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**The Project on Vegas, *Strip cultures: finding America in Las Vegas***, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2015, 384 pp., ISBN 978-0822359678, \$27.95 (paperback).

*Strip Cultures: Finding America in Las Vegas* is a very good example of combining a travel guide with academic research and tourism marketing in action. Stacy M. Jameson, Instructor of Film/Media at the University of Rhode Island; Karen Klugman, photographer and Chair of the Art Department at the Hopkins School in New Haven, Connecticut; Jane Kuenz, Associate Professor of English at the University of Southern Maine; and Susan Willis, Associate Professor of Literature at Duke University, put together an interdisciplinary group of scholars called *The Project on Vegas*, and set off for a research trip to the entertainment capital of the world.”

While I was reading the book, I remembered my travel to Las Vegas in 2002, as part of a long tour in California, Nevada and Arizona. Like the trip itself, this is a book that readers would not want to rush through, because they would miss the “experience and fun” of the whole adventure. The authors have masterfully balanced the various elements of the very distinctive local Vegas-distinct culture, without taking a judgmental approach; on the contrary, they totally acknowledge and respect the uniqueness of the destination. Las Vegas is an escapeland and this fact functions as a compass for the team of academic colleagues/authors that have undertaken this project.

The introduction provides coherence to the book, and evokes strong imagery, taking readers by a double-decker bus via the famous “Strip” and making specific reference to the atmosphere while aboard and also to those particular elements that impress the visitors. Right from the beginning, I had the feeling I was back in Vegas again, as Susan Willis offer a very vibrant description of the hop-on / hop-off bus experience.

The first chapter presents the main characteristics that comprise the Vegas reality, showing that human values, relations and man-made structures formulate the Vegas entertainment product, based on the logic that everything is for sale; commoditized aspects of love/sex, porn, music and a mismatched collection of hotels that could be part of a theme park, but, no, it is the center of an American city! Based on Karen's Klugman portraits, this commoditization of authentic values is served as the most original aspect of fake illustrations! Also, Vegas is the place where visitors behave differently than they would normally do, and rules of social interaction are vastly determined by the professionals who try to make a living by entertaining the crowds wandering the Strip.

Chapter 2 focusses on the various gambling "opportunities" provided. Susan Willis takes a critical stance describing the potentially harmful effects of the gambling experience in the luxurious halls of casinos. Interiors, exteriors and all man-made systems that create the built environment are meant to keep the tourists spending money. The Strip is a system specifically designed to recycle players throughout Vegas' numerous casinos and, thus, the rest of businesses support this 'mission'. All about Vegas is the commoditization of every aspect of life as a product of the gambling experiences offered. However, the author implies that this is part of the game: stepping into the well-designed casinos means that individuals should recognize the fact that the casino is the temple of consumerism and wasting/sacrificing resources (including oneself) is the price one would pay to be there.

Chapter 3 makes a specific reference to surveillance and the role of it in casinos' operations. However, it implies that monitoring customers is not mainly happening for protecting them from external dangers, but mainly for checking on their behavior and choices while gambling and moving within the casino, thus imposing casinos' regulations and protecting business interests.

The importance of water usage in creating a sense of abundance in such a parched place as is the case for Las Vegas was nicely described by Stacy Jameson in Chapter 4. After a general reference to the history of water in Nevada, it is clarified that access to water is a very serious matter that may categorize visitors accordingly. This is because water supply and management are very expensive activities and require high investments. Thus, although it may seem that a lot of water is wasted, the author argues that most water used is recycled and there is a continuous effort to ensure that the consumption of fresh water is kept to a minimum.

Various attractions and entertainment opportunities are presented in Chapter 5, however, the point here is that art is a commodity, an additional product to enhance visitors' experience in Las Vegas. Chapter 6 provides details about food consumption at hotels, the overloaded buffets and shows that Las Vegas may offer everything a person may wish for. This presents a message that capitalism makes it possible to enjoy a rich variety of pleasurable goods and experiences. Chapter 7 is all about structuring casinos and servicescapes to seduce visitors' senses with stimuli such as sounds, smells, tastes, and opportunities to touch and feel. Therefore, the goal is to amplify the effects of the surroundings and activities taking place to influence their perceptions and experience evaluation. Then, chapter 8 moves on to showing man-made structures around the "Strip" that provide an illusion of natural environment through artificial industry-developed elements, which is tourists' and residents best chance to improve the image they hold about Vegas' built environment. Chapter 9 deals with various aspects of consumerism in America by presenting some insights of how people shape a postmodern perspective of community and well-being that are adapted to the qualities of modern world. Weddings is a topic one would expect to be covered in a book about Las Vegas, and the authors indeed discuss this in chapter 10. Here, they show that even important events which traditionally involve very serious decision- making are treated like another transitory and

pleasurable experience or happening and is part of the game in this city. Finally, chapter 11 refers to visitors' willingness to take something back home with them as souvenir that would remind them their experience in Las Vegas. Again, consumerism is the predominant theory here too, since visitors prefer to purchase cheap items manufactured in other parts of the world, instead of creating their own original memories.

All in all, this volume is itself a great collection of experiences that presents an accurate portrait of Las Vegas and its lifestyle, while at the same time problematizing and analyzing the ways in which such imaginaries of Las Vegas are co-produced between locals, tourists, landscapes, and machines. By observing various aspects of life there and using the amalgam of pictures, feelings and actions, the authors produce a well-balanced critique on popular Las Vegas. A dynamic writing style has been adopted that offers the reader a feeling of actually living the whole experience; that is why this book is a highly recommended read for tourism destination researchers looking for a starting point on alternate tourism destination products, and anybody that may want to formulate a spherical and critical view of the Las Vegas visiting experience.

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