



People of Chance: Gambling in American Society from Jamestown to Las Vegas

John M. Findlay

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In 1978 the Reverend Billy Graham himself consecrated Las Vegas's place in the American cultural mainstream by taking his "crusade for Christ" there. He found the resort "a nice place to visit," and pointed out that, while he did not gamble himself, the Bible said nothing definitive against the practice.

This book is a social history of American gambling in a series of frontier settings ranging from seventeenth-century Jamestown to twentieth-century Nevada. The book points out the affinity between gambling and frontiers, showing how both thrived on high expectations, risk-taking, opportunism and movement, and both helped to shape a distinctive culture.

The first half of the book paints a vivid picture of gambling in the colonial and early national frontiers, on the Mississippi River, and in the California Gold Rush. Findlay describes how in the nineteenth century professional gamblers, operating in towns and riverboats along the Mississippi, popularized casino games, and then tells how these gaming practices were transported to the mining frontiers of the Far West. The second half of the book traces Las Vegas' rise as America's ultimate resort. The culmination of almost four centuries of westward migration and chance-taking by Americans, Las Vegas represents a link between America's frontier past and the contemporary values of the Sunbelt culture.

About the Author:

John J. Findlay is Assistant Professor of United States History at the Pennsylvania State University.

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