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# The Construction of Spatial Imaginaries: Luxury, Spectacle, Cosmopolitanism, and the Formation of the Casino-Resort

*Robert Miller*

**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines Monte Carlo in the late-nineteenth century and Las Vegas in the mid-twentieth century, and explores how the cities forged specific identities centered upon their casino-resort industries. Civic planners, entrepreneurs, and tourists contributed to the formation of a spatial imaginary (the conception of a place, laden with symbols and infused with meaning designed to evoke certain feelings or experiences, which is also mediated and re-mediated through the imagination) in these gambling centers. Casino-resorts came to dominate the economies of these cities and casino-concessionaires, business bureaus, and elites consistently emphasized the luxuriousness, spectacle, and cosmopolitanism of their casino-resort towns. This paper argues that the constant emphasis on luxury, spectacle, and cosmopolitanism allowed these casino-resort towns to appeal to a wide-ranging clientele and to remain commercially viable over time. This comparative study also briefly examines how other tourist-resort centers, from Dubai to Rio de Janeiro and Bangkok to Macau, have sought to emulate the successful promotional model set forth by Monte Carlo and Las Vegas.

**Keywords:** Monte Carlo, Las Vegas, casino, tourism, consumption, urban history, imaginary

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"Here we must present the dream."<sup>1</sup> François Blanc's concise appraisal of his vision for Monaco's casino-resort in 1863 set the tone for redefining Monégasque space as a center for tourism, luxury, and leisure, and also presaged the construction of

Monte Carlo, a resort-town inextricably connected to lavishness, extravagance, and pleasure in the popular imagination. His plan's aim was the revival of the floundering casino-business which had been founded in the tiny European principality in 1854; however, his vision ushered in the development of the world's first all-inclusive gaming resort and has served as the underpinning philosophy of many casino-resort towns across the globe for over one hundred and fifty years. Blanc's plan, adapted and employed by many

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<sup>1</sup> Archives Monte-Carlo SBM, 1863. Exhibition presented during the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SBM in Monte Carlo, Monaco on July 5, 2013. <http://www.montecarlolegend.com/monte-carlo-sbm-celebrates-its-150th-anniversary/> accessed on November 18, 2013.

other successful gaming-resort and civic developers throughout the years, focused on fundamentally altering the public perception of space in and around the resort-towns. It involved the creation of a spatial imaginary, by which I mean the conception of a place, laden with symbols and infused with meaning designed to evoke certain feelings or experiences, which is also mediated and re-mediated through the imagination. Successful casino-resort towns, cities or special districts that contain large or numerous casino-resorts, whose economies are primarily based on gaming revenues and the surrounding tourist industries which accompany gambling institutions, and which have developed pervasive cultures of gambling, have all formed distinct spatial imaginaries to attract tourists. These spatial imaginaries have differed over space and time and as the demographics of gaming tourists have changed. Yet, luxuriousness, overwhelming spectacle, and cosmopolitanism have consistently formed crucial aspects of casino-resort towns' spatial imaginaries. While these gambling centers have devoted exorbitant amounts of money and energy to developing and promoting their spatial imaginaries, they have encouraged the remediation and re-presentation of the imaginaries by the tourists and gamblers themselves. Through the use of photography, photographic postcards, souvenirs, and more recently, social media, gaming institutions and civic planners have allowed their clientele to perpetuate and redistribute their image of luxury, spectacle, and cosmopolitanism. Furthermore, casino-resort towns have referenced and re-appropriated one another's own spatial imaginaries. These gambling centers have also re-envisioned widely recognizable

places and epochs, from the sophistication of turn-of-the-century Paris or Ancient Rome to the exoticism of Ancient Egypt, Latin American Carnivale, or the tropical isles of the West Indies. These fluid and referential projections of spatial imaginaries have allowed casino-resorts, from Monte Carlo to Las Vegas, to establish themselves as premier international tourist destinations, not only by providing their clientele with the excitement of gambling or the prospect of striking it rich, but by promising an experience of intense spectacle, extravagant luxury, and worldly sophistication.

The projection of an image or the promotion of a reputation is not a unique strategy employed by tourist centers. Indeed, most areas which derive significant revenues from tourism attempt to cultivate a public image to promote their destination. However, the resort cities of Monte Carlo and Las Vegas went beyond simply projecting an image by carefully constructing, promoting, and altering a spatial imaginary based on spectacle, luxury, and cosmopolitanism surrounding their casino-resorts. Liberal gaming laws and pervasive gambling cultures have largely contributed to these cities' wildly successful tourism industries; yet, legalized gambling is not enough to explain how these casino-resort towns established themselves as world-class tourist destinations. In the twenty-first century, casino-resorts rake in a respectable proportion of the over \$900 billion worldwide tourist industry. At various times since the mid-nineteenth century, casinos in Baden-Baden, Atlantic City, Paris, Venice, Nice, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, and many smaller tropical locales have vied for tourist dollars; yet, none of these locations were able



The Principality of Monaco in the Mid-Fifties, ca. 1855

to establish themselves as a world-class and sophisticated tourist destination because of legalized gambling. The aforementioned casino-resort towns that managed to develop and cultivate a spatial imaginary based on spectacle, luxury, and cosmopolitanism offered their clientele much more than the excitement and thrills of gambling. Through the creation of specific spatial imaginaries and representations of place, these resort towns provided experiences for their patrons that served as a practice of class, an illusory international experience, and an exhaustive opportunity for consumption – not only of material goods but of cultural and social practices largely unavailable to many patrons outside of the resort-towns.

*Villa Bellevue*, the first casino founded in Monaco in 1854 demonstrated that legalized gambling, even with the rest of Europe's increasingly restrictive gaming laws, was not enough to entice patrons to visit the principality. The original construction of *Villa Bellevue*, and the few amenities that went along with it, was rushed, underfunded, and poorly conceived. The first concessionaires focused much more on providing gambling opportunities for tourists than securing proper accommodations for guests, and by the time the casino opened in December of 1856, the establishment was in pitiable shape. In addition to the pools of mud surrounding the villa, piles of garbage were the first sights that tourists viewed in the first few days of the grand opening. *Villa Bellevue* was "hurriedly and scantily furnished, and in no way fitted for its purpose. In spite of all that had been promised, the immediate vicinity of the villa was in a more or less wild state; even the entrance was not yet finished."<sup>2</sup> In architecture, accommodations, travel access, and communication, then, the first concessionaires failed to consider the comforts of their foreign guests and the benefits of a thriving tourism industry in surrounding states.

Almost immediately, the survival of the tourism and gaming industry in Monaco was challenged. The casino had been steadily losing money since the spring of 1857, and the frequent turnover of management and concessionaires did little to provide stability to the fledgling industry. Instead of focusing on constructing the foundations of the tourism industry and promoting the casino internationally, concessionaires micromanaged the table maximums and limited the casino's reserves.

<sup>2</sup>Count Egon Corti, *The Wizard of Monte Carlo* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1935), 149.

Not only did Prince Charles recognize the inefficiencies of these concessionaires, but according to historian Charles Graves, local Monegasques "believe[d so little in] grandiose promises to turn *Les Spéluges* into the paradise which is now Monte Carlo, that offers of free land on the condition that the recipient would build a villa or shop on it, produced no takers at all."<sup>3</sup> Only when the casino concession was transferred to François Blanc was Monaco able to spatially redefine itself and effectively promote the tourism industry that became the economic backbone of the small principality.

In stark contrast to his predecessors, Blanc focused on first building up the luxurious amenities surrounding the gaming casino. Blanc's plan for the 'presentation of the dream' was for the immediate construction of such extravagant and lavish gardens, hotels, cafés, shops, villas, and amusements that his patrons would marvel at the dreamlike fantasy he had created at the resort which exceeded the expectations of reality. His construction designs would take priority over the more controversial gambling aspect of the casino. Blanc reasoned that restrictive European gaming laws would make legalized gambling in Monaco a rare commodity and thus attractive to gamblers, and that the use of intense marketing campaigns emphasizing a morally-controversial issue were thus unnecessary. Indeed, Monaco in 1863 was one of the few spots in Europe where one could legally and publicly engage in gambling.<sup>4</sup> With this distinct advantage in hand, Blanc focused his early efforts in Monaco at constructing a favorable image and providing luxurious accommodations.

When a *La Société Anonyme des Bains de Mer et du Cerclé des Étrangers a Monaco* (SBM) shareholder asked for his designs for a casino-resort in Monaco and for his opinion on what should be built, Blanc curtly remarked "everything, immediately, in one place."<sup>5</sup> He answered his own call to action by work-

<sup>3</sup> Charles Graves, *The Big Gamble: The Story of Monte Carlo* (London: Hutchinson & Co. LTD, 1956), 45n

<sup>4</sup> Paul Blancin, *Les Joueurs et les cercles, avec des notices sur Monte-Carlo, Aix-les-Bains, par Paul Blancin*, 1885, 13. Bibliothèque Nationale de France François-Mitterrand Rez-de-jardin, 8-V-20761, D3 L 3.33-A., 10 ; 138.

<sup>5</sup> Archives Monte-Carlo SBM, 1863. Exhibition presented during the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SBM in Monte Carlo, Monaco on July 5, 2013. <http://www.montecarlolegend.com/monte-carlo-sbm-celebrates-its-150th-anniversary/> accessed on November 18, 2013.



Agence Rol. Agence photographique, “Entrée des tirs aux pigeons à Monte-Carlo,” 1907

ing diligently to modernize Monaco and improve the principality’s infrastructure. By negotiating with the French state and co-financing the railroad, paying for improvements for roads, building a gas-power plant, and embarking upon an extensive modern lighting campaign, Blanc set the stage for Monaco to become a luxurious tourist destination. The ‘Golden Square’, the resort-center of shops, restaurants, cafés, and restaurants inaugurated in 1863, was partially funded by Blanc and designed to appeal to Europe’s most exclusive seasonal travelers. With Paris as its model, it was meant to evoke the sophistication and splendor of the world-renowned cosmopolitan city. Perhaps the most poignant example of this attempt to replicate the sophistication of Paris, was the Hôtel de Paris project. Blanc was explicit in his instructions for the construction of the hotel. He conceived of the hotel as the most important step toward announcing to the rest of the world that his casino in Monaco was to be the premier and all-inclusive resort of luxury and leisure for the elite. He announced that his vision was for “a hotel that surpasses anything that has been built so far, even the Hôtel du Louvre or the Grand Hôtel in Paris. I want people to rave about the Hôtel de Monaco so that it becomes a powerful advertising medium.”<sup>6</sup> Blanc wanted the elegance and lavishness of the resort to overwhelm visitors and replace the noxious image of a bleak, pre-modern house of scandal which had characterized the casino from 1854-1863. His expensive gamble quickly reaped

rewards, as the Principality hosted over 170,000 visitors in 1869 alone, and authors remarked on the luxuriousness of the resort. A British travel author commented that the Hôtel de Paris de Monaco “is one of the most cosmopolitan hotels in the world... it will be found that the foreign element usually predominates. The restaurant is essentially Parisian, and the wine-cellar the best on the Riviera.”<sup>7</sup> Recreating and surpassing the sophistication of Paris was one of Blanc’s primary goals for his casino and the hotel.

The new era for redefining space in Monaco reached an apex with the decision to rename *Les Spéluges*, the region in Monaco where the casino was built and where the majority of the entertainment industry was supposed to be constructed. *Les Spéluges*, the Latin root of which means a cave, was poorly named for a space of luxury. To make matters worse, its French, German, and Italian equivalents “means not merely a cave, but also a low, disreputable haunt [or] den of thieves.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly, Blanc had pragmatic reasons for wishing to rename the district, but, the renaming of *Les Spéluges* also had a larger role in the re-construction of space in Monaco that was at the time, uniquely Monegasque. As David Harvey has pointed out, “the very act of naming geographical entities implies a power over them, most particularly over the way in which places, their inhabitants and their social functions get

6 Archives Monte-Carlo SBM, 1863. <http://www.montecarlolegend.com/monte-carlos-most-prestigious-palace-the-hotel-de-paris/> accessed on November 18, 2013.

7 V. B. [Victor Bethel], *10 Days in Monte Carlo at the Bank’s Expense: Containing Hints to Visitors and a General Guide to the Neighborhood* (London: William Heinemann, 1898), 163.

8 General Pierre Polovtsoff, *Monte Carlo Casino* (New York: Hillman-Curl Inc., 1937), 106.

represented [and] each social formation constructs objective conceptions of space and time sufficient unto its own needs and purposes.”<sup>9</sup> In short, renaming *Les Spéluges* was the first step in redefining the spatial conception of Monaco in a manner that would be beneficial to its casino and tourism industry. Blanc worked with Prince Charles carefully to select the most appropriate name to replace *Les Spéluges*, and they agreed upon a reference to the prince himself. On July 1, 1866, Prince Charles III made a royal decree that *Les Spéluges* was to become Monte Carlo. Both men sought to overturn the negative connotations associated with the space, and by reclaiming *Les Spéluges* as Monte Carlo they took a step toward the re-conceptualization of space within Monaco. Author, and frequent visitor of the casino, Pierre Polovtsoff noted that:

[s]oon there was hardly anyone in the civilized world who did not recognize Monte Carlo as being synonymous with gambling. *Les Spéluges*, Charlesville, Albertville—there is nothing exciting about them, but Monte Carlo sounds rich and rare, and rolls trippingly from the tongues of all men, no matter what their native language may be.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the renaming of *Les Spéluges* and the construction of the city of Monte Carlo marked the beginning of Monaco’s transition toward erecting a specific spatial imaginary and was one of the key catalysts of the success of the tourism industry.

The initial clientele base for the casino-resort at Monte Carlo were *hivernants*, elite and often aristocratic European travelers who sought to escape the cold winter season common to much of the continent and Great Britain. For these elite travelers, luxury and exclusivity were paramount in their choice of a seasonal vacation destination, and it was these traits which Blanc and his successors sought to closely associate with Monte Carlo throughout the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s. The construction of opulent gardens, chic shops and restaurants, and the Monte Carlo Casino Theatre and the Opéra de Monte-Carlo (both designed by Charles Garnier, architect of the famed Opéra de Paris) contributed mightily to Monte Carlo’s reputation for extravagance and luxury—with Paris a clear model for this sophistication.

9 David Harvey, “Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, no. 3 (September 1990): 419.

10 Polovtsoff, 106.

The transformation from *Les Spéluges* and its inhospitable associations to Monte Carlo and its image of luxury and exclusivity was as swift as it was complete. Nearly all travel guides and visitors’ letters praised the lavishness and luxury of the resort-city, but most expressed shock at the swiftness of the construction of Monte Carlo as an elite tourist destination. In 1903, Philippe Casimir proclaimed “Monte Carlo! This name is recognized throughout the world. Its fame equal to the biggest, most illustrious cities.”<sup>11</sup>

For observers such as Casimir, Monte Carlo was not merely praiseworthy for its magnificence, beauty, and splendor, but it was noteworthy due to the rapidity and extensiveness of its transformation. The speediness with which the casino grew reflected its economic fortunes as well. The casino saw a deficit of over a million francs in 1859 shift to gross receipts of over 40,000,000 francs toward the end of the century. So great was the economic growth from the casino and surrounding tourist industries that the once tax-ridden principality liberated all of its citizens from taxation in February of 1869.<sup>12</sup>

After the death of François Blanc in 1877, the challenge for Monte Carlo’s casino-resort was no longer in attracting patrons, but in negotiating the tenuous balance between accommodating elite travelers and mass tourists. For many elites, part of the attraction of vacationing in Monte Carlo was the prospect of gambling, dining, and socializing in an exclusive atmosphere. The resort’s reputation for hosting the world’s elite was quickly and thoroughly established. Jules Bessi remarked that “Few cities offer as many resources as Monte Carlo, for cosmopolitan people that like artistic pleasures. Each year, in fact, especially during the winter, there is a reunion of elite society from the major nations of Europe.”<sup>13</sup> While the casino-resort certainly catered to elite guests throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century,

11 Philippe Casimir, *Guides des pays d’azur. Monaco, Monte-Carlo et les environs, par Philippe Casimir : Le Passe et le Present Vues – Portraits – Plans – 1903* (Nice : Editions de la Ste de Publicite des Pays D’azur, 1903), 159. Bibliothèque Nationale de France François-Mitterrand Rez-de-jardin, 8-K-3694.

12 Adolphe Smith, *Monaco and Monte Carlo: With Eight Reproductions in Colour from Drawings by Charles Maresco Pearce, and with Forty-eight Illustrations in Black and White* (London: Grant Richards LTC., 1912), 126.

13 Jules Bessi, *Monaco et Monte-Carlo, causerie par Jules Bessi – 1874* (Nice : 1874), 8. Bibliothèque Nationale de France François-Mitterrand Rez-de-jardin, K-15188, D1-554 L 4.7-A.

its emergence as a mass tourism destination precluded any true practice of exclusivity. By 1909 the principality attracted over 1.5 million tourists every year.<sup>14</sup> The casino-resort which had promoted elegance, luxury, and exclusivity during François Blanc's run as concessionaire shifted to emphasize spectacle and cosmopolitanism by the turn of the century.

While the resort itself was no longer an exclusive space for the elite and the nouveau riche, extravagant luxury, lavish amenities, and private *salles* provided at least some form of elite and exclusive sociability. However, the aspirant and middle classes (and eventually even the working class) flooded the principality, enamored by the seemingly unending spectacle provided by the casino-resort and enchanted by the possibility of vacationing in what had so recently been a space of leisure unattainable to all but the richest and most elite. A late nineteenth-century travel author noted these changes, remarking that “the three gaming rooms are filled with a very cosmopolitan crowd, from which a spectator can make the strangest observations... [t]he Casino of Monte-Carlo recruits its clientele from all the ranges of society and from all the countries of the world. From waiters to princes. From Brazilians to Chinese and all in between.”<sup>15</sup>

For many patrons, from the elite to the lower classes, this form of vacation-leisure served as a practice of class. This is most notably reflected by the proliferation of letters and postcards in Monte Carlo (one of the very first cities in the world to popularize the practice of selling and sending postcards as souvenirs). A picture postcard allowed members of the aspirant classes the opportunity to announce to their friends, family, and associates that they were vacationing in the ‘exclusive’ casino-resort town and to mediate their experience with a written description of their travels on the back. Senders of letters and postcards were, in a sense, parlaying Monte Carlo's spatial imaginary into their own social capital. In 1923, a weekly society revue of the Riviera sardonically quipped that, “[t]he month of January should be called the month of letters...Tourists, on their journey, enter into two excursions, attending balls and taking the month to send postcards to their friends. In the evenings, they don't visit the casino,

<sup>14</sup> Smith, 324.

<sup>15</sup> Blancin, 239-240.

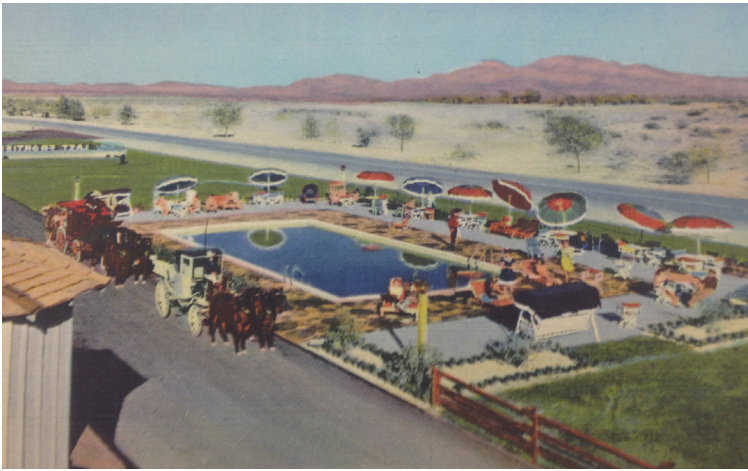
they stay in their rooms and write.”<sup>16</sup> The establishment of a specific spatial imaginary in Monte Carlo had not only allowed the casino-resort to flourish as one of the premiere vacation-leisure destinations of the nineteenth and twentieth century, but it had a tangible effect on the social and cultural practices of its patrons. Monte Carlo represents the quintessential example of how a casino-resort town constructed a spatial imaginary to promote its gaming-tourism industry.

One only has to look at the modern ‘Strip’ in Las Vegas to see how central cosmopolitan spectacle is to the casino-resort town's spatial imaginary. Place, and the imagining of place, is centrally important to the commercial and gaming activities in Las Vegas. Andreas Huyssen has claimed that such “urban [or spatial] imaginaries are thus part of a city's reality, rather than being only figments of the imagination” he argued “what we think about a city and how we perceive it informs the ways we act in it.”<sup>17</sup> He adds that such “imaginaries are also the sites of encounters with other cities, mediated through travel and tourism...the global and the local invariably mix.”<sup>18</sup> Las Vegas fits this description as well as any other city in the world. At certain vantage points on Las Vegas Boulevard, one can simultaneously view representations of Ancient Egypt and Rome, the elegance of Venice and Paris, and the sophistication of New York and Monte Carlo. These are, to be sure, vastly mediated representations of place; but, they nonetheless serve the purpose to remind consumers that they are in a cosmopolitan space, where new experiences and cultures can be had, and where a significant portion of the world's attractive vacation-destinations are available to those with even modest budgets. However, Las Vegas's carefully constructed spatial imaginary is designed to appeal to a variety of classes; the most extravagant luxury is available

<sup>16</sup> “Le Mois Des Lettres : L'Art de Varier les formules de Politesse,” *Cannes, Nice, Monte-Carlo – 1923 Touter les Femmes Élégantes sont abonnées à Art. Gout. Beauté. La Plus Luxueuse Des Revues de Modes La Seule Publiant Les Modelés de la Grande Couture dans le Coloris Exact de Leur Création*, no. 2 (22-28 January, 1923). Bibliothèque Nationale de France François-Mitterrand Rez-de-jardin, JO-60989 1923, D2-702 L 3.20-C.

<sup>17</sup> Andreas Huyssen, ed., *Other Cities, Other Worlds; Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Andreas Huyssen, 5.



“Hotel Last Frontier – Las Vegas, NV” series of color postcards, circa 1940s, The Dennis McBride Collection 0263, UNLV Special Collections.

for those who can pay for it, but even working class vacationers are offered simulated sophistication, with stereotyped food, stage shows, and activities packaged as luxury, gourmet, or exotic. Yet, however stereotypical, the cosmopolitan spectacle of Las Vegas provides and has provided working class vacationers with some experience of international flavor and a convergence of cultures since the 1950s. Like Monte Carlo, much of Las Vegas’s successes in maintaining its thriving casino-resort industry have been in accommodating the needs of multiple classes of vacationers and in making luxury, cosmopolitanism, and spectacle central features of its spatial imaginary.

This cosmopolitanism of present-day Las Vegas took time to develop however. The nascent casino-resort industry in Las Vegas during the 1940s did little to cultivate projections of cosmopolitanism or spectacle in order to lure potential clients. Instead, early marketing campaigns for the gambling and tourism industries focused on the past and sought to glorify the ‘Old West.’ The Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce designed its marketing campaigns of the 1940s to emphasize Las Vegas as the ‘Old West’ with modern comforts, used Helldorado Week as a publicity springboard, settled on ‘Vegas Vic’ and ‘Howdy Podner’ for its promotional campaigns, and rewarded businesses which kept to a Western theme through their Livewire fund. The promotion of the ‘Old West’ motif was not limited to civic initiatives; casino-resorts and supporting industries found promoting the ‘Old West’s’ scenic beauty, adventure, and excitement advantageous to their commercial pursuits. The Hotel Last Frontier released a series of postcards presenting staged scenes of the ‘Wild West,’ featuring their motto “The Early West in Modern Splendor.”<sup>19</sup> Over a dozen different

postcards featuring this western theme were printed during the 1940s and sold at the hotel until the late 1950s, featuring a model ‘Old West’ village, the ‘Iron Horse’ passenger train, scenes of damsels in distress, and a Chinese Joss House.<sup>20</sup> Even the architecture and décor of many of the hotels bought into the motif. The dining room of The Golden Nugget featured rustic booths and a wooden beam ceiling, with a mural of bucking broncos, burros, cowboys, and Indians surrounding the entire room.<sup>21</sup> The reverse of a postcard of the Western-themed Roundup Room of the El Rancho Hotel announced that “Western informality prevails. Come as you are.”<sup>22</sup> In fact, the informality and inclusiveness suggested by the Western motif was a major factor in its pervasiveness in Las Vegas’s first attempts to construct a spatial imaginary. A script for a 1947 travel film further emphasized this connection. The script notes for Monroe Manning’s film, *Frontier Playground*, insisted that the focus should be directed on “all the color and gayety of the Old West in a modern, up to date setting.”<sup>23</sup> The script also gave explicit directions that “[i]n making this picture, care should

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postcards, circa 1940s, The Dennis McBride Collection 0263, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, 0573, items 1-4.

20 “Hotel Last Frontier – Las Vegas, NV” series of color postcards, circa 1940s, The Dennis McBride Collection 0263, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, 0574, items 1-7.

21 “Dining Room THE GOLDEN NUGGET Las Vegas, NV” color postcard, circa 1940s-1950s, Dennis McBride Collection 0263, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, 0587.

22 “Roundup Room The El Rancho Hotel, Las Vegas, NV” color postcard, circa 1950s, Dennis McBride Collection 0263, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, 0498.

23 Monroe Manning, film script for “Frontier Playground,” 1947, Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce Records MS 96-07, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, Box 11, Folder 1. Pg. 5.

19 “Hotel Last Frontier – Las Vegas, NV” series of color





“Hotel Last Frontier – Las Vegas, NV” series of color postcards, circa 1940s, The Dennis McBride Collection 0263, UNLV Special Collections

be shown to make certain it does not make a particular appeal to any ONE class of people. It should be so constructed and written that anyone, from the high to the lowly, will see things of interest to them and will have a genuine desire to visit Las Vegas without feeling either a sense of inferiority or superiority.”<sup>24</sup>

By the mid-1950s, Las Vegas civic and business leaders veered away from using the ‘Old West’ as the exclusive means to attract patrons to the area’s casino-resorts. While few hotels abandoned the western motif altogether, most downplayed the theme in favor of a greater emphasis on luxury and cosmopolitan spectacle. Resorts instead began to feature lavish and extravagant shows, a multitude of dining options, and luxurious accommodations. Hotel-resorts began to merge luxury and cosmopolitanism by theming their hotels as exotic or sophisticated locations. They presented patrons with a wide variety of experiences of other locales, often wildly altered from traditional local cultures, but nonetheless new international experiences largely unavailable to the vacationers in reality.

Correspondence prior to the opening of The Dunes Hotel demonstrates this trend. Executive James Rowe wrote to Dunes financier Alfred Gottesman considering alternative names for the casino-resort. His recommendation included “a list of geographical and Spanish language names -- most of them connoting a pleasing thought or a smart visiting place of travelers.”<sup>25</sup> Gottesman himself followed up the recommendation, telling his publicity director “I feel we ought to hit this feature hard for its combined geographical and quality connotations. There is no lack of picture material... deriving from and inspired by the Arabian Nights tales... Middle Eastern symbols and art motifs...employed by artists to illustrate oriental legends.”<sup>26</sup> Alfred’s son Joe, encouraged his father to “follow through as consistently as possible with the Arabian-Persian motif and really achieve the

24 Monroe Manning, film script for “Frontier Playground,” 1947, Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce Records MS 96-07, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, Box 11, Folder 1. Pg. 9.

25 James F. Rowe to Alfred Gottesman, July 13, 1954, The Dunes Hotel Collection 93-98, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, Box 11, Folder 3.

26 Alfred Gottesman to Joe Perrett, July 31, 1954, The Dunes Hotel Collection 93-98, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, Box 11, Folder 3.

romantic fairy-tale atmosphere which the 'Arabian Nights' universally suggests."<sup>27</sup>

The Dunes Hotel was by no means unique in this dedication to geographical theme, meant to express luxury, exoticism, and cosmopolitanism to its guests, but it remained remarkably consistent in its approach. Promotional material featured an Arabian servant, describing the luxuries of The Dunes to his master, The Sheik. Riddled with stereotypes, the publicity was nonetheless geared toward cementing the illusion of patrons making their vacation part of the fabled Arabian Nights. The servant marveled, "Know, O Master, that the Dunes is the most. Baghdad was never like this!...O And best of all, Master, know you that the Dunes is captivatingly informal."<sup>28</sup> Such an Orientalist rendering of the casino-resort was meant to spark guests' imaginations, and to suggest the ease of acquiring a cosmopolitan and luxurious experience at a minimal cost. Patrons lured to the Dunes by such advertising were provided the opportunity of dining at the gourmet restaurant, The Sultan's Table, watching the Magic Carpet Revue in the Arabian Room, or having a drink in the Persian-themed Sinbad Bar; nonetheless, the casino-resort was quick to reference the original gambling Mecca, by adding the Monaco Room less than a year after opening its doors.<sup>29</sup> Competing hotels demonstrated a similar pattern; the Aladdin featured the Baghdad Theater, Caesars Palace offered both Bacchanal and Cleopatra's Barge, The Riviera had Versailles, The Sahara featured The Congo Room and the Casbar Theater, and Castaways featured the exotic Kon Tiki.<sup>30</sup>

By the 1960s and 1970s, Las Vegas casino-resorts branched out from their own geographically-themed shows, cuisines, and entertainments to feature a more eclectic variety of locales meant to evoke exoticism or sophistication. Most notably,

27 Joe Gottesman to Alfred Gottesman, September 4, 1954, The Dunes Hotel Collection 93-98, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, Box 11, Folder 3.

28 The Dunes Hotel, Ad Copy, June 23, 1955, The Dunes Hotel Collection 93-98, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, Box 11, Folder 1.

29 Untitled Document, 1961, The Dunes Hotel Collection 93-98, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, Box 11, Folder 17.

30 Jack Cortez's *Fabulous Las Vegas Magazine*, June 5, 1971, pgs 20-25, The Dunes Hotel Collection 93-98, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, Box 5, Folder 6.



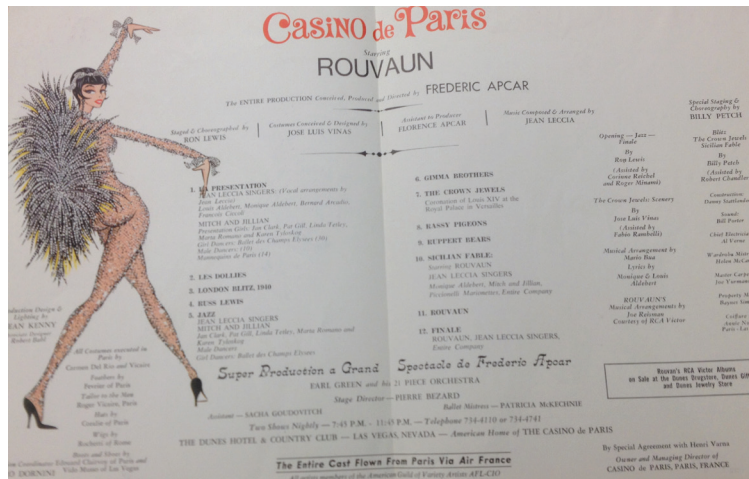
"Dining Room THE GOLDEN NUGGET Las Vegas, NV" color postcard, circa 1940s-1950s, The Dennis McBride Collection 0263, UNLV Special Collections



"Roundup Room The El Rancho Hotel, Las Vegas, NV" color postcard, circa 1950s, Dennis McBride Collection 0263, UNLV Special Collections,

the 'Strip' stage shows often adopted a Parisian or French theme. Such shows were marketed toward consumers with more modest budgets. Greyhound Bus Tours offered exclusive packages to shows such as Le Lido de Paris, Folies Bergère, and Casino de Paris, each referencing a famed nightclub, show, or cabaret in Paris.<sup>31</sup> The Dunes Hotel was so intent on retaining the name of their show, Casino de Paris, that they were willing to pay a \$26,000 fee each year to the owner of Paris's original establishment after he sued the resort for copyright infringement. Shows strived for authenticity, recruiting choreographers, composers, performers, designers, and costumers from France. If such measures were not enough to convince the audience of the authenticity of the acts, the program promised that

31 Greyhound Bus Tour Advertisement to Las Vegas, circa 1960s, The Dunes Hotel Collection 93-98, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, Box 11, Folder 10.



Casino de Paris Printing Sample, 1968,  
The Dunes Hotel Collection 93-98, UNLV  
Special Collections

“The Entire Cast [was] Flown From Paris Via Air France.”<sup>32</sup>

In short, the successful formula for creating a spatial imaginary in Las Vegas began as a focus on the ‘Old West’ but shifted to an intense presentation of cosmopolitan spectacle for most of the twentieth century. Unlike Monte Carlo, which emphasized seasonal tourism and a presentation of exclusive luxury during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Las Vegas largely centered its spatial imaginary on meeting the needs of short-term, middle and working class patrons. The heavy emphasis on cosmopolitan spectacle, and indeed the numerous representations of space which can be found in Las Vegas, were intended to evoke feelings of recognizable, yet foreign locales, unobtainable in the original to the majority of the city’s patrons. Liberal laws, entertainment, and gambling certainly were the basis of Las Vegas’s vacation-tourism industry; however, the presentation of luxury to middle class consumers, and the many forms of cosmopolitan spectacle were essential to the creation of Las Vegas’s spatial imaginary, its long-held place in the popular imagination, and the catalyzing of its vacation-tourism industry.

The creation of specific spatial imaginaries, centered upon the presentation to the consumer of luxury, cosmopolitanism, and spectacle has been an important part of the commercial activity of casino-resort towns since the 1860s. François Blanc’s call to action, to present the dream, has been taken up, not only in Monte Carlo, but also by civic planners, casino owners, and tourism Las Vegas, as well as Havana in the 1950s

and modern-day Macau. Creating illusions, dreams, and representations of spaces have been essential components of these casino-resort towns’ promotional activities, and have, indeed, defined their very landscapes. Throughout the twentieth century, few cities which allowed gambling have adopted the model described in these case studies. Even famous casino centers such as Atlantic City or Baden-Baden fail to fit the model; Atlantic City never consistently developed cosmopolitanism as part of its spatial imaginary, while Baden-Baden failed to incorporate spectacle to any great degree. Joseph Kelly and William R. Eadington have noted that the construction and culture of casino-resorts in Europe (Monte Carlo being a clear exception to this model) precludes the development of such resort-towns. The authors contend that “The European model, on the other hand, offers a quite different scenario. European casinos tend to be small, discrete, and inconspicuous...Rather, they tend to complement rather than dominate the touristic and recreational assets in those communities, and their influence on broad aspects of community life, as well as community image, is limited.”<sup>33</sup> By contrast, it has been a continued trend throughout the twentieth century that the most successful casino-resort towns, in terms of visitors and revenue generated specifically through gambling, have followed this model of forming a spatial imaginary.

However, recent tourism and leisure patterns suggest a divergence between gambling and tourism resort-centers which are working toward founding their own spatial imaginary. Some of the fastest growing

32 Casino de Paris Printing Sample, 1968, The Dunes Hotel Collection 93-98, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, Box 5, Folder 3.

33 Joseph Kelly and William R. Eadington, “The Regulation of Casino Gaming in Europe: A Comparative Analysis,” Paper No. 86-8, September, 1986, The William Thompson Collection 87-063, UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada, Box 3.

tourism destinations in the world now fall outside the boundaries of Europe and America, attract an array of international patrons, and are catering to a sharp increase in domestic and regional tourism. The future of the vacation-tourism industry seems reliant on representations of space and the implementation of a spatial imaginary, but casino-gaming appears to be less inextricably associated with resort tourism in the twenty-first century than it did in the twentieth century. Dubai, Bangkok, and Rio de Janeiro are in the midst of shaping or re-constructing their own spatial imaginaries while simultaneously experiencing a boom as international tourism destinations. Dubai downplays the image of a pleasure-repressed Middle East while overwhelming spectators with modern architecture, improbably high skyscrapers, and claims to the most extravagant and lavish hotel industry in the world. Yet, while vacationers may bet on horse or camel races, casino and table gaming is banned in the United Arab Emirates. Similarly, the hundreds of thousands of tourists who will venture to the Rio de Janeiro in 2014 for the FIFA World Cup, and again in 2016 for the Summer Olympic Games, will generate millions of dollars of revenue for the city's tourism industry, but none of that revenue will (legally) come from gambling. Most astonishingly, Bangkok, now the most visited city in the world, which has tacitly cultivated an image as a site of freedom, where even the most outrageous desire can be filled, imposes decades-long imprisonment for gambling. The city, long known for unofficially tolerating prostitution and a variety of other sexual exchanges, does not look so kindly toward clandestine gambling operations.<sup>34</sup> Yet, these cities are incorporating the successful model of presenting patrons with luxuries, accommodating members of various classes, overwhelming vacationers with spectacle, and emphasizing the cosmopolitan nature of the city and their sites of international sociability and exchange. Las Vegas and Monte Carlo are still experiencing long-term growth and are assured of a place in the enormous (and growing) world-wide tourism market, and emergent tourism centers such as Dubai, Rio de Janeiro, and Bangkok are embracing the model of promotion which was employed so successfully by the casino-resort towns of the twentieth century.



### About the Author

Robert Miller is a PhD candidate in European History at the University of Kansas, under the direction of Dr. Christopher E. Forth. He is a graduate of Eastern Kentucky University, where he received Bachelor degrees in History, Sociology, and Political Science. His research interests include the cultural history of modern Europe, tourism, consumption, leisure, and international history. Robert has served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant and Assistant Instructor of modern European history at the University of Kansas since 2009 and is nearing the completion of his dissertation, "Constructing a Spatial Imaginary: The Formation and Re-presentation of Monte Carlo as a Vacation-Leisure Paradise, 1854-1970." Beginning in August of 2014, Robert will serve as managing editor of the journal *Cultural History*.

<sup>34</sup> Schule Covers, "Bangkok Thailand, Where Pimpin' Ain't Easy, but Gambling is Illegal," *Travel and Places*.



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