

The WAGER, Vol. 3 (42) - Time capsule

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In March of this year, the American Academy of Political and Social Science devoted an entire issue of its journal, *The Annals*, to the study of gambling. That an established scholarly outlet would allocate 196 pages to gambling suggests that the field of gambling studies at last has established a niche in the spectrum of academic discourse. But the field is hardly nascent; in fact, the March special issue was the third *The Annals* had devoted to gambling. The first, published in May of 1950, provides a unique opportunity to learn how the post-war academic community viewed gambling. Of course, the social and political climate that produced the quotes below, is far different from the one in which the March 1998 issue was produced. In 1950, state lotteries did not exist (1), some pinball machines were still considered to be gaming devices (2), a U.S. Senator called for a national inquiry into the relationship between gambling and racketeering, and the mayor of New York City proposed the legalization of regulated sports betting (3). With this historical context in mind, critical reading can help us meditate on just how far the study of gambling has come over the past 48 years. Whereas the journal of 1950 does little to mask its anti-gambling stance, the journal of today represents a more tempered discourse. Was it the events of the past half century that prompted this change in presentation, or does this change of tone merely mirror the proliferation of gambling? We may have to wait for the next gambling-related issue of *The Annals* to obtain an answer.

Selections from the 1950 issue of *The Annals*

"Morally and legally wrong and outlawed, lotteries do more than mulct the rich and poor alike; lotteries change the very pattern of living, distort the sense of values, and incubate the eggs of crime. Examine the sociological and economic implications of the lottery and you will behold a Frankenstein monster..."¹

"To maintain a society with Christian character, we need a firm, solid foundation, with moral objectives higher than we reach on the average. Laws to prohibit gambling and especially its attendant evils set a better standard than legalization and approval of gambling, based on the vain hope that the evil, vice, and crime that pile onto such a vehicle can be controlled."⁴

"This phenomenon [the growth of the slot machine industry] is due essentially to apathy on the part of the average American towards widespread gambling and corruption. It is an apathy bordering on lawlessness, and the thriving slot-machine industry is only one of the symptoms of this moral illness."²

"Generally, the motivation of the compulsive gambler is self-destruction or rebellion."⁵

"They [gamblers] seem all to be strongly aggressive persons with huge reservoirs of unconscious hostility and resentment upon which their neurosis feeds; and chronic masturbators to boot."⁶

Sources: All articles appear in *The Annals* of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 269 (May, 1950).

1. Blanche, E.E., "Lotteries yesterday, today and tomorrow."
2. Anonymous, "Slot machines and pinball games."
3. Ploscowe, M., and Lukas, E.J. "Foreward."
4. Deland, P.S. "The Facilitation of Gambling."
5. Morehead, A.H. "The professional gambler."
6. Lindner, R.M. "The psychodynamics of gambling."