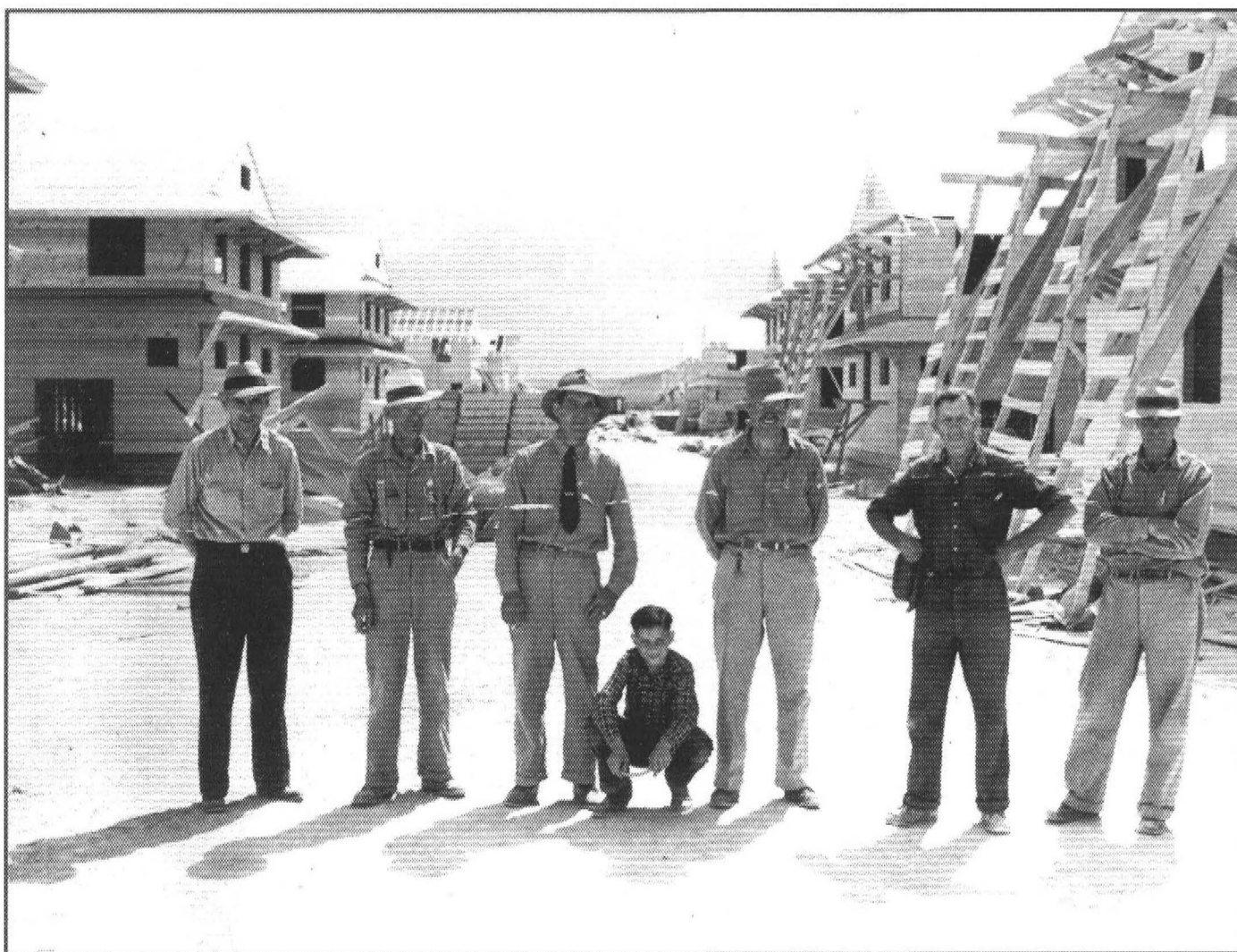
Las Vegas provides an interesting case study, for it displays elements of both interpretations. Little more than a whistle stop prior to World War II, Las Vegas had become a substantial metropolis by 1945. Public support and farsighted political leadership helped Las Vegas to attract the federal spending necessary to power Nash's economic transformation. The war was a turning point indeed, but it was not the only significant chapter in the longer story of southern Nevada's development. Las Vegas found its development inextricably bound to Lotchin's metropolitan-military complex. Cold War military spending and keen political maneuvering sustained the wartime boom and helped avert the impending bust. Federal defense spending thus transformed Las Vegas from a timid desert oasis to a full-fledged martial metropolis.

By the time America entered the war, "Nevada had completed a decade of legalized gambling without any startling changes in either its economy or

societal structure," observes Nevada historian Russell Elliott.¹¹ A surge in government spending, cued by the New Deal and prolonged by the onset of war, ushered in such changes. Southern Nevada had been no stranger to such support. "Federal spending, and lots of it, triggered the rise of modern Las Vegas," says Eugene Moehring in his history of Las Vegas.¹² Boulder Dam, completed in 1935, drew money, workers, and even tourists to the small desert town. While the 1930s brought more than 70 million federal dollars to southern Nevada, even this massive windfall paled in comparison to what the wartime boom delivered a decade later. In the 1940s, an army air corps installation brought soldiers and spurred construction, while a lucrative defense contract helped diversify the area's flagging economy. Both came with hefty payrolls, high hopes, and the power to drive economic development on an unprecedented scale.

Rising tensions in Europe awarded the Las Vegas Valley its first significant military presence. Recognizing the growing likelihood that America would enter the war, the United States Army established the Las Vegas Army Gunnery School in January 1941. Located just eight miles northeast of the city, the school trained bomber gunners for the war in Europe. By 1945, the base had become the nation's largest gunnery school.¹³ At its inception, however, the school was woefully unprepared to accommodate the large number of students it was expected to train. Located on the site of Western Air Express Field, the gunnery school had to share the small airport with Las Vegas's commercial air traffic. Rudimentary facilities to be sure, the field's unpaved runways and smattering of buildings were valued at a mere \$50,000.¹⁴ Such unacceptable conditions forced the army to initiate a massive federally funded construction program in order to open the base. "War accomplished what five years of lobbying had not," insists Eugene Moehring, noting that the arrival of the army immediately prompted airfield improvements that were long overdue.¹⁵ The Army Corps of Engineers went to work installing barracks, storage buildings, and lighting equipment. After the paving and grading of the field's runways, the project's cost totaled more than \$2.7 million. Since Western Air Express still retained rights to use the field, the civilian facilities required additional improvements. The Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) spent \$349,000 to refurbish this "airport within an airport."¹⁶ To supply the base, the Union Pacific Company built a spur line to connect the airfield to the main railway. These improvements helped convert the field into an acceptable facility, but much work remained to be done.

In early 1942, the gunnery school was host to 9,117 men. Only a year later, the base had become home to more than 18,000 trainees. At its peak, the school was graduating 4,000 students every six weeks.¹⁷ Despite the multimillion dollar construction projects, the base was bursting at the seams. When the field first opened, office space was so scarce that many officers worked out of the basement of Las Vegas's downtown federal building and post office. As more soldiers poured into the base, the housing shortage became acute.¹⁸ In May 1941, Las Vegas's vacancy rate was an anemic 2.6 percent. The federal



Barracks under construction at gunnery school, 1941. (Nellis AFB Collection)

government invoked the Lanham Act to finance the construction of 125 homes for local servicemen.¹⁹ Military construction continued also, with new barracks, mess halls, and storage buildings erected in 1943. The following year, the army added a civic center, improved the roads, installed the base's first air-conditioning units, and spent \$303,000 to improve support facilities at Indian Springs.²⁰

During the war, the gunnery school brought multimillion-dollar payrolls and much-needed improvements to the infrastructure of the Las Vegas Valley. In 1945, the base boasted a complement of 12,955 personnel, including more than 1,000 civilians. At war's end, the base served as a disembarkation station for returning veterans, bringing swarms of young men and their paychecks to southern Nevada. Many chose to stay, adding to the rapidly growing population of the budding metropolis.²¹ The gunnery school, renamed Las Vegas Army Air Field (LVAAF) in April 1943, helped bolster the area's population and stimulate the local economy. It was not southern Nevada's only source of federal defense spending. Although short-lived, a wartime contract to produce magnesium played another key role in Las Vegas's wartime development.

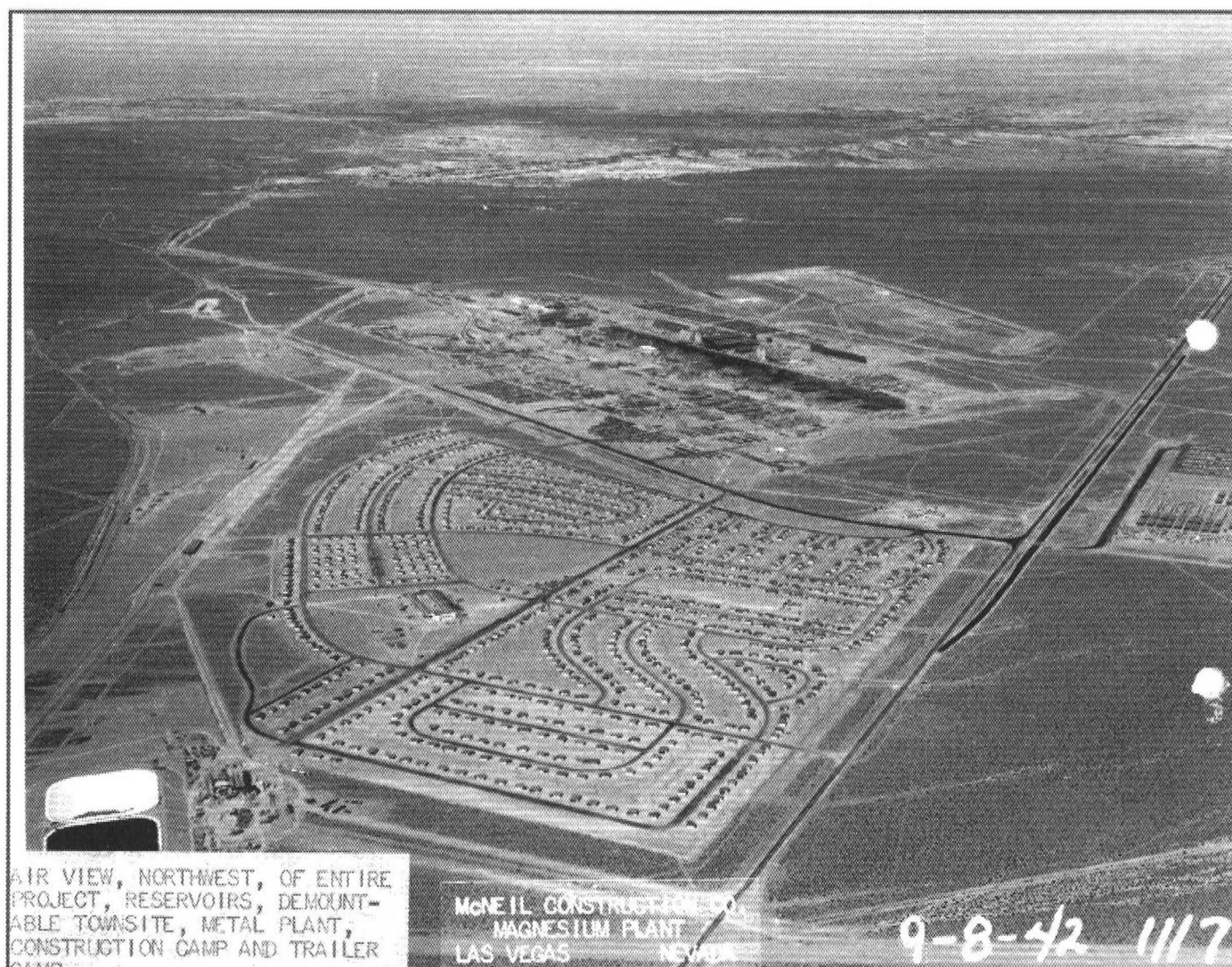
In 1941, the Office of Production Management (OPM) announced its intention to increase American magnesium production in support of the war effort.

Needing the metal to build planes, bombs, and ammunition, the government hoped to increase total output from 30 million to 400 million pounds per year.²² The rich magnesium deposits of southern Nevada made it one of the few domestic sites able to accommodate such large production. As a result, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) awarded the sizeable contract to the Silver State.²³ The federal government would build and own the magnesium plant and surrounding townsite, while leasing the facility to the newly formed Basic Magnesium, Incorporated. The plant opened on August 31, 1942.²⁴ Though it shut down before the end of the war, Basic Magnesium's impact on southern Nevada was enormous.

The scale of the plant's construction alone is staggering. The project was the second-largest structural steel job in the history of the world. Basic's construction employed more than 16,000 workers and generated a weekly payroll of \$1.1 million. The \$63-million project was larger and more expensive than even Boulder Dam, which had a peak employment of 5,250 workers with a monthly payroll of \$750,000. When finished, the plant produced up to 120 tons of magnesium daily. Its \$35-million annual output was roughly equivalent to the value of the rest of Nevada's total mineral output. Basic Magnesium was the world's largest magnesium plant and second-largest industrial user of electricity. In its prime, the plant employed more than 13,000 workers. Its \$8-million annual payroll was five times greater than the total wages paid by all of Nevada's other industrial plants.²⁵

The infusion of new capital was only a portion of Basic Magnesium's powerful impact. The influx of workers overwhelmed the small town's already strained housing supply. Officials planned to construct a "new city" to alleviate the need for housing. The Basic Town Site, later named after Charles Henderson, the RFC Chairman and a Nevada native, created a new population center in the Las Vegas Valley. Located southeast of Las Vegas, the site stood between Las Vegas and Boulder City. It was initially owned by the federal government and was intended to support up to seven thousand residents.²⁶ As new workers continued to descend upon the valley, however, the fledgling town could do little to ease the housing shortage. Exacerbating the crisis were legions of black workers who migrated to Nevada seeking employment. Facing segregation as well as lack of housing, many blacks resorted to living in tent villages, trailer parks, and even cars in the predominantly black Westside of Las Vegas. Over time, Henderson gradually evolved into a thriving community. In 1999, it surpassed Reno to become the second-largest city in Nevada.²⁷

The plant had more far-reaching influence, as well. Basic Magnesium is but one example of economic diversification in the wartime West. Gerald Nash cites this transformation as one of the most dramatic results of federal spending during the conflict. Stimulated by defense contracts and federal spending, the region was able to develop the potent manufacturing and technology sectors it had lacked. These new industries allowed the West to escape its



AIR VIEW, NORTHWEST, OF ENTIRE
PROJECT, RESERVOIRS, DEMOUNT-
ABLE TOWNSITE, METAL PLANT,
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CAMP

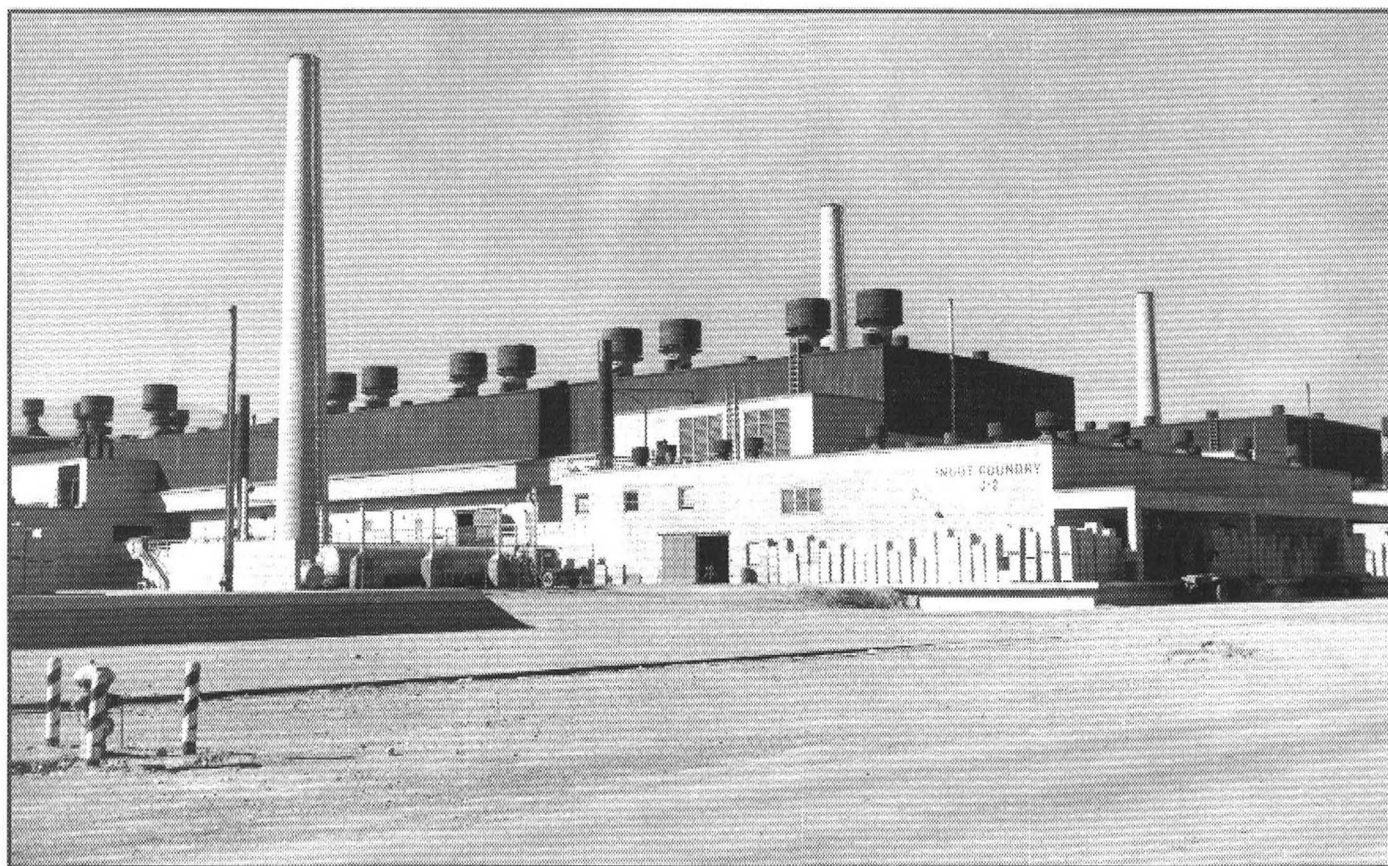
MCNEIL CONSTRUCTION CO.
MAGNESIUM PLANT
LAS VEGAS NEVADA

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Aerial view of the Basic Magnesium plant which was the world's largest magnesium plant and second-largest industrial user of electricity. In its prime, the plant employed more than 13,000 workers. (Nellis AFB Collection)



Women plant workers at BMI in September 1943 handling magnesium produced for domestic use. (*Henderson Public Library Collection*)



The ingot foundry J-2 and surroundings, on March 24, 1944, at the Basic Magnesium plant. (*Henderson Public Library Collection*)

longstanding status as a natural-resource colony of the industrial East and emerge from the war as a self-sufficient region.²⁸ Nash refers most specifically to the shipbuilding and aerospace industries that made southern California a postwar industrial giant, but southern Nevada also experienced substantial industrial growth.

While magnesium production is hardly a departure from the region's heritage of extractive industry, Basic Magnesium represented the first large-scale industrial venture in an economy desperate for diversification. Las Vegans were elated at the prospect of their city attracting firms like Basic. Promoters, such as *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* chief A. E. Cahlan, hoped the plant could help turn the Las Vegas Valley into "a major center for the light metal industry."²⁹ When Anaconda Copper Company took over the Basic plant in 1942, corporate executive Cornelius F. Kelley insisted that "Basic Magnesium will NOT be a war baby" [emphasis in original], promising that Las Vegas's new industrial sector would continue to thrive.³⁰ The factory shut down in November 1944, but it did help spawn something of an industrial base in southern Nevada. While never again operating on a wartime scale, the Basic facility became home to a variety of successful industrial firms after the war.

In the colonial struggle outlined by Nash, the plant played another powerful role. Traditionally, the West had served as a resource hinterland providing raw materials to the industrial East. Basic Magnesium symbolized the breaking of these colonial bonds. The very existence of a western magnesium plant struck a nerve in the East. In 1940, Representative James Scrugham of Nevada reported encountering "determined opposition of eastern industrial concerns" to his suggestion of the Silver State as a potential site for the plant.³¹ Prior to the war, Michigan-based Dow Chemical Company held a de facto monopoly on magnesium production. The threatening notion of a western plant, awarded to another firm, was not well received. Just as southern California's immense industrial growth had enabled it to challenge its colonial subordination to the East, southern Nevada's wartime growth allowed it to challenge California's intraregional dominance in the West. Nevada narrowly edged out Needles, California, as the final location for the plant. This victory was especially sweet for Las Vegans who lamented that their state's mines had consistently contributed more to California's wealth than to Nevada's.³² Unlike the profits of previous operations, Basic Magnesium's revenues flowed into, not out of, the Silver State.

Following Basic Magnesium's closure, A. E. Cahlan's editorial in the November 13, 1944, *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* voiced optimism in the face of adversity. The closing, predicted Cahlan, would have an "almost complete lack of effect on the morale of Las Vegas." Foreseeing a travel boom spurred by the growth of southern California and the eventual end to wartime travel restrictions, Cahlan considered Las Vegas's future brighter than ever.³³ While demobilization posed significant challenges to Las Vegas, the city emerged from



BMI graphics department, October 21, 1943. (Henderson Public Library Collection)

the war stronger than it had entered it. Las Vegas's municipal budget nearly tripled from 1940 to 1945, as did the valley's population by 1950.³⁴ While making strides to challenge its colonial relationship to both California and the East, southern Nevada also made progress in its struggle to end its longstanding subordination to northern Nevada. Since 1910, notes Russell Elliott, political power had been concentrated "to an amazing extent" in the state's northern half.³⁵ Wartime economic and social patterns, on the other hand, decidedly favored the state's south. The immigration of defense workers brought new clout to the Democratic Party, challenging the conservative north. Southern Nevada's rapidly growing population also helped to redistribute political power. By 1960, Las Vegas had overtaken Reno as the largest city in the state.³⁶

World War II was indeed a watershed in the history of Las Vegas. The desert oasis had supported a massive military installation, developed large-scale industry, and experienced dramatic population growth. By war's end, Las Vegas was well on its way to becoming a major western city. Its military establishment, although conceding the spotlight to luxury hotels and sparkling swimming pools, had very quietly become a major influence on the city's political and economic affairs. Primarily known as a resort city, Las Vegas had truly developed into a martial metropolis.

Such a city, Roger Lotchin argues, was defined by its "alliance to the United States fighting services." The martial metropolis was integrated both economically and politically with the military establishment, forging a federal-urban partnership based on the mutual benefits of defense spending. Municipal governments created formal and informal ties to the military, hoping to attract and retain defense installations and contracts. Rather than passively peddling resources to colonial oppressors, western cities willfully used political pressure to manipulate the system in their favor. City leaders in California, writes Lotchin, "consistently employed federal military resources to help create the urban empires to which they aspired."³⁷ Municipal officials, congressmen, city boosters, and local businessmen all took part in the race for federal funds. Once a city had successfully attracted a base or contract, its economic and political apparatus often became tightly interwoven with the new military establishment.

Many western cities were eager to forge such relationships with the military. For its success in this regard, Lotchin calls San Diego the "quintessential martial metropolis." Even more influential than strategic or economic concerns were the city's committed leadership, booster spirit, and pro-military public. Similarly, Los Angeles emerged from the war as the "capital city of the military-industrial complex," thanks to a supportive public and cooperative government. The primary reason for Los Angeles's success was not its physical climate, but its "mental or cultural climate."³⁸ Evidently convinced of a warm welcome, military planners awarded Los Angeles 47 percent of California's massive federal defense budget. At peak production, aircraft contracts alone employed more than two hundred thousand factory workers in the City of Angels.³⁹

With defense spending reaching dizzying heights, competition for military contracts became a high-stakes game. City officials went to great lengths to lure federal funds to their jurisdictions. The effort involved not only municipal officials, but also local businessmen, boosters, and chambers of commerce. A paragon of the new military-industrial city, Colorado Springs is proof that such cutthroat competition survived the war.⁴⁰ Boldly driven by its boosters, Colorado Springs launched a citywide campaign to attract military spoils. Its vehemently pro-military populace clamored for a defense installation, the Chamber of Commerce formed a Military Affairs Committee specifically for the task, and the opulent Broadmoor Hotel lavishly hosted visiting military officials. From 528 sites in 45 states, Colorado Springs was selected to host the United States Air Force Academy, and today is also home to Peterson Air Force Base, Falcon Air Force Station, and the North American Aerospace Defense Command—NORAD. Now hailed as the Space Capital of the Free World, Colorado Springs serves as a model for the successful martial metropolis.

Like these cities, Las Vegas was not shy about singing its praises to military planners. Active city boosters, a favorable public, and strong political leader-

ship at the national, state, and local levels helped the small city attract a significant amount of federal attention. Long before World War II, some Las Vegans were already clamoring for a military presence in southern Nevada. As early as 1935, the *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* printed editorials urging local officials to pursue construction of an army airfield in the area.⁴¹ The Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce and, rumor has it, a chicken sandwich were responsible for the eventual location of such a base. In October 1940, Brigadier General H.W. Harms of the Army Air Corps landed at Las Vegas's Western Air Express Field. According to legend, the famished officer arrived "between meals" and went to the nearby Apache Café for a chicken sandwich. There, "as fate would have it," General Harms happened to meet R. B. Griffith, a prominent local businessman and secretary of the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce. "Chewing happily on the succulent chicken," the general allegedly agreed to consider the possibility of establishing a base near Las Vegas.⁴²

Four days later, Griffith wrote a letter to Major David Schlatter of the Army Air Corps Western Command at Moffett Field, California. Griffith portrayed Las Vegas as the perfect location for an army airfield, emphasizing the excellent year-round flying weather, strategic isolation, and proximity to southern California's aircraft industries. Griffith promised that the city would lease the land to the army for one dollar per year and provide "every possible aid and assistance." He went on to boast that Las Vegas was the Clark County seat, home to many good schools, churches, and two newspapers. While noting opportunities for recreation at nearby Mount Charleston and Lake Mead, Griffith predictably failed to mention the town's notorious reputation for providing somewhat less wholesome forms of entertainment.⁴³ Griffith's salesmanship, not to mention the famous chicken sandwich, must have made an impression on the army brass. On January 23, 1941, General Harms and Mayor John Russell signed a lease granting the army rights to build a gunnery school on the site of Western Air Express Field.⁴⁴

In the war's early stages, Las Vegans were ardently pro-military. As they had done during World War I, citizens formed the Clark County Defense Council to coordinate rationing and support the war effort. The Chamber of Commerce created a Defense Committee, chaired by Griffith, to serve as a liaison between military and civic officials.⁴⁵ Many of the city's hotels raised money by staging special shows and concerts with admission by "war bonds only."⁴⁶ In late 1942, General John L. DeWitt voiced concern over the potential for the city's all-night taverns and casinos to become a distraction for servicemen and defense workers. Patriotism, as well as a fear of being declared off-limits to military personnel, prompted tavern and casino owners to agree to a voluntary program limiting hours of operation. Taverns and bars closed at midnight, while package liquor sales ceased at eight o'clock. The city's casinos also agreed to shut their doors between the hours of two and ten in the morning, closing for the first time since gambling had been legalized in 1931.⁴⁷ The Clark County Central

Labor Council even arranged a wartime labor truce between the Las Vegas Association of Employers and the city's major unions.⁴⁸ While Las Vegas's pro-military ethos was certainly an asset to defense planners, the city's friends in high places commanded even more attention.

In the United States Senate, Nevada's small population worked as an advantage. With each state receiving the same number of votes, Nevada exerted an influence disproportionate to its size. It was in this arena that Las Vegas found perhaps their most powerful and dedicated ally. Patrick McCarran, Nevada's first native-born senator, tirelessly championed southern Nevada's budding military establishment. Aggressive and often unpredictable, McCarran "understood power and was not afraid to use it ruthlessly and effectively," observes biographer Jerome E. Edwards. By securing a coveted seat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, McCarran "saw to it . . . that Nevada got more than its fair share of federal largesse."⁴⁹ Often criticized for placing state interests ahead of national ones, McCarran consistently strove to aid southern Nevada in its campaign for military spending. The Silver State had a long tradition of powerful senators, and McCarran proved no exception. Like William Stewart, Francis Newlands, and Key Pittman before him, McCarran effectively used his seat in the Senate to draw national attention to the small western state.

Something of an aviation enthusiast, McCarran helped pave the way for the location of an army airfield in Las Vegas. In 1938, he drafted a bill to create the Civil Aeronautics Authority, the body that later provided federal funds for the renovation of Western Air Express Field. From his seat on the Appropriations Committee, McCarran no doubt influenced the decision to locate a gunnery school in the Las Vegas Valley. In 1943, McCarran also helped draft a bill chartering the United States Air Force as an independent branch of service. Among McCarran's greatest achievements was securing the government's lucrative magnesium contract for southern Nevada. Hoping to bring an industrial base to the Las Vegas Valley, McCarran lobbied President Franklin D. Roosevelt directly.⁵⁰ When it appeared that the plant would instead be awarded to California, McCarran rounded up fellow Nevadans to oppose the move. Senator Berkeley Bunker "staged a valiant battle" in support of the Las Vegas site, but Charles Henderson, Elko native and former United States Senator, had the final say. As president of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, he chose in favor of the Silver State.⁵¹

McCarran went to bat for Las Vegas once again when the Basic Magnesium plant was slated to be shut down. He and Representative James Scrugham mounted a "vigorous protest" of the proposed shutdown.⁵² McCarran framed the closing as an act of eastern colonialism, denouncing it as "a battle of the West against those interests that seek to curtail the development of the West."⁵³ Here, McCarran cleverly used Nevada's perceived colonial status as part of a rhetorical strategy to achieve his objective. Western historian Patricia Nelson Limerick quips that many of the region's politicians have been "gifted

speechmakers," adept at using inflammatory rhetoric to dramatize their causes."⁵⁴ The simplistic wording of such speeches usually concealed their more complex significance. While McCarran's words portray Nevada as a victim of colonialism, his intentions support Lotchin's argument that western politicians consciously and vigorously competed for federal resources. Pushed into a corner by threats to close Basic Magnesium, McCarran was finally forced to denounce his state's colonial status. Hoping to delay the inevitable, McCarran demanded a federal investigation to determine the government's motives for shutting down the plant. McCarran ultimately proved unsuccessful in preventing Basic Magnesium's closure, but the feisty Democrat was determined to ensure that southern Nevada's military economy would persist long after the war ended.

As peace neared, the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce developed a comprehensive plan for coping with the upcoming demobilization. Many feared a postwar depression, but residents cited the ubiquitous housing shortage as "Nevada's most pressing postwar problem."⁵⁵ With even the town's hotels filled to capacity, many returning veterans were forced to live in tent cities and temporary housing. March 1946 brought the largest construction boom to that point in Las Vegas history as builders struggled to keep pace with demand.⁵⁶ The Chamber of Commerce hoped to capitalize on the waves of veterans returning from the war. Its action plan called for an extensive advertising campaign to cash in on the postwar travel boom.⁵⁷ Tempering this optimism, however, was an ominous announcement regarding the fate of the Las Vegas Army Air Field. As the war wound down, the air force corps suspended gunnery training. On January 12, 1946, the army announced that the LVAAF would be deactivated.⁵⁸

As in many other martial cities, demobilization created something of a crisis for Las Vegas. By March 1946, the LVAAF, once teeming with more than eighteen thousand men, saw its garrison substantially reduced.⁵⁹ Facing such massive economic changes, city and county officials began to realize that private spending alone could not stave off postwar depression. Aware that only continued federal spending was likely to sustain the war boom, many considered the government ultimately responsible for ensuring the employment of returning veterans.⁶⁰ A new round of metropolitan competition ensued as each martial metropolis vied for its piece of the now significantly smaller defense budget. "Having contributed to winning the war," Lotchin notes, "urban California girded itself to protect its winnings."⁶¹ Las Vegas was no different, launching a full-scale campaign to protest the closing of Las Vegas Army Air Field.

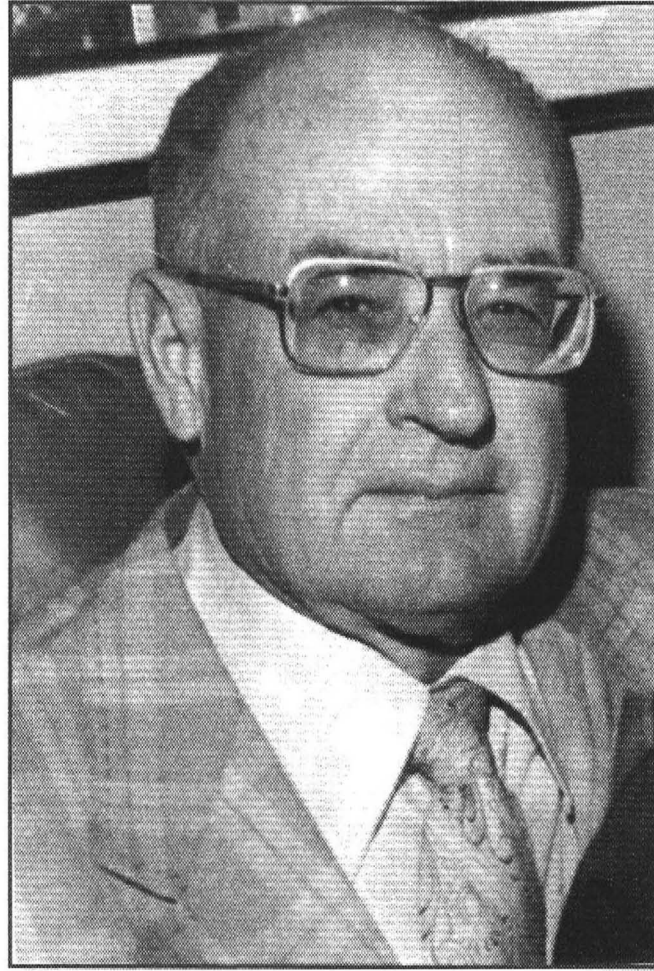
Even prior to the field's deactivation, the city's leaders were struggling to ensure that it would become a permanent installation.⁶² In the *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal*, A.E. Cahlan's editorial trumpeted the base's importance to the Las Vegas economy. Cahlan insisted that the field's \$55,000 daily payroll was vital to the community, noting that military personnel occupied 40 percent of



These leading Las Vegans include, in the front, third from left, Bob Griffith and then Jake Kozloff. In the back, second from left is Roscoe Thomas, then Art Ham, Sr., Guy McAfee, and Tutor Scherer. (*Betty Ham Dokter Collection*)

local housing.⁶³ In September 1945, an unsigned editorial urged civic leaders to make "every effort" to retain the base.⁶⁴ Las Vegas leaders did just that. The Chamber of Commerce appointed a committee to expedite plans for the field's permanent re-opening, declaring the LVAAF "more important to Las Vegas than anything else."⁶⁵ Months before the official deactivation announcement, a group of civic leaders had traveled to Washington, D.C., to plead the city's case to Congress. Mayor E. W. Cragin, R. B. Griffith, and Maxwell Kelch, president of the Chamber of Commerce, assured Las Vegans that "every effort would be made to influence those in authority." McCarran pledged his cooperation, and they soon struck a deal.⁶⁶

Setting a price of \$1, the group proposed selling the base property outright to the army. In return, the city and county would receive \$250,000 from the Civil Aeronautics Authority to build a new civilian airfield. In October 1945, the War Department recommended that the LVAAF become a permanent installation. Jubilant local leaders could hardly contain their excitement. Kelch declared that the "economic worth to Las Vegas of this important enterprise cannot be overstated." Griffith added that Las Vegans should be "everlastingly grateful" to McCarran and his "consistent militant campaign" to save the field.⁶⁷ Celebration faded to concern as local officials initially failed to honor their end



Maxwell Kelch, who started the Live Wire Fund and KENO Radio.
(*North Las Vegas Library Collection*)

of the agreement. The War Department made the base's permanence contingent on granting the military exclusive rights to use the field.⁶⁸ While McCarran and others went to Washington to fight for the base, local officials adopted an "official attitude of complacency."⁶⁹ City commissioners made no plans and held no meetings after the deal was announced.⁷⁰ Although the city expected to receive some federal money to help build a new civilian airport, local officials were still unsure how to raise sufficient funds. Eager to both appease the military and garner support for a new commercial airport, the Chamber of Commerce unanimously approved a vigorous publicity campaign promoting the passage of an airport bond issue. On May 2, 1947, local voters approved the bond by a margin of ten to one. In addition to financing the construction of a new civilian airfield, the \$750,000 bond ensured that the LVAAF would become a permanent presence.⁷¹

Las Vegas was fortunate to avoid losing such a large military installation. While World War II had provided the impetus for unprecedented economic growth, the onset of peace presented a difficult challenge. The military and the martial metropolis had in many cases become so interdependent that neither could survive without the other. Peacetime demobilization threatened both the services and the municipalities that housed them. Lotchin refers to this as the

"mutual dilemma of relative decline."⁷² Cities and the services eagerly sought ways to ensure their continued prosperity. The answer to this quandary came quickly as global tensions gave rise to the Cold War.

The volatility of the postwar world prompted the United States to develop its first significant peacetime military establishment. The emerging permanent war economy was a boon not only to western martial cities but to the region as a whole. The West had experienced a brief economic expansion during World War I, but it subsided quickly with the end of hostilities. Increased defense spending during the Cold War, however, allowed many cities to sustain the economic momentum gained during World War II. Cold War spending, like that of the previous conflict, favored the West at the expense of other regions. Atomic science and other technology made warfare far more sophisticated. Military production became an extremely specialized endeavor, and the federal government commissioned firms to produce highly technical products to very precise specifications. Since the market had only one buyer, price was not the primary determinant of a bid's success. The government also gave serious consideration to non-cost factors such as location, climate, and labor. Boasting strategic isolation, favorable labor conditions, mild weather, and a lack of existing infrastructure, western sites enjoyed a comparative advantage over other candidates at the same price.⁷³

The situation was ideal for the many western politicians who sought to avoid a postwar depression. Consistently pro-growth and pro-defense, the region's leaders eagerly supported continued military spending.⁷⁴ Buoyed by outlays for the Cold War, the federal defense budget remained near ten percent of the gross national product throughout the 1950s. The government committed \$40 billion to defense from 1954 to 1956 and \$45 billion more from 1957 to 1970.⁷⁵ As during World War II, Las Vegas was able to attract a significant amount of federal spending during the Cold War. This allowed southern Nevada's military establishment to sustain its prominent economic position.

On April 30, 1950, the Las Vegas Army Air Field was renamed Nellis Air Force Base in honor of First Lieutenant William H. Nellis, a native of Searchlight, Nevada who had been killed in action on his seventieth mission as a pilot during World War II.⁷⁶ The change in name was soon followed by a change in mission as the Cold War continued to escalate. International tensions prompted United States military policy to shift drastically toward rearmament. Responding to the rise of atomic warfare, President Dwight D. Eisenhower's "New Look" strategy after 1953 established the young air force as the centerpiece of the nation's defense.⁷⁷ The onset of hostilities in Korea during June 1950 gave new importance to installations such as Nellis. Charged with training airmen for combat in Asia, Nellis Air Force Base once again assumed a wartime footing.

This sparked a renaissance of sorts, as Nellis Air Force Base began to grow in both size and prestige. On July 20, 1950, Nellis officially adopted a six-day workweek to speed training for airmen bound for Korea. The base accelerated

its program so as to graduate a class every two weeks,⁷⁸ and the auxiliary base at Indian Springs was reopened in October to support the increased activity at Nellis. The Korean conflict allowed the facility at Nellis to reprise the influential role it had played during World War II. Nearly every airman who flew an F-86 Sabrejet in Korea had received training at Nellis.⁷⁹

Expansion continued in earnest following the conflict in Korea. In May 1950, the base began construction of the Wherry Housing Project in hopes of alleviating its perpetual housing shortage. At a cost of \$4 million, the government built four hundred new residential units for military personnel. In 1952, President Harry S. Truman declared Las Vegas a "critical defense area," qualifying the city for additional federal funding for housing and defense.⁸⁰ A grade school for the base's children came in 1953, while more than \$2 million in infrastructural improvements followed in the next year. In 1954, the base supported more than five thousand military and civilian personnel.⁸¹

In the midst of the Cold War, Nellis achieved a higher level of national and international prestige than it had ever previously enjoyed. Although it began as a school for training bomber gunners, the base now became known as the Home of the Fighter Pilot. Its isolation and superior year-round flying weather made it ideally suited for aerial combat training. In 1954, Nellis was host to the first all-jet United States Air Force Gunnery Meet, a regular event at which Nellis pilots remain perennial favorites. Two years later, the base became home to the world-famous Thunderbirds, the air force's precision flying team. In 1958, the air force again affirmed the commitment of Nellis to fighter training by assigning it the service's Tactical Air Command.⁸²

While this new mission brought additional prestige and strategic importance, it also ensured that the base would remain a pillar of the southern Nevada economy. Nellis's new tactical and symbolic roles allowed it to escape the closings and budget cuts that affected many other bases across the country. Nellis, in fact, continued to grow. In 1958, the Manch Manor and Nellis Terrace housing projects funded the construction of hundreds of new residential units. The base and gunnery range's 3.1 million square acres made it the largest base-range complex in the nation.⁸³ Ten years later, the base continued to exert a powerful economic influence. With 80 percent of its \$35-million annual payroll spent locally, Nellis Air Force Base was second only to tourism as the largest sector of Las Vegas's economy.⁸⁴

Southern Nevada soon found other sources of Cold War spending as well. News of the first successful Soviet atomic test in September 1949 and rising tensions in Korea prompted President Truman to expedite American plans to locate a continental site for testing nuclear weapons. In December 1950, with urging from McCarran, Truman created the Nevada Proving Grounds on a portion of the Nellis Bombing Range. Sixty-five miles northwest of Las Vegas, this facility has been the site of more than nine hundred nuclear tests. While not a military installation, the Nevada Proving Grounds attracted substantial



Supersonic Fighters, 1954. Four F100s from Nellis AFB shown in tactical formation over North Las Vegas during a practice mission. (*USAF Photo - October 1954*)



In May 1950, the base began construction of the housing projects in hopes of alleviating its perpetual housing shortage. The government built four hundred new residential units for military personnel. (*Nellis AFB Collection*)

federal spending to the Las Vegas Valley. The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) spent \$4.5 million on initial construction and road improvements for the site. Testing drew thousands of AEC and military personnel to the area, adding to the Cold War boom simultaneously engendered by increased activity at Nellis Air Force Base.⁸⁵

The tests became a cultural and economic phenomenon. A sort of atomic tourism developed as reporters and travelers flocked to Las Vegas to witness the explosions. Anything but fearful, Las Vegans turned the tests into a marketing tool. The mushroom clouds became part of the city's mystique.⁸⁶ Hotel guests toasted the early-morning blasts with Atomic Cocktails, while local retailers offered "atomic bomb sales." Clark County even changed its official seal to include a picture of a mushroom cloud.⁸⁷ Although a handful of residents complained of broken windows or lost sleep as a result of the tests, the vast majority of Las Vegans were decidedly in favor of the tests. Their enthusiasm went beyond civic pride, however, as atomic testing proved to be yet another economic boon to the southern Nevada economy.

Although the Nevada Test Site no longer conducts atmospheric tests, the facility continues to have a significant economic influence. In 1990, the Department of Energy (DOE), which owns and manages the test site, was Las Vegas's largest civilian employer. In that year, the DOE paid \$320 million in salaries and \$116.7 million in pensions to workers and retirees in the Las Vegas area. The site's major contractors, including firms such as Reynolds Electrical and Engineering Company (REECo), Edgerton, Germeshausen, and Grier (EG&G), and Wackenhut, also brought jobs to the community. All told, the test site's local economic impact was an estimated \$1 billion in 1990.⁸⁸

Many feared that the end of the Cold War and the diplomatic moratoria on nuclear testing would spell an end to the Nevada Test Site and its stimulation of the local economy. The high-tech nature of weapons during the Cold War production forced many defense contractors to become so specialized that they were unable to re-enter the private sector when the conflict ended.⁸⁹ The Test Site and its major contractors deftly escaped this fate. REECo continued to employ more than five thousand workers at the facility, while EG&G expanded its operations to twenty-six countries worldwide.⁹⁰ The test site itself has diversified, now playing host to a variety of research and defense-related activities. Hazardous materials handling, counterterrorism exercises, seismic testing, and subcritical nuclear testing are just a few of the site's current operations.⁹¹

Despite its continuing impact on the local economy, the Nevada Test Site has become a frequent target of criticism. Once a source of local pride, the test site is now regarded in a darker light. Antinuclear activists, "downwinders," and "atomic veterans" have all denounced the test site and its role in developing nuclear weapons. Organized protests and high-profile lawsuits have elevated the test site to the national stage in a consistently negative way.⁹² Recently,

presidential approval of a nuclear-waste dump at the site's Yucca Mountain elicited similar reactions. These developments reflect the changing relationship between the defense establishment and the community it helped create. Public support for the military, once overwhelmingly favorable, eventually waned as the long-run consequences of a military presence became more visible.⁹³ With the emergence of a highly successful gaming and tourism industry, Las Vegas no longer relies on the defense sector for economic development. The military remains a significant factor in the area's economy, but the city's casinos and megaresorts have all but overshadowed it.

In fact, the historic relationship between the city's tourist economy and the military sector has been complex. Ample evidence suggests that the large payrolls and population increases inspired by Basic Magnesium and the Las Vegas Army Air Field helped the nascent gambling sector mature into the dominant industry it is today. During the war, thousands of soldiers and visitors flocked to the town's casinos and hotels on the weekends. Military demands for exclusive use of the Western Air Express Airfield led to the building of a new civilian airport. Located closer to the emerging Strip, the new McCarran International Airport catered nicely to the tourist trade. Gerald Nash argues that Las Vegas became the "great entertainment capital of the West" during the war.⁹⁴ In this period, Las Vegas confirmed gambling as its primary attraction. Eugene Moehring writes that this unity of purpose gave local promoters a focused sense of direction. By intensively marketing itself as a resort city, Las Vegas was able to capitalize on the postwar travel boom and establish itself as a unique destination.⁹⁵

While the subsequent population boom was an economic godsend for the community, it eventually led to conflict with the area's existing military installations. Over time, Nellis Air Force Base, the former Basic Magnesium plant, and the Nevada Test Site shaped the geographic pattern of Las Vegas's urbanization by drawing development away from The Strip and toward the northern and eastern sections of the valley.⁹⁶ The rapid growth of these areas soon brought residents uncomfortably close to installations once revered for their isolation. In 1995, the *Las Vegas Sun* reported rising tensions between Nellis and the surrounding community. Several local residents, including the casino mogul Steve Wynn, have voiced concerns about low-flying air force jets causing frequent disturbances in nearby areas.⁹⁷ With more and more houses encroaching on the area beneath the base's airspace, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the air force to conduct its operations without upsetting local residents. While Nellis's strategic and military importance has grown appreciably over time, its standing in the community has declined.

Nevertheless, the base remains a significant actor in the valley's economy. It continues to employ more than fifteen thousand civilian and military personnel, nearly 4 percent of the county's work force. The air force also pays in excess of \$100 million per year in pensions to local retirees. Nellis's operating

expenses include millions for construction contracts, local utilities, health care, and subsidized education. The base also supports the tourism industry by attracting an estimated hundred and fifty thousand out-of-state visitors each year.⁹⁸ Much of this impact has gone unrecognized, however, since Nellis's \$450-million payroll pales in comparison to the billions of dollars grossed by the city's lucrative gaming industry. No longer dependent on defense spending, Las Vegas has grown increasingly critical of the military establishment they once worked so diligently to attract.

As a martial metropolis, Las Vegas has thus come full circle. For some, the military establishment has served its purpose. It delivered the payrolls and population increases that allowed Las Vegas to realize its vision of becoming a thriving resort city. Preoccupied with lavish buffets and flamboyant floor shows, visitors now see little of the military influence that so dramatically shaped Las Vegas. The city's lore readily favors Bugsy Siegel and Frank Sinatra over R. B. Griffith's chicken sandwich and Pat McCarran's impassioned battle to save Basic Magnesium. Today's tourists are kept spellbound by dancing fountains and erupting volcanoes rather than early-morning mushroom clouds. Yet, air force paychecks and pensions still flow into the southern Nevada economy as Nellis airmen continue to defend their country. For Las Vegas's military establishment, living quietly in the shadow of The Strip is perhaps the ultimate indication of success. Its legacy is not defense alone, but also the satisfaction of knowing that it has helped make Las Vegas a self-sufficient and truly remarkable community.



Senator Charles Belknap Henderson, namesake of the city.
(North Las Vegas Library Collection)

NOTES

¹Russell R. Elliott, *History of Nevada* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 325. Las Vegas had a population of 8,422 in 1940. By 1950 this had grown to 24,624, an increase of 192.4 percent.

²Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 85.

³Robert E. Parker, "Economic Impact of Military Spending on the Urban Environment in Southern Nevada," manuscript (1990), Lied Library Special Collections, University of Nevada-Las Vegas, 4.

⁴Gerald D. Nash, *World War II and the American West: Reshaping the Economy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 1.

⁵Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 496-97.

⁶Gerald D. Nash, *The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth-Century West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), 78. Martin J. Schiesl, "Airplanes to Aerospace: Defense Spending and Economic Growth in the Los Angeles Region, 1945-1960," in *The Martial Metropolis: U.S. Cities in War and Peace*, Roger W. Lotchin, ed. (New York: Praeger, 1984), 135-36.

⁷Nash, *Federal Landscape*, 52; *idem.*, *American West Transformed*, 201, 216.

⁸Lotchin, *Martial Metropolis*; *idem.*, Lotchin, *Fortress California: From Warfare to Welfare, 1910-1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 174.

⁹Lotchin, *Fortress California*, 16.

¹⁰Roger W. Lotchin, "Introduction" and "Conclusion: The Martial Metropolis," *Martial Metropolis*, Lotchin, ed., 223-232, 223, xi.

¹¹Elliott, *History of Nevada*, 315.

¹²Eugene P. Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas, 1930-2000*, 2nd ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000), 13-16. For more on this subject, see *idem.*, "Public Works and the New Deal in Las Vegas, 1933-1940," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 24:2 (Summer 1981), 107-29.

¹³James R. Hinds, *Epitome of the History of Nellis Air Force Base, 1940-1966* (Las Vegas: Nellis Air Force Base, 1976), viii; "A Concise History of Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada" (Office of History, Headquarters, Air Warfare Center, 15 March 1997), 9-12.

¹⁴Hinds, *Epitome of History*, 4.

¹⁵Eugene P. Moehring, "Las Vegas and the Second World War," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 29:1 (Spring 1986), 1-30, 1.

¹⁶*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (28 January 1941), p. 3:1. The total cost of the Army project was \$2,724,950, which included a monthly payroll in excess of \$100,000. *Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (26 February 1941), p. 1:1.

¹⁷Hinds, *Epitome of History*, 18; "Concise History," 7.

¹⁸Hinds, *Epitome of History*, 18.

¹⁹*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (26 May 1941), 1:4.

²⁰Hinds, *Epitome of History*, 10.

²¹*Ibid.*, 18.

²²*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (8 July 1941), p. 1:1.

²³*Ibid.* (12 August 1941), p. 1:1.

²⁴*Ibid.* For more on Basic Magnesium, Inc., see Maryellen Vallier Sadovich, "Basic Magnesium, Incorporated and the Industrialization of Southern Nevada during World War II" (M.A. thesis, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1971), Lied Library Special Collections; William T. Dobbs, "Southern Nevada and the Legacy of Basic Magnesium, Inc.," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 34:1 (Spring 1991), 273-303.

²⁵*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (20 May 1943), p. 9:3; (13 November 1941), p. 1:1. Nevada's total mineral production in 1938 was valued at \$27,031,281.

²⁶*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (28 July 1941), p. 7:1.

²⁷Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 279; *idem.*, "Las Vegas and Second World War," 21.

²⁸Nash, *Federal Landscape*, 52.

²⁹*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (21 May 1943), p. 12:1.

³⁰*Ibid.*, (6 April 1943), p. 2:6.

- 31*Ibid.*, (8 October 1940), p. 1:1.
- 32*Ibid.*, (13 November 1941), p. 1:1.
- 33*Ibid.*, (13 November 1944), p. 14:7.
- 34Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 294. Las Vegas's budget climbed from \$388,358 in 1940 to \$997,164 in 1945. Clark County's budget grew from \$930,719 to \$2,289,525 in the same period. Las Vegas' population grew from 8,422 in 1940 to 24,624 in 1950.
- 35Jerome E. Edwards, *Pat McCarran: Political Boss of Nevada* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1982), 28.
- 36Elliott, *History of Nevada*, 325.
- 37Lotchin, *Fortress California*, 346.
- 38Ann Markusen, Scott Campbell, Peter Hall, and Sabina Deitrich, *The Rise of the Sunbelt: The Military Re-Mapping of Industrial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 99, 234.
- 39Arthur Verge, "The Impact of the Second World War on Los Angeles," *Pacific Historical Review*, 63:3 (August 1994) 289-314, 305.
- 40Markusen *et al*, *The Rise of the Sunbelt*, 174.
- 41*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (30 December 1935), p. 6:1.; (18 March 1937), p. 8:1.
- 42*Guide to Nellis Air Force Base, Las Vegas, and the Valley* (San Diego: Armed Forces Publishers, 1957), 2.
- 43R. B. Griffith to Major David Schlatter [Subject: A Suitable Field] (5 October 1940), University of Nevada-Las Vegas, Lied Library, Special Collections.
- 44*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (23 January 1941), p. 1:8. The Army leased the field from Western Air Express for \$10, while WAE retained the right to use the field for commercial operations.
- 45*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (25 July 1941), p. 1:1; (16 April 1941), p. 1:2.
- 46Moehring, "Las Vegas and the Second World War," 8.
- 47*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (28 November 1942), p. 1:4; (7 December 1942), p. 1:1.
- 48Moehring, "Las Vegas and the Second World War," 7. The unions agreed to suspend picketing, strikes, and boycotts in exchange for a promise from the Las Vegas Association of Employers to refrain from lockouts and other anti-labor activity.
- 49Edwards, *Pat McCarran*, 323.
- 50 Nash, *World War II*, 125.
- 51*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (13 August 1941), p. 1:1.
- 52*Ibid.* (28 October 1944), p. 5:3.
- 53*Ibid.* (23 March 1944), p. 10:1.
- 54Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), 83. Limerick's chapter on "Denial and Dependence" outlines the ways in which western politicians have asserted independence in spite of their overwhelming dependence on the federal government. McCarran's tirade falls neatly into this model, as he laments the state's status as a colonial victim in order to ensure continued federal support.
- 55*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (25 January 1946), p. 6:3.
- 56*Ibid.* (1 April 1946), 1:1.
- 57*Ibid.* (14 March 1944), 2:5.
- 58*Ibid.* (12 January 1946), 1:4.
- 59Hinds, *Epitome of History*, 22.
- 60David W. Eakins, "Business Planners and America's Postwar Expansion," in *Corporations and the Cold War*, David Horowitz, ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969), 143-72, 150.
- 61Roger W. Lotchin, "World War Two and Urban California: City Planning and the Transformation Hypothesis," *Pacific Historical Review* 62:2 (May 1993), 143-71, 156.
- 62Hinds, *Epitome of History*, 24.
- 63*Las Vegas Evening Review-Journal* (13 June 1945), p. 14:8.
- 64*Ibid.* (11 September 1945), p.14:1.
- 65*Ibid.* (18 July 1945), p.3:2.
- 66*Ibid.* (25 September 1945), p.1:3.
- 67*Ibid.* (15 October 1945), p.1:7.
- 68*Ibid.* (7 March 1946), p.1:2.

- ⁶⁹*Ibid.* (24 June 1946), p.1:1.
- ⁷⁰*Ibid.* (18 July 1946), p.1:1.
- ⁷¹*Ibid.* (8 April 1947), p.1:1; *Ibid.* (2 May 1947), p.1:8.
- ⁷²Lotchin, *Fortress California*, 26.
- ⁷³Markusen, et al., *Rise of the Gunbelt*, 101.
- ⁷⁴Timothy Chambliss, "Pro-Defense, Pro-Growth, and Anti-Communism: Cold War Politics in the American West," in *The Cold War American West, 1945-1989*, Kevin J. Fernlund, ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 101-17, 103-6.
- ⁷⁵Joseph D. Phillips, "Economic Effects of the Cold War," in *Corporations and Cold War*, Horowitz, ed., 173-203, 175.
- ⁷⁶"Concise History," 15.
- ⁷⁷Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 517-38.
- ⁷⁸*Las Vegas Review-Journal* (20 July, 1950), p. 1:1.
- ⁷⁹"Concise History," 17.
- ⁸⁰Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 99.
- ⁸¹Hinds, *Epitome of History*, 46-47. The school, which cost \$420,000, was initially intended to support 400 students. In 1954, the base hosted 419 officers, 4,254 enlisted men, and 513 civilians.
- ⁸²Hinds, *Epitome of History*, 46-47.
- ⁸³*Ibid.*
- ⁸⁴"Southern Nevada Salutes Nellis Air Force Base: An Unofficial Guide" (Lubbock: Boone Publications, Inc., 1968), 47.
- ⁸⁵Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 99.
- ⁸⁶Sally Denton and Roger Morris. *The Money and the Power: The Making of Las Vegas and Its Hold on America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 139.
- ⁸⁷A. Costandina Titus, *Bombs in the Backyard: Atomic Testing and American Politics* 2nd ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2001), 93-94. Served at the Sands, the Atomic Cocktail was made from equal parts vodka, brandy, and champagne, with a dash of sherry. Atomic indeed, considering that the tests took place in the pre-dawn hours of the morning.
- ⁸⁸Titus, *Bombs in the Backyard*, 68.
- ⁸⁹Charles E. Nathanson, "The Militarization of the American Economy," in *Corporations and Cold War*, Horowitz, ed., 205-35, 214.
- ⁹⁰*Las Vegas Review-Journal* (29 November 1987), p. 38B.
- ⁹¹Titus, *Bombs in the Backyard*, 162.
- ⁹²*Ibid.*, 109.
- ⁹³Gerald D. Nash, "The West and the Military-Industrial Complex," 75.
- ⁹⁴Nash, *American West Transformed*, 85.
- ⁹⁵Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt*, 27, 42.
- ⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 245. This trend began during the construction of Boulder Dam, when the federal government created Boulder City to accommodate workers. Dam construction, and later the magnesium plant in Henderson, drew development to the southeast of Las Vegas, while Nellis and the test site pulled toward the northeast.
- ⁹⁷*Las Vegas sun* (14 May 1995), p. 1D. Steve Wynn denies filing a direct complaint, saying only that he once requested the Air Force's Thunderbirds not to fly over his golf course while it hosted then President George H. W. Bush.
- ⁹⁸"Nellis' Economic Impact on Nevada," fact sheet (United States Air Force Tactical Fighter Weapons Center, Public Affairs Division. Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, 1986). In 1986, the Air Force spent \$2.6 million on hotel rentals for the base's 39,000 official-duty visitors. Other visitors include friends and family of servicemen. Pensions for Las Vegas-area retirees amounted to \$111.6 million in 1986.

Las Vegas Under the Microscope

A Review Essay

GEOFF SCHUMACHER

Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-first Century. By Hal Rothman
(New York: Routledge, 2002)

The Last Honest Place in America: Paradise and Perdition in the New Las Vegas. By
Marc Cooper (New York: Nation Books, 2004)

Of Rats and Men: Oscar Goodman's Life from Mob Mouthpiece to Mayor of Las Vegas
John L. Smith (Las Vegas: Huntington Press, 2003)

Suburban Xanadu: The Casino Resort on the Las Vegas Strip and Beyond. By David
G. Schwartz (New York: Routledge, 2003)

The Grit beneath the Glitter: Tales from the Real Las Vegas. Edited by Hal Rothman
and Mike Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002)

As Las Vegas prepares to celebrate its hundreth birthday this spring, interest in the city is reaching new heights. Academicians and journalists have written an array of books in recent years dissecting this desert phenomenon. Some are better than others, of course, as Las Vegas is a place that often brings out a writer's worst instincts. This essay highlights a few of the more perceptive titles.

Hal Rothman, a professor of history at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, has dubbed Las Vegas the "first city of the twenty-first century," and, regardless of whether you agree with his assertion, it's clear that Las Vegas is one of the most written-about cities of the new millennium. The city's growth in the 1990s was the fastest in the nation as Las Vegas was transformed from a quirky gambling outpost into a metropolitan resort destination, a paradigm shift that curious journalists and academicians simply could not ignore.

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Las Vegas attracts writers because it presents an unusual phenomenon: They are able to watch the city grow and change right before their eyes. Las Vegas is the largest American city to get its start in the twentieth century. Most other large cities on the continent were well established before Las Vegas even made it onto national maps. Elsewhere, the heavy lifting had already occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Las Vegas, the hard work of building a city did not really get started until the 1940s, and the city didn't achieve metropolitan status until the 1990s.

Adding interest, of course, is Las Vegas's unique place as the world's undisputed gambling capital. The expansion of the city's casino industry occurred on fast-forward during the second half of the twentieth century, evolving from a handful of mob-controlled sawdust joints to miles of billion-dollar pleasure palaces capable of satisfying a visitor's every desire. With more than thirty-five million tourists flocking to Las Vegas each year, writers are compelled to find out what's going on.

And yet, the best of the recent spate of books about Las Vegas were written by people who live in the city, professors and journalists who have come to know the place and its people. Local pundits are quick to castigate so-called parachute journalists, who fly in for a couple of days, observe the tourists and go home with what they believe to be a sturdy understanding of Las Vegas. More often than not, they have merely skimmed the surface of the multifaceted city.

One of the major tasks that writers face when they choose Las Vegas as a subject is to decide which city they are writing about. Are they writing about The Strip, a practically self-contained theme park, or are they writing about all the rest of Las Vegas, where 1.6 million people live? To do a good job, they should address both. These are distinctly different places, yet inextricably linked. To write solely about the Strip is to ignore the hundreds of thousands of people who work there, serving and supplying tourists, cleaning up after them, and providing all the thrills to which they have become accustomed. To write solely about the rest of Las Vegas is to ignore the fact that, while many residents want to live "normal" lives, the resort industry is going to play some role in most everything they do. Writers who understand this dynamic tend to produce more insightful words about Las Vegas.

Hal Rothman's *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-first Century* is an ambitious book, delving into history, sociology, politics, and memoir as the author strives to deliver a full-bodied portrait of modern Las Vegas. Rothman charts the city's transformation from "old company town" to "postmodern metropolis," a shift triggered largely by casino developer Steve Wynn's opening of the Mirage Hotel in 1989. He describes how, at once, Las Vegas became more like the rest of America and America became more like Las Vegas. "Sin City is mainstream," he writes. "Las Vegas is still socially sanc-

tioned deviance. Its brand is just more comfortable to more Americans than it used to be" (p. xx).

The book is loaded with Rothman's trademark pithy, big-picture assessments of the city's status in the world. These quotable mouthfuls revolve around the provocative premise that Las Vegas is the "first city of the twenty-first century." Las Vegas, Rothman says, is "the place where desire meets capital, where instinct replaces restraint, where the future of a society, for better and worse, takes a form that had been inconceivable even a generation before" (p. xi).

This seems a risky assessment for the book's first page, especially if the reader is someone who has lived in Las Vegas for a while. To the resident, Las Vegas surely can be an interesting place, but it doesn't exactly give off the vibe that it is surging into the future, leaving other cities in its dust. Las Vegas, in fact, may represent the cutting edge when it comes to serving the desires of tourists, but beyond The Strip it looks much like other places in the American Southwest: cookie-cutter subdivisions, undistinguished shopping centers, and crowded highways. Off The Strip, Las Vegas is not much of a risk-taking town, preferring to emulate what's worked in southern California or Phoenix rather than forging its own path. If this is the future, one might wonder, it's not a pleasant prospect.

On the other hand, Rothman is well aware of Las Vegas's shortcomings for the people who live there. His generally positive take on the city comes with the caveat that its service-oriented economy and relentless growth, while representing future trends for the country as a whole, aren't necessarily positive harbingers. And he acknowledges that Las Vegas tends to be a "court of last resort for displaced humanity from around the globe." People who have hit rough patches back home see Las Vegas as a place where you can reinvent yourself and beat the odds. This doesn't always happen, of course, leaving the community saddled with an array of social problems, from homelessness to mental illness to addiction. Las Vegas, Rothman notes, is a "hard town that will make you pay for your inability to restrain your desires If you have a weakness, Las Vegas will punish you" (p. xxv).

Rothman is a careful observer of Las Vegas's changing demographics. He tracks the rise of the Culinary Union, providing low-skilled workers with middle-class wages; he notes the emergence of a large and growing Latino immigrant community, seeking and finding opportunities for upward mobility; and he profiles the growing senior population and outlines its effects on local politics. Rothman perceptively documents the perils that "weak government" and "small-town thinking" inflict on the Las Vegas landscape. He quotes Peggy Pierce, a Sierra Club activist (who later became a state assemblywoman): "The hookers here say 'no' more than the county commission" (p. 264). (It is of interest that, in 2004 Rothman was tapped by that same county commission to serve on a task force to study the impacts of rapid growth and to recommend remedies.)

Rothman's personal anecdotes represent the book at its best and its worst. They often help to humanize Las Vegas, putting a face on what, to many, is still strictly a place to visit, not to live. (Nobody actually lives at Disneyland, right?) On the other hand, Rothman occasionally draws some debatable conclusions about the city as a whole based on a single incident or an individual's inherently limited experience. For example, in discussing "the St. Petersburgization of Las Vegas," Rothman provides a prescient overview of why, as the baby boomer population retires, Las Vegas can expect to see continued migration of older citizens. He notes that this growing population has influenced the political landscape, with many seniors voting against school bond issues and other tax measures because they believe they've already paid taxes for such things when they were rearing their kids "back home."

But while Rothman draws sage conclusions from demographic figures, his observations of the comings and goings of customers at a neighborhood Starbucks shed less light. Arriving early in the morning, he notices that the first wave of customers consists largely of young, driven professionals grabbing some caffeine on the way to work. The second wave is "carpooling moms" who, he presumes, are stopping in just before or after dropping the kids at school. The third wave is seniors, ambling into the shop "in the middle of a morning stroll." As the day progresses, he notices other types coming in at certain times. While there's no reason to doubt Rothman's account of this seemingly too-perfect pattern, the whole scene begs a question: What, if anything, does it all mean? Rothman suggests that the habits of Starbucks customers indicate that "different groups could easily share one space in the course of the day without tension or rivalry. The key was respecting the boundaries of time, of observing the unwritten *de facto* distinctions that kept different groups from treading upon one another" (p. 164). This suggests, somewhat ominously, that if the seniors decided to start getting their coffee at 6:30 a.m. instead of 9:00, some sort of rancorous rumble might ensue. Is intolerance among suburban Starbucks customers a real concern? This anecdote, it seems, is a case of trying to make something out of nothing. If Rothman were looking for real social or class conflict, he might have ventured into Las Vegas' urban core, observing the tense relationships between Fremont Street shopkeepers and the bums and drug dealers with whom they must contend every day.

That said, Rothman's observational skills serve him well in describing the nature of community in Las Vegas. The city is often criticized for its lack of community feeling, largely because of the highly transient population. Next-door neighbors often don't know each other; and you may not see a single familiar face during a trip to the local grocery store. Rothman, however, identifies a brighter trend in Las Vegas often overlooked by critics. While neighbors may not know each other, that doesn't mean people are living hermetic lives. Rather, they are involved in "communities of affinity" rather than traditional "communities of proximity." In other words, people are more likely to get to

know others through school activities, places of worship, and Little League teams than simply because they live on the same street.

Journalist Marc Cooper is not from Las Vegas, but he spent a lot of time there before writing *The Last Honest Place in America: Paradise and Perdition in the New Las Vegas*. And while the promotional material for the book claims that Cooper follows "in the tradition of Hunter S. Thompson," nothing could be further from the truth. Cooper's exploration of Las Vegas casino culture does not involve ingesting massive amounts of drugs or any resulting hallucinations, and Cooper only occasionally describes imbibing alcohol. What's more, as a mild-mannered sort, Cooper does not make a scene anywhere in Las Vegas that gets him thrown out of a casino or that requires a close encounter with jack-booted police.

That said, Cooper, a contributing editor for *The Nation* magazine and a columnist for *L.A. Weekly*, delivers a spirited and well-written overview of the "new Las Vegas," a place he unabashedly loves despite its many flaws. Cooper deserves praise for being one of the few outsiders to write about Las Vegas with knowledge and insight.

Still, as informative and entertaining as *The Last Honest Place in America* can be, I found myself asking a nagging question: Why was this book written? Cooper is a veteran progressive journalist known for hard-nosed reporting and biting political commentary. He's traveled to war zones and political battle sites, returning with poignant stories of struggle, tragedy, and hard-won triumph. And the publisher is Nation Books, affiliated with *The Nation* magazine, the muckraking bible of the Left. Considering these facts, it might naturally have followed for Cooper to write a damning critique of Las Vegas as representing everything that is wrong with unfettered capitalism, or some such.

But no. Cooper, it turns out, is an avid blackjack player who has been visiting Las Vegas for years. His frequent sojourns across the Mojave Desert turned into a jaunty *Village Voice* cover story in 1993, in which he and a colorful sidekick (a Hunter S. Thompson homage) gambled ferociously while finding a little time to check the city's pulse. Cooper, alas, loves Vegas, celebrating its honest embrace of vice and greed rather than condemning it.

Ostensibly, the book's *raison d'être* is to explain the popularity of Las Vegas, especially its persistent allure after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when pundits proclaimed that fun was dead. "Las Vegas, after all, was now supposed to be everything we Americans were putting aside in this new chapter of history thrust so suddenly and rudely upon us," Cooper writes (p. 9). "We were, after the collapse of the World Trade Center towers, said the media, less frivolous, more serious, less ironic, more authentic. How would Las Vegas, with all its bombast and artifice, fit into this post-9/11 America?"

Quite nicely, of course. Las Vegas took a significant hit in the weeks after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., as tourists feared to fly.

But the city soon bounced back to former levels of visitor volume and gambling activity. Cooper addresses this phenomenon, but his curiosity about Las Vegas soon wanders. He laments the demolition of the Desert Inn Hotel, traces the city's early history, explores public corruption in the strip-club industry, and dutifully records the sound bites of colorful Mayor Oscar Goodman. He talks to would-be stripper union organizer Andrea Hackett, Nevada ACLU director Gary Peck, and former councilman/gadfly extraordinaire Steve Miller. Cooper also describes his own gambling escapades, and tries gamely to explain why losing your money in a casino is thrilling.

Further afield, Cooper explores a dealer school, explains high-tech trends in slot machines, and bumps up against the harsh reality of his own gambling fever: the shattered lives of people addicted to video crack. Cooper ventures downtown, where he relishes the old-school atmosphere of Binion's Horseshoe and recounts the legends of its founding namesake, Benny Binion. "If Vegas is the major leagues of gambling, then Binion's is its Fenway Park," Cooper cleverly observes, regretting later in the book to report the casino's financial crisis and sudden closure (it reopened after his book went to press) (p. 157). And getting completely away from his thesis, Cooper outlines the city's homeless crisis and briefly discusses the state's underfunding of social services. It is interesting that Cooper avoids two hot Las Vegas topics that seem to fit well with his and *The Nation's* progressive interests: the rise of the powerful Culinary Union and the Latino immigrant explosion (both tackled by Rothman).

The Last Honest Place in America is all over the place, like an anxious fly zip-ping here and there and never landing anyplace for long. That's a weakness, but it also makes for a breezy read that rarely gets bogged down in minutiae. That said, Cooper's attention is focused on Las Vegas's resort corridor. He rarely ventures beyond it, and when he does, his instincts sometimes fail him. He explores titillating subjects such as strip-club corruption and homelessness rather than examining the bigger issues and trends in Las Vegas, such as growth, water, and the spread of gambling. His study of the giant Summerlin planned community, which he condemns as a banal counterpoint to the rich textures of The Strip, takes up all of a page. Cooper is a clear-eyed reporter, but he, like so many other out-of-town observers, isn't much interested in the lives beyond the neon.

Oscar Goodman—mob lawyer, Las Vegas mayor, quote machine—is an ideal subject for a biography. John L. Smith, veteran chronicler of all things Las Vegas and author of two previous biographies about Las Vegas characters (casino mavericks Steve Wynn and Bob Stupak), is an ideal person to write it. The result, *Of Rats and Men: Oscar Goodman's Life from Mob Mouthpiece to Mayor of Las Vegas*, does justice to the combination. Goodman provides a colorful running commentary on his action-packed career, while Smith weaves it together into a readable and engrossing narrative.

But while *Of Rats and Men* is largely set in Las Vegas and profiles a Las Vegas legend, it is not intended to provide great insight into the city itself. Large sections of the book focus on the inner workings of Goodman's numerous criminal court cases. *Of Rats and Men* should be required reading for law school students and practicing lawyers, not so much for textbook instruction but to reinforce the notion that their primary career goal should be to defend the Bill of Rights, not rake in big bucks. If they make a bundle along the way, as Goodman did, fine, but first things first.

Goodman is best known today as the popular mayor of Las Vegas, tireless advocate of downtown redevelopment, and world spokesman for the city. But the limelight is nothing new for the Philadelphia-born-and-reared lawyer who, almost from the start of his legal career in 1964, was drawn to high-profile cases. After eighteen months working in the Clark County district attorney's office, Goodman went into private practice, and it didn't take long for him to make a name for himself as a criminal defense attorney. After he happened to win two relatively minor mob-related cases, his reputation ballooned with connected guys in trouble with the law.

It wasn't long before Goodman was representing the biggest names in organized crime, from Meyer Lansky and Jimmy Chagra to Frank "Lefty" Rosenthal and Tony Spilotro, and, through courtroom savvy, government incompetence, and a little luck, keeping these guys out of prison. Smith provides blow-by-blow accounts of Goodman's biggest mob cases from the 1970s and 1980s, sometimes giving more information than the average reader could ever want. Colorful mobster names are mentioned on almost every page, most of them irrelevant to the biography's central thread. But it's a little unfair to fault Smith for being thorough. Plus, Smith strives to break up this litany of courtroom narratives with smile-inducing snippets of description. For example, he writes: "For a short guy, Tony Spilotro was never good at keeping his head down" (p. 58). Of Frank Rosenthal, Smith relates: "Rosenthal's father was a produce wholesaler, but young Frank wasn't interested in the price of Red Delicious apples" (p. 55).

As Goodman became more intertwined with his mob clients, he had to work harder to maintain his independence—especially in the eyes of government prosecutors, many of whom came to believe he was actually part of the mob, not merely its lawyer. Goodman himself complicated matters by befriending some of his mobster clients, enjoying their company beyond the courthouse. Smith does not shy away from the government's suspicions about Goodman, but he ultimately finds no hard evidence suggesting that Goodman was anything other than a well-paid legal representative.

Goodman was a pervasive presence in the Las Vegas press in the late '70s and '80s. "Goodman's face and name made local newsprint day after day for weeks on end" during the Spilotro case, Smith writes (p. 94). That's even more ink than the outspoken mayor gets today. Goodman coveted the spotlight, of

course, but he had a purpose: not only to defend his clients but to influence public opinion about the questionable tactics that FBI agents and government prosecutors employed to nab his clients. *Of Rats and Men* is timely in that sense, because overbearing government tactics are at the heart of the USA PATRIOT Act, the law passed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks that gives the government a vast array of powers not outlined in the Constitution.

The pay-off for slogging through the Goodman casebook is an enhanced appreciation for the key role of the defense attorney in the American justice system. Time after time, Goodman exposed wrongdoing by the government. Where other lawyers would have pulled their punches and urged their clients to take their punishment, Goodman gave his clients their money's worth, fighting relentlessly for their rights. "I try my case based on trying the government," Goodman says. "If they can show that they got my man without breaking the law, then they're entitled to him. And in every case they broke the law. I don't think I've had one case where the government didn't break the law" (p. 300).

In the late '80s and '90s, the mob began to lose the war with the feds. The feds got smarter, it seems, and the mob got dumber, especially as it became more involved with drugs. For Goodman, the good fight was waning, and he started fishing around for a new challenge. That eventually materialized in the form of a run for mayor of Las Vegas. It seems hard to believe today, what with Goodman being the valley's most popular politician, but when he announced that he was going to run in 1999, local "experts" considered him a big underdog. But Goodman's charisma and populist rhetoric connected with city voters and he won easily.

Smith devotes the last seventy pages of the book to Goodman's mayoral candidacy and first term in office, providing an adequate overview of the period. But while this section naturally has attracted considerable local interest, it is not the reason the book was written. After all, it's difficult at this point to draw many interesting conclusions about Goodman's stint in municipal politics. Whether he succeeds in reviving downtown Las Vegas—his primary goal—remains to be seen. Downtown redevelopment is an arduous process that takes decades, so Goodman's efforts aren't likely to bear fruit until after he's left office. Perhaps his tenure in the mayor's office will be fodder for a different book down the road.

What we do know is the profound impact that Goodman had during his thirty-five years as a defense lawyer. One can despise Goodman's notorious clients, but *Of Rats and Men* makes the compelling case that Goodman was just doing a job—a crucial job that too often is poorly handled in the revered yet misunderstood American justice system.

A hundred books have been written about The Strip over the past fifty years, but it wasn't until 2003 that an author provided a clear and convincing big-

picture explanation for why this barren scrap of roadway became a universally known and desired destination. The writer is David Schwartz, and the book is *Suburban Xanadu: The Casino Resort on the Las Vegas Strip and Beyond*.

Schwartz explains that Strip casinos were America's postwar solution to the prevalence of illegal gambling dens. Allowing gambling to occur in a small, distant desert outpost, far from urban centers, was "tolerable and even desirable." At mid-century, Schwartz says, illegal gambling was going on "seemingly everywhere in cities large and small," and this spurred a strong antigambling wave in the country. Reformers were particularly concerned about the emergence of slot machines in retail outlets and their ability to corrupt women and children. Law-enforcement authorities were concerned that organized-crime syndicates controlled most of the illegal gambling rackets. The solution was to crack down on the illegal gambling operations and allow an outlet for the nation's insatiable gambling passion. "The distant isolation of casinos on the Strip, which early promoters probably considered their greatest drawback, was paradoxically its salvation," Schwartz writes. "Because the 'wide-open' action of the Strip was located at a safe distance from the teeming masses of urban America, there was no great outcry over it. Few do-gooders complained about Strip casinos' impact on public morality or individual finances" (p. 31). This "containment of gambling" meant that "by default, the state of Nevada had solved the national debate over gambling policy. Gamblers would no longer contribute to urban corruption and gambling; rather, those with the means to travel to the desert could now be parted with their money in sunny, state-regulated casinos" (p. 32). What's more, this solution guaranteed that Nevada would enjoy a virtual monopoly on legal gambling for decades to come.

The rise of The Strip parallels the explosion of suburbia across the nation, Schwartz notes. Unlike the cramped downtowns of Las Vegas and Reno, The Strip, with its large parking lots, sprawling layouts and multiple amenities, felt familiar and comfortable to suburbanites. Schwartz draws parallels between the social structure of suburbia and the culture of vacationing on the Strip. Schwartz debunks the reputation of Strip resorts as "lawless underworld jungles"; he notes, "Even in its headiest boom years in the early 1950s, the Strip was as ordered an environment as the shopping malls and subdivisions that developers were building throughout the nation" (p. 88). He also contrasts the "hard-sell focus on gambling" in the downtown settings with the "soft-sell approach" on The Strip. "In Strip casino resorts, vacationers tried their luck in between jaunts to 'their' resort's yacht on Lake Mead, the swimming pool, and the dinner theater," Schwartz writes. "In their suburban setting, casino resorts offered a complete vacation experience that Reno gambling halls, no matter how astute their owners or how beneficial their payouts, could not. The soft-sell approach of casino resorts made patrons feel it was almost their responsibility to 'be a sport' and gamble a little—after all, it was the least they could do for the resort that had given them such a superlative vacation value" (p. 40).

Schwartz provides a solid history of the development of The Strip, from the first resorts in the early 1940s to the emergence of megaresorts in the 1990s. But the strength of *Suburban Xanadu* is that Schwartz cuts away the glitz, mob drama, and showgirls and puts The Strip's development in a more useful context. He concludes that, their obvious differences aside, Strip casino resorts grew much like other suburban developments across America, but they "just happened to include a casino."

While Schwartz offers a compelling new perspective, it would be the height of naïveté to suggest that the rise of The Strip in the '50s and '60s was solely a product of demographic trends and postwar development patterns. Schwartz offers a welcome alternative to previous writers obsessed with organized crime's colorful role in Strip history, but the two perspectives need not be mutually exclusive.

The Grit beneath the Glitter: Tales from the Real Las Vegas is a hefty collection of articles (as well as two photo essays) that is, as might be expected of such an ambitious endeavor, uneven. Several pieces offer perceptive analysis of Las Vegas, including the introduction by co-editors Hal Rothman and Mike Davis, Kate Haubeck's treatise on the Las Vegas sex industry, Jon Christensen's overview of the city's water issues, and Courtney Alexander's history of the Culinary Union. But other essays descend into turgid academese or fail to say anything meaningful. And none of them truly reflects the book's intriguing title.

William N. Thompson's "How I Became a Native" comes close. It is a humorous take on living in Las Vegas. Thompson, a University of Nevada, Las Vegas, professor who has become a frequently quoted pundit on casino-industry trends, relates some of his experiences upon moving to Sin City in the early '80s. For example, his daughter befriends a schoolmate whose father disappears mysteriously. It's later learned that he was killed gangland style, his body found in pieces in the desert. When Thompson's son goes out for Little League, the professor discovers that the league is headed by Bobby Spilotro, brother of Tony Spilotro, head of street rackets in Las Vegas for the Chicago Mafia. "Tony the Ant" was later murdered, along with another brother, and buried in an Indiana cornfield.

Less entertaining is Shannon McMackin's reminiscence, "I Didn't Know Anybody Lived There," in which she waxes nostalgic about growing up in a much smaller Las Vegas. She writes: "It depresses me to be reminded that the desert where I collected lava rocks as a kid has since sprouted into four exclusive golf courses; that the mesa where coyotes howled is now condos; or that corporate kings stuffed dynamite into the Dunes Hotel and Casino, destroying the site of my senior prom" (p. 195). McMackin describes the horror of her family moving farther and farther from the city, only to see development march to their doorstep. "It seemed as though my family's strategic moves to 'nowhere' always found us somewhere in the middle of development," she writes (p. 197).

McMackin describes a childhood "living off the land," relishing the desert and "our unencumbered 360-degree view of the mountains." "Now that landscape has been obliterated, and I feel claustrophobic," she writes. "There is no room to breath." (p. 201). Yet McMackin apparently lived something of a dual life. Her father booked lounge acts on The Strip, and the kids often found themselves in the casinos, eating Sunday brunch buffets, playing video games in the arcades, and watching trapeze acts at Circus Circus. She fondly remembers these urban experiences as well. Yet she has nothing good to say about modern Las Vegas, noting that it does no good anymore to give a tip for a good seat in a showroom, where assigned seats are now the rule. "When did this silliness start?" she asks, lamenting that the "entire monetary structure in Vegas was in shambles" (p. 206).

While McMackin's complaints about the "development of the desert and the corporate takeover" of Las Vegas seem to be heartfelt, they come off as whiny and simplistic. What, exactly, did she expect to happen over a thirty-year period? Long before she was born, Las Vegas thrived on growth and development, and it's never been a town that stood in the way of capitalist enterprise. This was just as true when she was a kid as it is today. What's more, her idyllic childhood on the edge of the city conveniently glosses over the seedier aspects of the pre-corporate Las Vegas, when that same desert was populated with the scattered remains of men and women who made the mistake of crossing the town's ubiquitous gangsters.

Las Vegas's centennial promises to be a huge affair, and several new books about the city are expected to be published to capitalize on the celebration. If the authors manage to push past the public spectacle and explore new avenues of inquiry, they will find that Las Vegas offers a lot more to write about than meets the eye.

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