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# Family-Friendly Las Vegas: An Analysis of Time and Space

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the rise and fall of the “family-friendly” Las Vegas marketing era. Through analysis of casino advertisements, internal and external building infrastructure, and qualitative in-depth interviews with industry insiders, this work investigates the city’s reinvention of the early 1990s. Key factors that set the stage for the emergence of targeted family marketing are identified, addressing why this advertising approach ultimately did not sustain. Unique marketing case studies are identified throughout.

**Keywords:** Casino advertising, family leisure, infrastructure, presentation of place, Las Vegas marketing

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### Introduction

Las Vegas is a place of continual reinvention. Due to sustained competition in the gaming industry and the financial necessity to stay current, the city must constantly refine its image. One can conceptualize this image as the ultimate collision of the physical and social spheres of tourism. Physically, buildings and attractions offer visitors important visual cues about what one can expect to experience in a particular space. These expectations are socially reaffirmed

through carefully-designed advertising schemes displayed in print and visual media. Given that the image of Las Vegas is a dynamic entity, we can observe trends in the city’s self-presentation. Looking longitudinally, these trends reveal periods—or eras—of marketing approaches. This paper explores the rise and fall of the “family friendly” period observed during the 1990s.

New marketing eras often emerge as a result of broad shifts in economic conditions or social trends.

A sharp economic downturn, growing competition, and a fledgling popular image in the early 1980s established a ripe context for a reinvention of the Las Vegas brand. What emerged from this reinvention came to be known by many as “Family Vegas.” This period was marked by two characteristics—the rapid construction of family-oriented attractions and a concerted advertising effort by some properties to target families. This paper explores the economic and social conditions that allowed for this new Las Vegas image to emerge. It also investigates the transition to the next Las Vegas reinvention, the adult-centered era that defines the city today.

## The Family Market

Children hold a precarious place in Las Vegas. They are too young to rent a hotel room, buy a drink, and most critical to the casino industry—gamble. While researchers recognize that the casino gambling market is “large, complex, and dynamic,” some question the value of spending advertising dollars attracting parties with minors (Dandurand 1991, 1). Consequently, the concept of the Las Vegas family market—and the extent to which casinos should cater to it—is political, economic, and nothing short of controversial.

Statistical data reflect that a family market does exist for the city’s tourism industry. GLS Research conducts a visitor profile study for the city every year. Their 2013 findings revealed that the average visitor party size was 2.4 persons, a figure that increased from 2011 (GLS 2013, 11). One-in-ten visitors had children under the legal gambling age in their immediate party (11). However, visitors without children have a more sizable gambling budget than visitors with children. One study estimated the gaming budget differential to be as great as 70% (Dandurand, 6). Casinos are well aware of these trends. As observed by Dr. Lawrence Dandurand, Professor of Marketing at UNLV, “Lower gambling budgets are a perceived threat to the casino gambling industry.” (6). He goes on to comment, “Gamblers without children, compared to gamblers with children, tend to stay longer, visit more frequently, and visit more gambling locations” (7). These findings present Las Vegas properties with an interesting conundrum. A family market clearly exists—but is it one worth spending valuable advertising dollars to attract? While the push to broaden appeal to families was not universal, a num-

ber of properties adopted this approach as a means of bringing new visitors through their doors. During a very short period in the early 1990s—a window of about two years—major family-centered attractions popped up all over the strip. This included brand new theme parks, shows, and child-friendly eating establishments. At the same time, many casinos stuck to their traditional adult-centered marketing approach. It is no wonder why some are confused about how to classify this period in Las Vegas’ history. With properties taking vastly different marketing approaches, the city was caught between two seemingly incompatible images—family-friendly and adult-centered Vegas.

## The Construction of Image

Image is not something that is easy to maintain. It takes sustained effort to establish a consistent presentation of self. Sociologists from the Symbolic Interactionist camp, particularly the work of Erving Goffman (1959), help set the stage for considering presentation of self in daily life. This theoretical framework sheds light on how individuals create meaning in their individual lives and how this meaning can change between and within contexts. This includes wearing particular types of clothing, using specific language, and putting particular images on their social media accounts. Symbolic Interactionism further stresses that the mind has the ability to interpret symbols and that society is a product of collective daily social interactions. Individuals are seen as dynamic, conscious actors who attach meaning to symbols as they progress through their life course, serving as a way to communicate different expectations, ideologies, and perceptions during their interactions with others (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959; Blumer, 1972, 1969).

Like people, places also work to offer a certain presentation of self. This is particularly true of places that rely heavily on tourism. Drawing on the power of cultural symbols, tourist destinations seek to sell an experience. Each vacation destination is tasked with a challenge in this regard. Consider Walt Disney World, a tourist haven that consists of four theme parks. The fact that these parks are all owned by the same corporation makes maintaining a consistent family-centered image manageable. The Disney experience is tightly controlled. It is brilliantly designed to isolate tourists from competing company

narratives. A family staying at a Disney property can board the Magical Express at the Orlando airport, be driven straight to their Disney hotel (complete with video promotional material on the bus), and spend their entire stay on Disney property. Las Vegas presents tourists with an entirely different cope of experiences. While visitors may elect to physically limit themselves to particular parts of the city—often the strip—numerous entities have a hand in contributing to what those tourists may experience. The construction of the Las Vegas image is complicated by the sheer number of players involved. These players include individual casinos, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (hereby referred to as the LVCVA), and a vast array of cultural media such as movies, music, and books (Gragg, 2013). I argue that competing ideas about the Las Vegas image emerged during the early 1990s. However, as properties abandoned the family-friendly marketing approach, a more unified sense of image came forward. This revived adult-centered image is the one embraced in popular culture today.

## Method

This multi-method project is based on content analysis of trade collections, casino promotional items, and material from mainstream media. While serving as a Visiting Fellow at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas Center for Gaming Research, I had access to the school's vast Special Collection, including an array of casino marketing material. Trade collections reviewed included Las Vegas TourGuide (all issues dated from the early 1990s) and Casino Player (all issues dated from January 2006 through December 2007). Promotional and publicity material reviewed included archives from Circus Circus, Riviera, Stardust, Sahara, Sam's Town Hotel and Gambling Hall, Tropicana, and Sands. Mainstream media collections reviewed included articles from Time, USA Today, Forbes, GQ, Las Vegas Sun, and Las Vegas Review-Journal.

In addition to content analysis, this paper analyzes qualitative themes from two in-depth interviews with Las Vegas insiders. One research participant was involved with the marketing efforts of a major property located on the Las Vegas strip. In addition to sitting for an in-depth interview, this participant granted me access to archives of the casino's print advertisements. The second participant was involved

with the branding of Las Vegas more broadly, serving as an employee of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. These interviews were transcribed and imported into NVivo, a qualitative software program. These data are interspersed throughout.

## Analysis

### *Setting the Stage: The Downturn of the 1980s*

Competition breeds innovation. This is particularly applicable to a city like Las Vegas, a location that is so heavily dependent on tourism dollars. With stagnation leading to lost revenue, the incentive to innovate is clear. It should come as no surprise that the family-friendly Vegas advertising era came on the heels of a difficult economic period in the city's history. In his 2010 work, UNLV's Center for Gaming Research Director David G. Schwartz talks about the three crisis that the city had to respond to in the early 1980s: competition from Atlantic City, the broader national economic downturn, and the fire at the MGM Grand (Schwarz 2010, 261). Schwartz writes, "Some thought that Las Vegas had seen its best days" (261). This concern was not ill-founded. Las Vegas was also facing a new crop of competition from Indian casino establishments such as Foxwoods Resort and Casino, a New England-based property that opened its doors in 1986. Riverboat casinos, such as Harrah's Joliet (opened May 1993), were also poised to threaten Las Vegas' revenue stream. Numerous sources describe the late 1980s and early 1990s as one of the bleakest periods in the city's history. In the most literal sense, Las Vegas could not afford to remain idle.

With revenues plunging and competition growing rapidly, the eminent question was how the city could broaden its tourist appeal. By identifying untapped or underserved clienteles, new revenue streams could potentially be uncovered. Expanding the market of appeal to include families was a key part of the city's response (Findlay, 1986). As reaffirmed by UNLV professor Eugene Moehring, "Las Vegas in the 1990s marketed itself as a family vacation center" (271). Instead of appealing to the individual gambler, attracting families opened up a brand new cohort of consumers. Come the mid-1990s, a number of major properties built attractions specifically to draw in the family market. As noted by ABC News, "In less than 10 years, virtually every hotel on the Strip was de-



molished or rebuilt, at an estimated total cost of \$12 billion. The new hotels were huge—20 of the world's 23 largest hotels are in Las Vegas—and provided spectacular entertainment like the artificial volcano at the Mirage, which spewed out flames every 15 minutes after dark" (ABC News). A new marketing era had materialized.

### A Reinvention: The Family-Friendly Era of the 1990s

For a city that is continually re-shaping its image, the concept of investing in infrastructure is nothing new. However, this wave of development was markedly unique from past eras. Family-centered attractions, and even family-centered hotels, were being erected at rapid pace. The Excalibur Hotel and Casino was built entirely on a family-centered theme. Opened in June of 1990, the \$290 million property featured an Arthurian motif. Highlights included an inoperable drawbridge and guards in costumes. The New York Times proclaimed the opening to represent, "The latest 'theme resort' to open in Las Vegas, part of a trend by giant casino operators to create a family atmosphere" (New York Times, 1990).

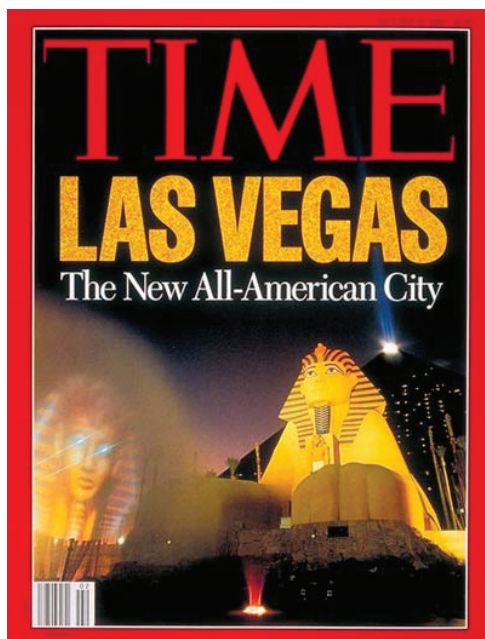
This catering to families continued through the early and mid-1990s. A new theme park opened up next to the MGM in December of 1993. Taking cues from Walt Disney World's MGM Studios in Orlando, MGM Grand Adventures offered guests a mock movie studio experience. Themed after *The Wizard of Oz*,

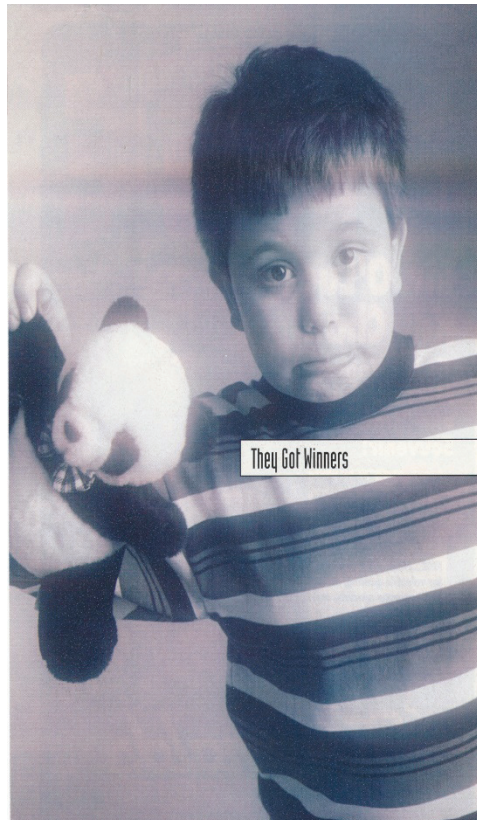
the park featured an outdoor theater with dueling pirates, an area with rides for small children, and indoor and outdoor entertainment theaters. Guests were encouraged, in the literal sense, to "follow the yellow brick road" from the casino floor out to Grand Adventures. The hope was to make "Las Vegas as popular with families as it was for adults" (Adams 1993). Other new attractions included Luxor's Nile River Tour and Treasure Island's "Battles at Buccaneer Bay." Collectively, these and other attractions worked to shift perceptions of identity surrounding the city.

Mainstream media also helped to propel the image of a "family-friendly" Las Vegas into popular culture. In 1994, *Time* magazine dubbed Vegas "The New All-American City" (cover on left). The term "All-American" is a loaded phrase, conjuring up images of what it means to be "American:" working middle-class with a spouse, family, and pets. In the mid-1990s, Steve Wynn said that Las Vegas, "Represents all the things people in every city in America like" (Egan, 2012). Foreshadowing a more familiar Las Vegas, *Time* revisited its coverage of the city in 2004. The cover on the right reflects a much more risqué Las Vegas, an image more in tune with the Las Vegas that people visualize today. The words on the *Time* cover practically shout, "It's Vegas, Baby!"

### A Unique Counter Campaign

While the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority works to create a brand for the Vegas destina-





tion, it is valuable to remember that not all properties work in lockstep to reaffirm that image. As mentioned earlier, properties such as the Riviera and the Stardust maintained their adult-centered image in the early 1990s. The archival research completed for this project shows that one casino in particular, Tropicana, stood out as a curious outlier during the 1990s. This property not only maintained its adult-centered theme, but also used a unique anti-children marketing strategy. This strategy may have been employed in part due to the property's geographical location on the strip. Tropicana is across the Boulevard from Excalibur, one of the first family-themed resorts to be established. Tropicana is also located next door to MGM, a property that created an expansive theme park for children. Being within eyeshot of these two casinos may have provided all of the inspiration that Tropicana needed in crafting their new advertising strategy.

Tropicana featured a series of advertisements in the mid-1990s that actively went against a family-oriented presentation. One advertisement proclaimed, "they got strollers, we got rollers." Another advertisement, shown above, touted "they got winners, we got winners." These pictures cleverly draw upon the use of color, space, and body. The image on the left depicts a child, shown in black and white, dan-



gling a Teddy bear in his right hand. The image on the right, shown in full color, depicts a man and a woman playing a table game. The woman is smiling over a king-jack pair, a powerful hand in the game of Blackjack. With tropical drinks at their side and their bodies partially submerged in a crystal-clear pool, the smiling duo are presented as "winners."

One of the more interesting facets of these advertisements is how they were presented to the public. As an example, the advertisement shown above was presented in the February 16-22, 1995, edition of *TourGuide*, a free publication designed for tourists. Readers would first come across the image on the left. They would then turn the page to see the image on the right. This marketing scheme was a creative way to attract gamblers looking to avoid children. Further, this advertising approach was a powerful foreshadow of what was to become of the Las Vegas image—a return to the adult-centered experience.

## A Second Reinvention: The Return to Adult-Centered Vegas

In 2003, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority debuted a new marketing campaign called "What happens here, stays here." This campaign featured the release of a series of commercials focused on adult experiences. In a 2003 commercial



titled “Postcard,” a woman is shown reading her own Las Vegas postcard. As she reads, her smile turns into worry. The woman promptly smudges out a sentence on the card, indicating that she doesn’t want her activities to be revealed to others. A 2005 commercial titled “Parents” featured a mother and father returning home from their Las Vegas vacation. Upon walking in the door, they ask their son what he was up to. The camera pans to a room full of empty cups, pizza boxes, and food on the floor. “Nothing,” the son replies. He then counters his parents with the same question. The parents hesitate to answer as their smiles disappear. The mother diverts her eyes away from her son. “Nothing,” the father replies.

In the span of just a few short years, Las Vegas re-centered its focus on the adult experience. What led to this reinvention? The answer is perhaps best summarized by Burston Cohen, President of the Desert Inn Country Club and Casino. Speaking at the 1995 International Gaming Exposition, Cohen noted, “If there’s a twelve year old in my casino, he’d better be shooting craps” (Thompson et al. 1996, 70). While the family marketing strategy was successful at bringing first-time visitors to the city, the percentage of non-gamblers and low roller increased exponentially. As noted by Thompson et al., “Las Vegas casinos will have to change the way they do business if the future visitor is anticipated to spend 39% less on gambling than the current tourist” (Thompson et al. 1996, 72). Less gaming revenue increases the pressure to make money on other property features such as restaurants and attractions. The issue is that many of these features are not designed to be moneymakers. By themselves, some are not even profitable. Casinos design these establishments to get players in the door. A story told by casino host Steve Cyr highlights this fact. In his April 2009 UNLV Gaming Research Colloquium talk, Cyr discusses the value of Nobu, a restaurant at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino:

I have a guy go to the pool and dump like \$78,000 in three minutes. He didn’t win a hand. It was brutal, right? He’s in the pool, drinking. He came over for one reason. He wanted Nobu, which is our sushi restaurant which is really famous. We built it for Nobu for free and we charge them a dollar a month in rent. We get no breakage there. If I comp there, it’s real hard money. But the restaurant is that powerful for us. (Cyr, 2009)

What happens when that same patron is not dropping \$78,000 in three minutes at a table game? Simi-

larly, imagine the family that enters a casino for their discount buffet, bypassing all of the tables and slots on the way to and from their meal. In marketing to families, these are the difficult business situations that casinos are forced to reconcile. Once again, Las Vegas found itself needing to draw from an untapped clientele.

The LVCVA’s “what happens here, stays here” advertising campaign was one of the first successful leaps in attracting a new demographic. As noted by Billy Vassiliadis, CEO of Las Vegas-based R & R partners, “Younger travelers are a key target in this campaign [...] We want to be in [travelers’] heads saying if you want to have a blowout time, Las Vegas is where you need to be” (Howard, 2003). This reinvention is influenced by both economic and social factors. Economically, Las Vegas branding has moved more towards attracting those who can legally gamble—adults over the age of 21. Socially, attracting younger adults means selling the idea of liberation from the daily routine. This means emphasizing sex and the opportunity for unpredictable excitement, a return to traditional Vegas imagery. Unable to co-exist with the revived adult-centered branding of the city, family-friendly Las Vegas was rapidly dismantled and forgotten.

The period of image renovation witnessed in the early and mid-2000s was marked by a “de-theming” of major resorts. Interiors were stripped of their family-friendly activities. Many of these voids were filled with clubs and upscale shopping. Advertising reaffirmed this new presentation of self. The LVCVA rolled out even more “adult escape” commercials and properties adopted new slogans. Current-day slogans for properties occupying space on the Las Vegas strip include Monte Carlo’s “unpretentiously luxurious” and Bellagio’s “luxury in the heart of Las Vegas.”

In February of 2012, the Las Vegas Sun published an article called the “Sun’s list of shuttered family-friendly Vegas attractions.” Rebecca Clifford-Cruz writes, “Las Vegas has always billed itself as a playground, but its emphasis on being one for both kids and adults appears to be dwindling. Many of the family-friendly attractions that peppered the city during the 1990s have vanished, doomed to exist only in photos and memories” (Clifford-Cruz, 2012). Items on the list include the MGM Grand Adventures Theme Park, Treasure Island’s Pirate Battle, Wet ‘n Wild, Games of the Gods Arcades at Luxor, MGM

Grand Lion Habitat, GameWorks (a gaming store/family fun center inside the Showcase Mall), and Speed at the Sahara (a roller coaster that sat beside the property now known as SLS Las Vegas).

The dismantling of this infrastructure gave a definitive signal that the image of the city was moving in a new direction. While observers have yet to see what the long-term future holds, we can confidently that this return to an adult-centered focus has staying power. The LVCVA recently came out with “Vegas Enablers,” a clever supplement to the popular “What happens here, stays here” marketing campaign. Vegas enablers are people that help to create, in LVCVA’s words, “what happens here” moments. As noted by LVCVA senior vice president of marketing Cathy Tull, “With the ‘Vegas enablers’ spots, we’re exploring for the first time how those memorable moments can happen, especially with the help of that one fearless friend that we all seem to have, the one who encourages us to let our hair down” (Velotta, 2013).

The LVCVA has played a critical role in helping to popularize new narratives about Las Vegas. This comes, in part, due to a substantial shift in the Visitor Authority’s marketing approach. More specifically, they have come to treat Las Vegas as a brand, not a product. As explained by one study participant:

For years and years, our advertising reflected the product of Las Vegas. It showed the casinos, the shops, images of the strip and downtown. And then in the late 90s we started to look at Las Vegas as a brand – what is the emotional experience of Las Vegas that sets it apart? This is in light of casinos becoming available everywhere. The hotels wisely saw the writing on the wall and diversified with new attractions and shows to diversify the experience. We went from a product-focused strategy to a branding-focused strategy.

A prime example of this branding effort could be seen on Presidents’ Day of 2014. The LVCVA offered McCarran International Airport travelers a surprise. The “President of Las Vegas” gave official “Vegas Presidential Pardons” (Telles, 2014). Tourists leaving the city were pardoned for their “what happens here, stays here moment.” This event attracted both local news coverage and expansive social media attention through the Twitter hashtag #Vegaspardons. This was the last interaction that most visitors had with the city during the course of their stay, helping to solidify the city’s brand as an adult-centered escape.

In the next section, I present two case studies that

surfaced while sifting through the UNLV archives. The first case study is Circus Circus, a casino that has maintained its family-friendly image since its doors opened in October of 1968. The second case study is TI, a casino that has had some struggles in defining its identity.

## A Closer Look: Circus Circus

While many of Las Vegas’ casinos have tried new marketing schemes in hopes of attracting new clientele, *Circus Circus* has maintained a consistent family target. As noted by one study participant, an expert on branding, “Circus Circus is one of the exceptions to the rule where, since their opening, they very aggressively included families as part of their target market.” Observers need to look no further than the external physical infrastructure to see the family-friendly motif. The photograph on the left (on the following page) shows the Casino’s marquee—a brightly illuminated smiling clown. Its left index finger points down to the casino property. A more subtle advertisement for “weddings starting at \$135” a reminder that adults still matter, but are not necessarily the exclusive focus.<sup>1</sup>

The image on the right (on the following page) is an aerial photograph of Circus Circus from the non-strip side. The circus theme is promoted by the physical infrastructure, most notably, the big top. The décor on the inside matches. The inside has three feature items: the Midway, circus acts, and the Adventuredome (which opened in 1993). These items still stand today, showing a consistency in theme throughout the years. The language that Circus Circus uses in describing the Midway also works to establish the family-friendly tone:

We truly mean it when we say, “Act your age somewhere else!” This Las Vegas hotel casino is all about having fun. Step right up at Circus Circus’ famous Carnival Midway, designed for kids and adults of all ages! If you’re game, we’ve got plenty to keep you entertained with our huge selection of games and premium prizes for winners. Also on the Midway is our pulse-pounding Arcade energizing players with 200 of today’s most popular and yesterday’s most classic games. (Circus Circus website)

Recall how, as a result of the family advertising boom in the early 1990s, the Tropicana ran “anti-children” advertisements. Circus Circus used a similar maneu-

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<sup>1</sup> Images are courtesy of the University of Nevada Las Vegas Special Collections.





ver in the 1970s. At a time when children were sparsely used in casino advertisements, Circus Circus ran an “anti-adult campaign.” Just like the Tropicana, Circus Circus was seeking to set itself apart from its competition. It did so by proclaiming that their property was “Fun-Rated! Not for Adults!” The coupon found on the bottom of the advertisement is specifically tailored to people under the age of 21. Another advertisement proclaimed the casino to be “Your One Stop Fun Spot,” while another suggests that people can have “Fun in the Family Tradition.”<sup>2</sup> In addition to presenting the property as being welcoming to families, this advertising approach appeals to adult nostalgia.

Circus Circus remains a family destination to this day. Currently housing 25 rides, the Adventuredome still stands as a prominent fixture on the property. The Midway features 200 classic and contemporary games. Recent advertisements further confirm Circus Circus’ image as a family-friendly, affordable vacation experience. The first image was an advertisement concept approved in 2013, while the second image made an appearance as a website advertisement in 2012<sup>3</sup>:

<sup>2</sup> The author would like to thank Circus Circus for providing access to their in-house advertisement collection.

<sup>3</sup> Images are courtesy of Circus Circus.

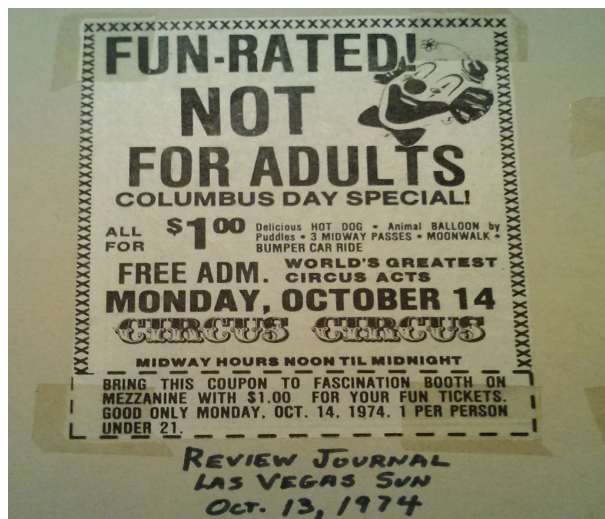


### A Closer Look: Treasure Island

Unlike Circus Circus, which has maintained its family marketing theme throughout the years, other properties have attempted to shift with the changing Las Vegas image. Solidifying an identity in such a dynamic landscape can be difficult. Treasure Island, now known more simply as TI, represents one such case. As noted by one Las Vegas insider, “Steve Wynn went on record as saying that his purpose was not to target families with that [TI] property. There was an arcade in the back and the pirate ship in the front, but that was it. There was somewhat mixed messaging in terms of what that property was. The position of that property was somewhat confusing to people.”

One prime example of this confusing identity can be seen in the famous strip-side pirate show. This show has gone through multiple reiterations, the first of which was known as “Battle of Buccaneer Bay.” Subsequently referred to as “Sirens of TI,” the newly-themed show featured scantily clad men and women parading around the ship. As noted by the Las Vegas Review-Journal, “Choreographer Kenny Ortega put together the ‘Sirens of TI’ show in 2003, switching from a male-dominated Disney-esque production to a more dancer-driven show. Hundreds of ship weddings were held over the 20 years” (Clarke, 2013). It was announced in November of 2013 that, after a ten year-run, Sirens of TI had its last viewing. The





space is projected to be used for retail sales. This is not the only notable change to the property. Treasure Island went so far in its rebranding effort that it actually altered its name. The casino decided to go with Treasure Island's abbreviation, moving to the simple

yet seemingly more hip "TI." This change may have been viewed as a way to disassociate the property with children and families. As noted by Thompson et al., "As Las Vegas becomes less gambling-oriented, it will begin to look like many other resort destinations.

The danger is that potential gamblers will go to other gaming locations” (72). Gamblers may go out of their way to avoid families (Solomon 1992; Mowen 1995). Replacing the pirate show with high-end shopping is a way to re-establish connections with the tradition allure of Las Vegas—glitz, glamour, and gaming.

## Conclusion

This paper has identified eras in the Las Vegas advertising historical timeline. Family Vegas, a period experienced in the 1990s, was marked by expansive infrastructural changes and a new targeting approach. Some argue that this development was simply in the name of diversifying experiences offered to city visitors. I contend that this period represents more than that. While families may have not been the *exclusive* target market during the time, they represented a new demographic that was getting serious attention. This is notable for Las Vegas, a destination that is particularly not known for rolling out the red carpet for families with children.

This research reminds us that perceptions of place hold deep social significance. Even more than twenty years after the fact, the notion of “family Vegas” stirs up a host of reactions. Some challenge the idea that such an era ever existed. People subscribing to this camp believe that the period’s emphasis on families is overstated. Others acknowledge that the era existed, but regard it as something they would prefer to bury. During a casual conversation at UNLV, one long-time city resident suggested that, “it was an era that we like to forget.” This sentiment is thoroughly captured in a 2012 article by Vegas Seven contributor Geoff Carter. In a piece aptly titled “The Lonesome Death of Family Vegas,” Carter observes, “We blame Family Vegas for the destruction of the Sands, the Dunes, the Stardust. We proudly inform out-of-towners that we’ve been theme-park free for a decade, and that we’re back to the wholesome pursuits—booze, breasts, and blackjack—that we built our name on” (Carter, 2012). So why is this era so contentious? Defining the image of place is a political process informed by a diverse number of players.

Las Vegas is a location founded on adult-centered experiences. To challenge that image means upending an emotional attachment that many feel to the city. Playing on that attachment, LVCVA’s recent marketing approach has helped to re-center the city’s image as an adult-centered escape. Most of the casi-

nos have followed suit, effectively establishing a more unified sense of place. However, as the diverse marketing eras have shown us, competition breeds innovation. As more establishments made bids for casino licenses, Las Vegas properties will be challenged to continue their cutting-edge marketing practices.

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## About the Author

Diana Tracy Cohen is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). A graduate of the University of Florida (doctorates in Political Science and Sociology), her research focuses on the culture of endurance sport communities. Her most recent work investigates a population that she calls “Iron Dads,” men who juggle work, family, and long-course triathlon training. Dr. Cohen currently serves as the Principal Investigator for various projects with CCSU’s Center for Public Policy and Social Research.

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Founded in 1987, the Center for Gaming Research hosts scholars investigating a variety of subject areas. Located within Special Collections at UNLV's state-of-the-art Lied Library, its main resource is the Gaming Collection.

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The Center's Eadington Fellowship program, active since 2007, brings scholars from around the world to Las Vegas to perform research in Special Collections. Fellows use the Center's resources to further their study of gaming and become ambassadors for the Center and UNLV.

The Center is committed to providing support for scholarly inquiry into all aspects of gaming. We serve as an unparalleled resource for students, faculty, and independent scholars.

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In 2010, the Center for Gaming Research launched an Occasional Paper Series that publishes brief studies of gambling and casinos with a policy and public-interest orientation.

Authors include faculty affiliated with the Center for Gaming Research, particularly Eadington Fellows. As part of their residency, fellows complete a paper for the series.

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