# The WAGER, Vol. 3(29) – Repainting the town

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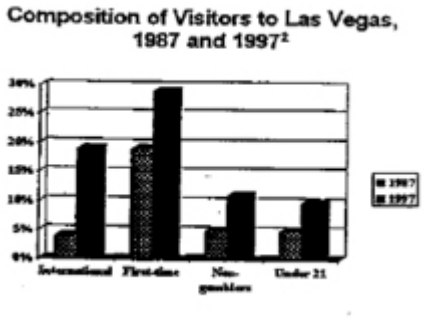
"Remember how much fun summer vacation used to be?" So reads the headline of a full color advertisement intended to tantalize this summer's USA Today readers into visiting "America's best vacation value [1]." Perhaps an ad from the National Park Service promoting Yosemite or Yellowstone? Maybe a mouse-adorned plug for Disneyworld? Nay, the destination pictured is Las Vegas and the ad is part of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority's marketing program for the summer of 1998. Yet, rather than being an adman's prescription to whitewash and repackage the Strip for a new market, the LVCVA's campaign is instead responding to an array of changes that have already had a significant impact on the city.

According to a recently released strategic report, 62% of travelers now perceive that there "is a lot more to do in Las Vegas than gambling," up from 43% in 1989 [2]. Such a shift is similarly reflected in the increase in proportion of Las Vegas visitors who do not gamble from 5% to 11% between 1987 and 1997. Anecdotal evidence also abounds. Casino magnate Steve Wynn has purchased over $285 million worth of fine art by Picasso, Degas, Cezanne, and other masters. Many will hang in private gaming rooms frequented by the international gambling elite [3].

For those-without the cash to place bets next to Van Gogh's "Woman in a Blue Dress," the plentiful offerings of the city's gargantuan buffets can be enjoyed for under $10 per head.' Compound these cultural shifts with a 41% population boom between 1990 and 1996 [5] and it is difficult to ignore the multiple metamorphoses at work in a city that boasts a downtown district ablaze with 2.1 million lights and 540,000 watts of sound [1].

Numerous theories have been expounded to explain the Las Vegas transformation. William Eadington. Director of the University of Nevada Institute for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gaming points to significant increases in the price of air fares, hotel rooms, and other attractions [6]. In a survey of people "less likely to visit" the city, 70% cited inconvenience as the most salient detractor while 28% listed price and cost. The most interesting hypotheses is

nestled among the points of the LVCVA's marketing report: By the year 2000, 90% of the U.S. population will live within 200 miles of similar gaming facility. Similarly, the number of states with legalized "casino-style" gaming has increased from 2 to 30 during the past decade. As gambling becomes less of a geographic novelty, Las Vegas has become and is now seen as an "entertainment" destination rather than merely a "gambling" venue. The large-scale local and national economic impact of the proliferation of legalized gambling is a significant issue that deserves ongoing and scholarly attention. Many of the marketing statistics described above derive from focus groups; consequently, this evidence might not be as scientifically representative as more rigorous empirical research. Nevertheless, we are bearing witness to a city that is continuing to adapt to changing conditions. It remains to be seen whether average American families en masse will pack up their mini vans and head to Las Vegas instead of Orlando, trading Minnie Mouse for Lady Luck.

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