

Book Review

Resorting to Casinos: The Mississippi Gambling Industry

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What happens when a hot button industry and a struggling state embrace? In the case of gaming and Mississippi the road to romance is still somewhat rocky, according to this book—a compendium of chapters from varied authors.

Resorting to Casinos traces the impact of casino gaming in Mississippi, a land left behind. For decades Mississippi was far below most other states in education, employment, economics and social advancement. Along came legalized gambling seen by some as panacea by others as profane. Legislators loved the tax benefits; religious zealots threatened to bring gaming down even after the investment of billions by casino corporations.

This book breaks new ground in a couple ways: a) by examining gaming through the eyes of historians and political scientists, and b) by exploring gaming impacts on subunits of the state and small populations. Municipal and county impacts are explored. School districts, such as the city of Biloxi relate gaming revenue to per-pupil expenditures. At the family level the pros and cons of shift work are detailed in a section on worker rotation in a round-the-clock industry transplanted to a state not accustomed to it.

And poor Tunica. The city of Tunica gets its own chapter as the poster child for poverty, unemployment, sad race relations, and a large black population with virtually no political power. Things are looking up, however. After gaming was legalized, Tunica's unemployment dropped somewhat, per capita income rose slightly and poverty declined a little.

Crime gets its due. The evidence seems mixed whether crime increases or decreases when casinos come in. How to measure gambling-related crime becomes an argument in itself. Shall we consider only police reports that may not show crimes handled by casino security? Can increased domestic violence be traced to paychecks left in the slot machines?

For future trends, the book predictably mentions tax rate changes and possible competition from Memphis, Tennessee, and Arkansas if they adopt gaming and deprive Mississippi of players from those areas. However, the big "if" was raised not by economics but by mother nature. Hurricane Katrina (August 2005) damaged or destroyed a good part of the Gulf Coast casinos and the book's "Afterword", written post-Katrina, offers a few educated guesses about what comes next.

Gaming researchers will snap up this book for its well documented articles peppered with tables, growth percentages, and dollar figures for taxes and revenue. Mississippians get important history lessons to guide their steps as they rebuild after the disaster.