

# Sin City

An analysis on the outstanding growth and success of Las Vegas

## Abstract:

In this paper, I analyze the sequence of events that made Las Vegas the Entertainment Capital of the world, and one of the top tourist destinations of the world. Further, I analyze the contribution of several influential people in the growth of Las Vegas. Then I analyze how the city managed to survive in the harsh desert environment, with the lack of resources, despite the rapid growth of population. The I analyze how Casinos in Las Vegas make sure they stay in business by using several tactics to make gamblers spend money and then put forward the theory of Operant Conditioning as an explanation to why people gamble.

## An Introduction:

Las Vegas is a city well known for its gambling, shopping, entertainment, and night life. Today, Vegas is one of the top tourist destinations in the US and claims itself to be 'The Entertainment Capital of the World' <sup>1</sup>. A significant part of the success of Las Vegas is to be attributed to the Mafia that started the gambling culture in the city.

The following section is a history of Las Vegas, exploring how the events unfolded to make Las Vegas the Entertainment Capital of the World.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Entertainment\\_Capital\\_of\\_the\\_World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Entertainment_Capital_of_the_World)

## The history of Las Vegas

The prehistoric landscape of Las Vegas Valley, and most of Southern Nevada was a marsh with water and abundant vegetation, but as time passed, the river that created the marsh went underground and the marsh receded. The valley once covered in marsh vegetation slowly evolved into parched and arid landscape. But the water trapped underground sporadically surfaced to create vegetative life. The water flowed into what is now known as the Colorado river, and created an oasis in the desert.<sup>2 3</sup>

The existence of the oasis was hidden for centuries till it was discovered by a young scout – Rafael Rivera

### The discovery of the oasis:

In 1829, a 60-man caravan, led by a Mexican trader Antonio Armijio, travelling along the Spanish Trail to Los Angeles veered of the usual route. While the caravan was camped about 160 kilometers northeast of present day Vegas, a scouting party was sent searching for water. Rafael Rivera, a young scout, left the main party in search of a shortcut<sup>4</sup>. He headed for the Colorado

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Las\\_Vegas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Las_Vegas)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.lvol.com/lvolog/hist/lvhist.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://lasvegas.sdsu.edu>

river, and followed a tributary of the river, and stumbled upon what is now known as the Las Vegas Valley.

After two weeks, he rejoined the group and led them to the valley. The party named it 'Vegas', meaning Meadows in Spanish. The discovery of the oasis shortened the path to Los Angeles and became an important stopping point for travelers on the 'Spanish Trail'. The travelers named the area 'Las Vegas' – meaning 'The Meadows'.

In 1855, a group of Mormon (a religion) missionaries arrived at the area, and tried to settle there, but the harsh climate and insect infections spoiled their plantations and were forced abandon the area. Mineral ores were discovered but were not profitable till World War 1 (1914 – 1918), as a result, the valley was sparsely populated and hardly explored until the early 1900s. In fact, the 1900 consensus counts only 30 people as the residents of Las Vegas.<sup>5</sup>

In 1866, the Las Vegas Valley, which was till then part of Arizona territory, joined the state of Nevada.

### The Railroad Development:

The previous subsection is about the discovery of Las Vegas, but the valley remained relatively dormant, and unknown till early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The change began in 1890, when William A. Clark, senator of Montana, mining magnate, and an investor of a significant portion in the company building railroad from Los Angeles to Salt Lake City, recognized that Las Vegas would be an ideal stop point on the railroad. The springs of Vegas

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Las-Vegas-Nevada/History#ref258380>

would provide a reliable water source along the route, and the mineral ores discovered near Vegas could be mined and transported via the railroad.

Clark purchased a large area of land in the valley and with the help of the then Utah's Senator, and mining magnate Thomas Kearns to ensure that the line is built through Utah to Las Vegas.

The actual development of the railroad began in the summer of 1904, and the Las Vegas town that only had tents till then, finally started seeing the building of some stores, saloons and hotels. The railroad completed, and the town of Las Vegas was officially founded on May 15, 1905.

William Clark auctioned off the land he bought in large number of lots to American farmers, who quickly started agriculture in the area through wells and arid irrigation. Agriculture prevailed in that area for the next 20 years. In gratitude of his contributions, the farmers named the area Clark County.

### Nevada Outlaws Gambling

Clark subsequently built another railroad that intersected in Vegas, and with the inflow of money from both the railroads, the town of Vegas slowly began to grow. The city began to grow slowly at first, except at one area which witnessed rapid development. The areas development stemmed from gambling and prostitution -which was still legal in Nevada.

Then, Nevada de-legalized gambling. The first states to do so. Very strict laws against gambling were implemented in the October of 1910, and this set back the development a little.

## Development as a tourist destination

In response, the casinos continued to operate covertly. Illegally, but secretly, gambling flourished in Vegas. This made Las Vegas a favorite weekend destination for the residents of Los Angeles.

The influx of people from California came due to gambling, and the Nevada's newly relaxed Divorce laws, which required only a 6-week residency in the state of Nevada before a Divorce can be filed. This, and money from workers from the movie industry workers from Hollywood in Los Angeles fueled the growth of the city. By 1930, the population was more than 5000. The population increased by more than 160 times in just 30 years!

## Nevada Legalizes Gambling

The already impressive growth is further augmented when Nevada legalized gambling in 1931, and with the construction of Hoover dam beginning in 1930. With gambling legal, Las Vegas was the only place to legally gamble now, this lured Californians to Vegas.

The construction of the Hoover dam, across the nearby Black Canyon <sup>6</sup> was a major event that boosted the growth of Las Vegas. The Hoover dam was a very ambitious project. It was the largest dam in the World then, calculated by height, and the reservoir created by the dam, known as the Lake Mead, is the largest reservoir in the US.

The construction of the dam employed a huge number of people, employing more than 5100 workers at its peak, and brought in water and electric power. The key commodities that made Las Vegas the city it is today. The thousands of workers employed at the dam came to Las Vegas

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hoover-Dam>

at weekends for the Casinos, and the entertainment facilities. With the dam construction going on, and the casinos running, Las Vegas was largely unaffected by the Financial Depression in the 1930s.

In summary, the construction of the Hoover dam, and the legalization of gambling gave Las Vegas a huge boost in growth as a city, and as a center for gambling.

## The Word War II

Las Vegas was quickly growing as a center for gambling, and grand casinos were prevalent. But the second World War stunted World War. It later became the training ground for the nation's best pilots, and a wide range testing ground for the U.S. Airforce, due to the vast expanse of the empty desert.

These, and other military related installations brought in thousands more people. Encouraged by the large inflow of people, new Casinos and hotels sprung up, and the owners of the hotels, and casinos began to offer entertainment with the then top performers - Frank Sinatra, Tommy Dorsey, and the Andrews Sisters.<sup>7</sup> This led to the further growth of Las Vegas as a city of entertainment.

After the World War, with the development of Air Conditioning, it became easier to live in the hot desert region and many of the returning soldiers chose to settle in the Las Vegas area.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Las-Vegas-Nevada/History#ref258380>

In summary, the World War benefited Las Vegas incredibly. The population of Las Vegas grew three-fold during 1940-1950 (The World War 2 was from 1939 – 1945), and then it again doubled within a decade after that.<sup>12</sup>

the growth of Las Vegas as a resort city. But Las Vegas as a city, continued to grow, even more so because of the arrival of defense workers, and military personnel as the Hoover dam was an important asset to the US, and the US intelligence received reports that the Germans were planning to destroy the dam and reservoir.<sup>8 9 10 11</sup>

The then Nevada Senator Pat McCarran lobbied the Federal Government to establish near Las Vegas, a Magnesium processing plant, and a military airfield. Now known as the Nellis Air Force Base, it eventually grew to occupy about 3500<sup>12</sup> square kilometers and became a key military installation during the second

## The Advent of Organized Crime in Las Vegas

Tommy Hull built the Hotel-Casino El Rancho in 1941, which would later restart the development of the gambling culture in Las Vegas, stunted by the Second World War. The success of El Rancho started a new spurt in building of several Hotel-Casinos in the late 1940s. The lane in which the new buildings were setup is now known as today's The Las Vegas Strip.

El Rancho was later destroyed in fire, and most of these initial establishments later lost their name and shape due to transfer of ownership and heavy renovations. The most celebrated of

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<sup>8</sup> <http://allthatsinteresting.com/h Hoover-dam-attack-plot>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.usbr.gov/lc/phoenix/AZ100/1940/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.usbr.gov/lc/phoenix/AZ100/1940/topstory.html>

<sup>11</sup> [https://web.mst.edu/~rogersda/h Hoover\\_dam/Rogers-HooverDam-Pt4.pdf](https://web.mst.edu/~rogersda/h Hoover_dam/Rogers-HooverDam-Pt4.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Las-Vegas-Nevada/History#ref258380>



these early resorts as 'The Flamingo', built by mobster Bugsy Siegel, a member of the Meyer Lansky Criminal Organization <sup>13</sup>.

The huge amount of profits from legalized gambling and prostitution attracted Mafia to Las Vegas. Las Vegas remained largely Mafia-free until then. In 1945, Benzamin 'Bugsy' Siegel <sup>14</sup>, one of the most prominent criminals, started building the city's first major Hotel and Casino complex – The Flamingo.

In 1947, Siegel was murdered, and the Lansky immediately took over The Flamingo. The new venture's enormous success encouraged more establishments, and soon, several new Casinos were established along what is now known as 'The Strip'. Most remarkable of them are, the Desert Inn, the Thunderbird, the Sands, the Sahara, the Riviera, the Royal Nevada, and the Dunes. Of these the Desert Inn is important for what becomes apparent in a little while.

### The Fall of Organized Crime

Development of casinos accelerated during the 1950s, and Mafia thrived for a short while on the revenues earned from the establishments. One of the reasons for Las Vegas being a main center for Mafia is, the Fidel Castor's revolution of Cuba. Before that, Cuba was Americas destination for gambling, and the corrupt Baptist Government worked with gangsters. But Fidel Castro's arrival changed all that, and Vegas was the only alternative for legal gambling.<sup>15</sup>

As more and more Mafia organizations were building resorts, concerns grew about corruption in the gaming industry, and by the ending of 1950, Mafia was severely restricted by the newly

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<sup>13</sup> <https://the-mafia.weebly.com/mafia-in-las-vegas.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bugsy-Siegel>

<sup>15</sup> <https://the-mafia.weebly.com/mafia-in-las-vegas.html>

established Nevada Gaming Commission. The Commission was responsible of licensing and regulating gambling operations, and with banned people with criminal record from casinos. The Commission succeeded in separating Casinos and crime organizations with a vigorous enforcement of law, and soon, legalized corporations took over the Casinos.

### The growth of the Mafia Free Vegas

By now, Las Vegas has already established itself as a go to destination for entertainment. Till now, the growth of Vegas was overlooked by the Mafia, but with the eradication of Mafia, the contribution to the city's development started to come through private corporations and individuals.

The Desert Inn opened by Wilbur Clark was followed by a huge spurt of new, and more expensive, and more grander casinos. In 1966, Howard Hughes, a very wealthy businessman, and movie maker, moved into Las Vegas, and settled in The Desert Inn. He kept a suite there throughout the 1950s and lived there permanently during 1966 to 1970. He refused to evict the suite and chose to buy the whole hotel instead. Along with The Desert Inn, he bought several other hotels, real estate, and media outlets and acquired enormous wealth from them.<sup>16 17 18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Howard-Hughes>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Las-Vegas-Nevada/History>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/las-vegas>

Spending estimated 300 million dollars, he took control of many hotels, especially the venues connected to crime and quickly became one of the most powerful individuals in Las Vegas. His move both removed freed Vegas from the control of Mafia and changed the image of Las Vegas from a Mafia controlled city to a more refined Cosmopolitan City.<sup>19</sup>

### The Nevada Nuclear test site

Las Vegas gained further popularity due to Nuclear tests conducted by the Federal Government during 1950-1990 at the Nevada Test Site, about 100 km from Las Vegas. A total of 928 nuclear explosive tests were conducted at the site.<sup>20</sup> Initially, above-ground testing took place, but the public protested open-air testing, and Howard Hughes would drive visitors away from the city. It also became apparent in later years that exposure to nuclear fallout from those tests was yielding is resulting in a large number of radiation-related cancers.<sup>21</sup> With that, the Nevada test site resorted to underground tests.

### The growth of the modern Las Vegas

The city which started as an oasis in a desert, is now at the path to becoming the current day Vegas. Popular entertainers such as Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., Wayne Newton, and Elvis Presley moved in to Las Vegas, and brought more publicity to the city. The city had a steady growth till 1980. During the economic recession at late 1970, an Entrepreneur Steve Wynn, already the owner of The Golden Nugget Casino since 1970, used the opportunity to buy old

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<sup>19</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Las\\_Vegas#Howard\\_Hughes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Las_Vegas#Howard_Hughes)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nevada-Test-Site>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Las-Vegas-Nevada/History#ref912789>

casinos, renovate them, and build new ones. Of the new ones, the most remarkable is The Mirage, opened in 1989.

During the early 1990s, till late 2000s, Las Vegas saw an explosive growth. The population grew due to immigration, and by 2000, Las Vegas was the largest city founded in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. By 2006, Las Vegas was the 28<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States.<sup>22</sup>

This rapid growth resulted in rapid development of commercial and residential areas throughout the Valley. Development of single family homes across the valley resulted in the creation of the areas Henderson, North Las Vegas, Centennial Hills, and Summerlin. This rapid growth continued till the recession in late 2000s.<sup>23</sup>

## Summary of the History

- The oasis was discovered by a scouting party in 1829. Then it remained largely unknown till early 1900s.
- The Senator of Montana, William A. Clark brought the railroad to Las Vegas, from then, the city slowly started to grow,
- Clark sold away auctioned away his land to farmers and kick-started agriculture in Las Vegas. Agriculture was the major industry for the next two decades.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20050727081949/http://www.lasvegasnevada.gov/FactsStatistics/history.htm>

<sup>23</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Las\\_Vegas#1970-1988:\\_Explosive\\_growth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Las_Vegas#1970-1988:_Explosive_growth)

- Gambling caused rapid development of a part of the city. The state of Nevada outlawed gambling in 1910, but casinos and gambling establishments were secretly run till 1931, when Nevada legalized gambling.
- With the legalization of gambling, gamblers from other states had only Vegas to go for gambling. The Hoover dam brought in thousands of workers, and with them they brought the wild-west gambling and easy-going culture to Vegas.
- The second world war brought in more population to Vegas in the form of Military establishments. The Hoover dam provided electricity and water, and the newly established Magnesium processing plant, and Nellis Air Force Base brought popularity, and population to Las Vegas.
- Development of Air Conditioning made it easy to live in the desert weather, bringing a huge increase in the population of Vegas.
- Then the Mafia arrived, and started many Casinos, and started the Casino culture.
- Soon, Mafia was removed from Vegas, and the Casinos were seized and handed over to corporations.
- Howard Hughes brought many hotels, and drove Mafia out of them, thus changing the image of Las Vegas from a Mafia ruled city to a refined cosmopolitan city, and a family entertainment destination.
- The Nevada nuclear tests made Las Vegas more popular during 1950-1990.
- From 1960s, Las Vegas witnessed an explosive growth and the city was renovated by Steve Wynn.

- Population growth accelerated after 1990s due to immigration, and by 2000, Las Vegas was the largest city founded in the 20th Century.

### The main reasons for the success of Las Vegas

The main factor that led to the success of Las Vegas is, not gambling, but the accepting and nonjudgmental nature of Vegas. One can spend all day and night doing pretty much anything in Las Vegas – as long as it doesn't directly harm anyone – without the fear of being judged and stopped. Anyone can spend an entire day gambling, drinking, eating, or just roam around the city at any time without being anyone batting an eyelid. This easy going, fun loving nature of Las Vegas is what attracted people to Las Vegas, and the incidents we discussed in the previous section all happened to fit in perfectly and led to the popularity of Las Vegas.

This is symbolized by the tagline of Las Vegas – 'What Happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas'. The tag line communicates to visitors that visitor can do anything they want to and indicates freedom.

### How does Las Vegas sustain itself?

The city's economy is dependent on tourism – so Las Vegas has to continuously find something new for the visitors so that they keep coming. And the city also should find a way to keep criminal activity down, while giving its civilian visitors freedom. And Las Vegas should find resources to keep it's visitors fed and occupied. This is especially a problem because, the city is in the middle of a desert with low resources.

## How does Las Vegas keep crime low?

Even though the Mafia is virtually inexistent in Las Vegas now, the city's hedonistic tendencies can cause problems. The Adrenaline rush caused by the party mood of Vegas, the casinos, Alcohol, and Marijuana (Nevada <sup>24</sup> recently legalized Marijuana for recreational purposes) influence people to act in ways that could harm others. Apart from this, there is crime that occurs for other reasons. For example, the incident where a gunman opened fire on The Las Vegas Strip on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017 <sup>25</sup> at a concert. Crime is an inevitable part of the society.

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department – LVMPD – published an article about Crime Prevention via various methods – for example, training the house owners about which patterns in people to look out for, when renting out their houses, and crime prevention through environmental design – through surveillance, access control, and proper lighting of the city streets so that crimes can be responded to quickly by the nearby public. The article also includes common self defense methods, and armed robbery prevention. <sup>26</sup>

The State of Nevada also created stricter laws against criminal activity hoping to keep the criminal activity low – For example, The Mandatory Minimum Sentence Law in Nevada, <sup>27</sup> which mandates that prison inmates get at serving time of at least 24 months (2 years).

Some other of the measures taken are

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<sup>24</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannabis\\_in\\_Nevada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannabis_in_Nevada)

<sup>25</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017\\_Las\\_Vegas\\_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Las_Vegas_shooting)

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.lvmpd.com/en-us/Documents/2013\\_CFMH\\_CompleteManual.pdf](https://www.lvmpd.com/en-us/Documents/2013_CFMH_CompleteManual.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.legalchip.com/Las-Vegas-Criminal-Defense-Blog/2017/October/New-Mandatory-Minimum-Sentence-Law-in-Nevada.aspx>

- Sobriety check points on Las Vegas Highways <sup>28</sup> to prevent crime from people under the influence of Alcohol, Marijuana and other similar drugs.
- Suspension of Licenses when the driver is under the influence of Alcohol or drugs, or has too many traffic related crimes, or has failed to appear at court for criminal proceedings. If a driver is found driving with a suspended license, he earns a conviction record, up to six months of jail time, and a penalty of up to 1000 dollars. <sup>29</sup>
- Action against domestic abuse depending on the severity of the case, and the previous record of the convicted <sup>30</sup>
- And similar strict laws against Kidnapping, misdemeanor, and other crimes.

Even without the intervention of the Police department, the Hotels, Casinos, and Pubs take strict security measure, and check the visitor before admitting them inside their establishments, because any criminal incident inside the said establishment can result in the tarnishing of the image of resort and can drop them out of business. For this reason, any guests who are observed to be involved in drug usage or engaging in violence will be escorted out of the resort, and most of the times, also reported to the police and placed under investigation. <sup>31</sup>

With the measures taken by the residents and the law enforcement organizations of Las Vegas, the city is free of organized crime, and considerably reduced the crime rates.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.legalchip.com/Las-Vegas-Criminal-Defense-Blog/2015/February/Sobriety-Checkpoints-in-Las-Vegas.aspx>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.legalchip.com/Las-Vegas-Criminal-Defense-Blog/2015/January/Dangers-of-Driving-On-a-Suspended-License.aspx>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.legalchip.com/Criminal-Defense/Domestic-Violence/Physical-Abuse.aspx>

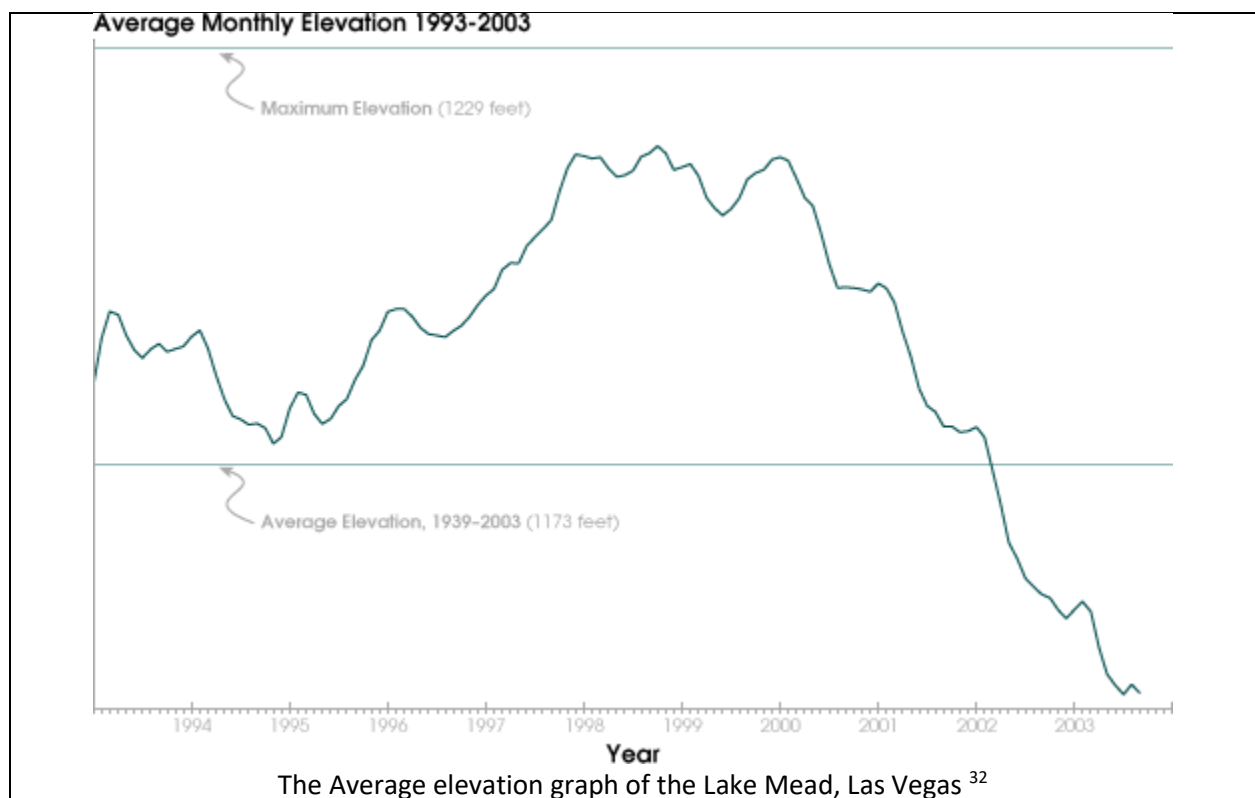
<sup>31</sup> <https://www.legalchip.com/Las-Vegas-Criminal-Defense-Blog/2014/May/The-Dangers-Of-Casino-Pool-Parties.aspx>



How does Las Vegas conserve water?

Excessive pumping has resulted in dropping of the water table of Las Vegas valley. Even the water level of lake mead has dropped and the influx of visitors to Las Vegas continues to increase.

Here is a graph of the average water height of the Lake Mead over the years, taken from NASAs Earth Observatory Website.<sup>32</sup>



More data about the Elevation of Lake Mead, Colorado River here: [https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/lakemead\\_line.pdf](https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/lakemead_line.pdf). The data here comprises of date from 1935 – 2015. The drop in the water table below than its recorded average, is a major

<sup>32</sup> <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Features/LakeMead/>

concern to the city of Las Vegas that depends heavily on the Lake Mead reservoir for its water supply.

To save it self from perishing, the City of Las Vegas has gotten serious about water conservation in the past 15-18 years.

The City of Vegas has a network of underground channels about 3200 kilometers in length, and spanning across the City's Strip, and residential area. The water discharged from Casinos, Hotels, pubs, and other resorts, and the Homes in the residential area is channeled through these to treatment facilities where the water is filtered, treated to remove harmful compounds, disinfected with Ultraviolet light, and then pumped back into the Lake Mead, where it can be drawn back again. The system is so efficient that, Bronson Mack, the authority who oversees water resources and operations in at Southern Nevada Water Authority said "If Vegas had only indoor water use, we'd have a limitless supply of water"<sup>33</sup>.

The hot and dry desert weather increases the need of water. In Las Vegas, an average person uses about 830 Liters per day. This is higher usage than most other places in the United States. Even places that are naturally abundant with more water than Las Vegas, say Seattle, use less than half of that amount. People in San Francisco use about 175 liters of water a day on average. As of 2015.

A city that supports 2.1 million people (as of 2015) in the middle of a desert and has this high per-capita usage of water per day has to take these serious measures.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.outsideonline.com/2016686/water-conservation-brought-you-las-vegas>

The city now recognizes water as a scarce resource and employs even more aggressive measures for water conservation. For example, Las Vegas has banned watering when the temperature is high, because most of the water would evaporate due to the high temperature, and would be not very effective for the intended cause.

Some more of the conservation measures implemented are: <sup>34</sup>

- Las Vegas has banned growth of grass on Backyards. It's illegal to have more than half of the backyard covered in grass, and new houses are not allowed to have grass on their front yards.
- During summer, watering lawns between 11 AM to 7 PM is prohibited, as most of the water is evaporated before it sinks into the ground.
- Water technicians go regularly in rounds of city, searching for water wastage, and violations of the Water Laws, and fine an amount of around \$80, as of 2015. The Water Cops, as they are called, have investigated 830 water violations in a single year.
- Since 1999, the State pays people who remove turf grass from their lawns. As of 2015, the rate was 1.5\$ per square foot of grass, and the city has paid around 3 million dollars to home owners.
- Golf courses are incentivized to use desert type grass, and the courses that use more than 6.3 feet-acre of water per acre per year are heavily penalized.<sup>35</sup>

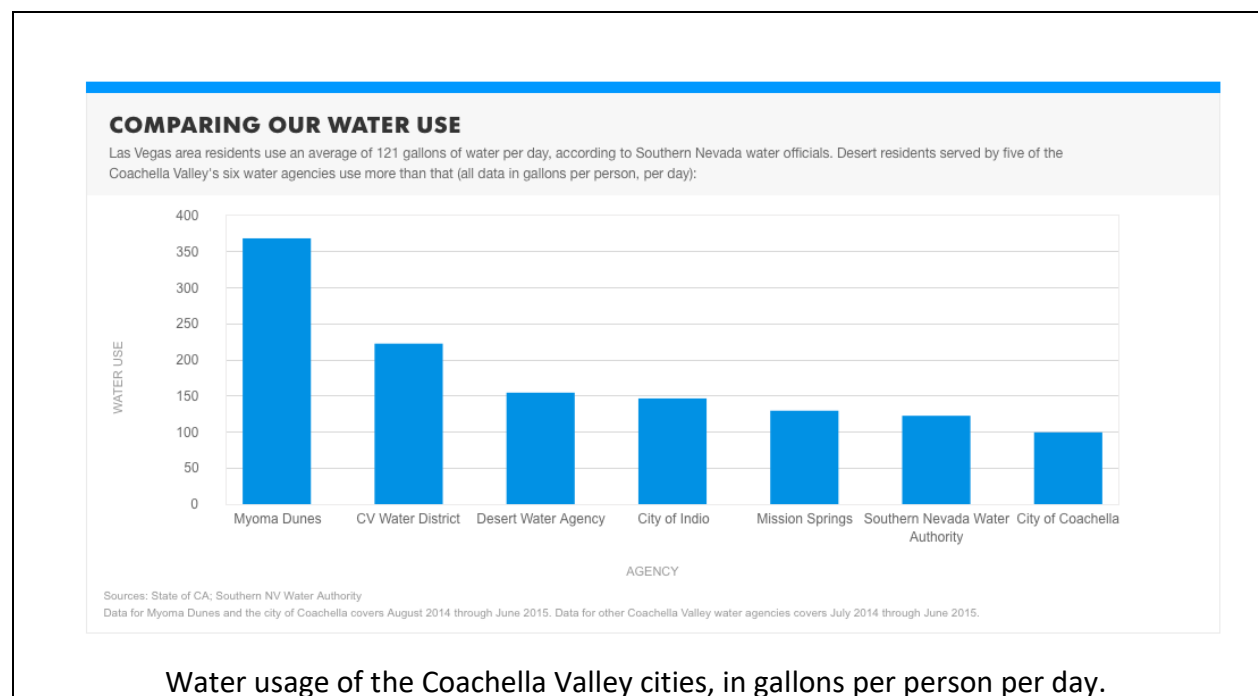
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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.outsideonline.com/2016686/water-conservation-brought-you-las-vegas>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/environment/2015/08/27/learning-sin-city-las-vegas-saves-much-water/32471441/>

The efforts taken by the city of Las Vegas are paying off. The city is allocated only 2 percent of the water from the Lake Mead of the Hoover dam. This was designed in the early 1900s when Las Vegas was a small town. But even now, 90% of the city's water is sourced from the Hoover dam, and the city has learned to use water efficiently to support its fast growing population with just that much water.

Today, the city uses less water than it did 14 years ago per capita, and uses less water than five of the six other Coachella Valley cities. Here is a graph for comparison.<sup>36</sup>



Suggested reading: [Learning from the Sin City](#), [Water Conservation - Brought to You by Las Vegas](#), and ['What Nevada has done to conserve water may serve as example for California'](#)

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/environment/2015/08/27/learning-sin-city-las-vegas-saves-much-water/32471441/>

## How Casinos stay in business

Casinos being a major part of economy in Vegas, their survival is key to the survival of Vegas.

The Casinos in Vegas employ several tricks to make sure customers spend more money than they intended to.<sup>37 38</sup>

- They offer free drinks. Alcohol has been shown to decrease inhibition and cognitive abilities.<sup>39 40 41</sup>With decreased inhibition and rational thought, gamblers end up spending more money.
- Most casinos use indoor lighting and lack windows or clocks. This is so that the players cannot keep track of how much time they spent in the casinos.
- Gamification: Some casinos are designed with levels. The more you play the higher you move up the levels. The higher levels have higher benefits, so players end up playing. The competition between players also leads to making irrational decisions.
- Rewards and Bonuses: Casinos offer free rooms, bonus rounds, and sometimes chances to meet celebrities to encourage gamblers to play at their casinos.

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<sup>37</sup> <https://medium.com/thrive-global/how-casinos-trick-you-into-believing-youre-thriving-cbe3d036901a>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.gamblingsitesonline.org/casino/articles/tricks-casinos-use/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2999764/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.michaelshouse.com/alcohol-abuse/lowered-inhibitions-and-alcohol-abuse/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/alcalc/article/40/5/373/188544>

- Abstraction of money: This is a proven tactic used at several places. Casinos abstract the money by making players purchase tokens instead of using cash. This abstraction has been shown to make users spend more money as tokens, than they would have if it were spent as coins. This is used even in Computer Games to make people spend more money, and sometimes, one more layer of abstraction is used to hide how much money the players are actually spending.<sup>42</sup>
- The token method is also used to make sure that you cannot use the money in another casinos and end up spending all the money you converted into tokens because, it would be useless outside the casino.
- Other tactics like near misses, are also used to provoke you into playing more.

Skinner's theory of Operational Conditioning can be used to explain why people spend at all in gambling.<sup>43 44</sup>

The theory is as follows. Put a rat in a box and arrange a lever so that pressing the lever delivers a food pellet to the rat. Now if the lever always delivers a food pellet when every time it's pressed, the rat will learn to press the lever only when it's hungry. If the lever never delivers, the rat stops pressing it after some time. But if the lever randomly delivers the pellet, the rat will press the lever all the time, even when it's not hungry.

The probability of that is kept at a sweet point in casinos so that the user doesn't get bored, and the casino still continues to make money.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.gamblingsitesonline.org/casino/articles/tricks-casinos-use/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.psychestudy.com/behavioral/learning-memory/operant-conditioning/skinner>

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## Overview of the paper:

We explored how the small Oasis grew to be the largest city in the US created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And saw the what events made this possible, and the outcomes that made Vegas 'The Entertainment Capital of the World', and one of the Top tourist destinations of the world.

We saw how major events, like the World Wars, and the construction of the Hoover dam, the arrival of Magnesium treatment plant, and Military bases benefited Las Vegas. We saw how Nevada de-legalization, and the legalization of gambling when it's illegal in other states caused Las Vegas to become the center of gambling.

We saw how the Mafia established and controlled several venues of Las Vegas. We then saw how private individual and corporations took over and changed the image of Vegas from a Mafia town to a refined metropolitan. We saw the contributions of private individuals like William Clark, Bugsy Siegel, Howard Hughes, and others in the growth of Las Vegas into the current metropolitan.

We then saw how the City adjusted to the rapid growth in fame, and popularity, and adjusted to support its huge, and fast-growing population. We then saw how the city kept crime rates low with law enforcement and how it used aggressive water conservation tactics to conserve water and support such a huge population in the middle of a desert.

After that, we discussed how Casinos in Las Vegas make sure that people spend large amounts of money there, and suggested a theory to explain why people spend money in Casinos at all.

## Conclusion

A series of fortunate events made Las Vegas popular, and known wide for gambling. There are some influential people who played a major role in the development of Las Vegas. The city was started by Mafia, but is free of organized crime now, thanks to strict law enforcement. The city was benefited from the World Wars, the building of the Hoover Dam, the Nevada Nuclear Test site, the Magnesium treatment plant, and the Military Air Force base, the laws of the Nevada State. To keep up with the growth, the city in the desert had to figure out to control crime, and to conserve its water supply. The casinos in the city developed several methods to ensure their survival and profit. Las Vegas is the largest city created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and still exhibits steady growth. With proper measures to ensure survival, and control of growth, The City of Las Vegas will survive and continue to flourish in the foreseeable future.

## Suggested readings and Reference:

The History of Las Vegas:

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20050727081949/http://www.lasvegasnevada.gov/FactsStatistics/history.htm>

The water conservation in Las Vegas

- [Learning from the Sin City](#)
- [Water Conservation - Brought to You by Las Vegas](#)
- [‘What Nevada has done to conserve water may serve as example for California’](#)

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Paper submitted by

Aravind Reddy V, IMT 2015 524, for The City course at IITB. All the material that was helpful for writing this paper was cited as foot notes, to the best of my knowledge.

Thank you.

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