

Gamblers...

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most forms of the lottery. In the South, wagering lingered on and in 1868 Louisiana formed a lottery to pay for reconstruction costs of the events of the Civil War. This was accepted as the country's only legal lottery and eventually all the states participated with their own.

Progressive reformers set up shop to rid cities and towns of various "vice" operations such as saloons, racetracks and card parlors. Ministers preached against the "sin" of gambling and drinking and the states gradually began to outlaw much of this activity.

With the Great Depression, state governments began to review their prejudice against games and gambling. In 1930, to develop new revenue sources, Nevada legalized casino gambling. In the next ten years, 22 states had legalized racetrack betting. As this opened the "vice" door a crack, illegal gambling began to flourish and some of these "underground" operations were as organized and open as legal ones. Rainbow Lodge, near the Sierra summit in California, had a "back room" of table gaming and slots that were "overlooked" by law enforcement.

Church bingo was essentially illegal, but that didn't prevent it from becoming the most popular form of gambling in America by 1950. A 1941 Gallup poll found that 24% of those surveyed were regular bingo players. The total amounts wagered became so substantial that salivating politicians came up with ideas for legalizing bingo and reviving state or federal-sponsored lotteries so the politicians could have a piece of the action. In 1963, New Hampshire created a statewide lottery and the country again would have at least one legal lottery. The gaming door opened wider as public opinion shifted toward acceptance. "If gambling is morally wrong, my God, how can government be operating it," asked Frank Fahrenhopf, President and CEO of the American Gaming Association.

Of course, revenue-eager politicians readily grasped the significance of more public acceptance of this "vice" as an all-American pastime. In 1941, the foundation of Las Vegas of the pleasure palace Xanadu was begun with the building of El Rancho Vegas Casino in the warm suburban style its name epitomized. Located just a few miles from the city and near the highway leading to Los Angeles, it proved

to be an attractive pleasure destination for Angelinos and other Southern Californians. Mobsters moved in and targeted high rollers as customers, not grandmothers from the Midwest. In 1967, the Nevada legislature legalized publicly-traded companies to hold gambling licenses and the commercial casino industry began.

Over the following 10-15 years a rise in crime, extortion and murder placed a dark cloud over Vegas with the Nevada legislature finally legislating to shift the Mob into the background, where they remain to fund expansion and even finance Indian tribal casino start-ups in California and Arizona. The tribes are the "fronts" and, as they are sovereign nations, they can persuade legislators and the public that the "Indian Casino" is helping to lift the livelihood and economy of the "first Americans," which to date has played quite well on the public conscience. To wit—more casino expansions are approved.

Bingo rising. Prior to the early 1970s, bingo was illegal, but tolerated, in most states and operated mostly by churches where authorities tolerated this ignoring of the law. However, some states began to legalize the game so as to better regulate it and to also grab a cut of the proceeds.

Legal bingo was a small-stakes operation. In Florida during the 1970s, jackpots were limited to \$100 and charitable and civic groups could hold games just two nights a week. The Florida Seminole Indians decided to get into the action in 1979. Because they were a sovereign nation, its leaders believed, they would not be constrained by the state's bingo regulations. With outside investor help and a white-owned management company, the Seminoles opened a 1,200 seat bingo hall in Hollywood, Florida and offered games every day with nightly prizes totaling up to \$60,000.

Local law enforcement officials tried to clamp down on the operation resulting in a series of law suits. The courts, each time, ruled in favor of the Indians. Since the state permitted bingo, under some conditions, the issue was considered a civil matter and the Seminoles were allowed to exercise their sovereignty and set their own rules.

In 1987, the US Supreme Court came to a similar conclusion in a case of the Cabazon band of Mission Indians in California. From that, tribes everywhere realized they could pretty much offer any kind of gambling they wished as long as the state permitted it under the

same conditions. If Vegas-style blackjack and roulette were okay at local civic fundraisers, then Indian tribes and their backers (mobsters?) could have wide-open casinos. This has happened. Today there are 400 tribal casinos in 30 states. California alone has 53—and counting.

The anti-sin community has not taken this lying down, however. Preachers have devoted sermons to "serfs of Satan" with admonition to gamblers abandoning wives and children, etc. They point out advancing crime rates, robbery, etc. to finance this (gaming) addiction. Gambling opponents approach the subject in terms of economics and public policy. Leading this attack are social conservatives such as Phyllis Schafly and James Dobson. Other conservatives, who are the money trough recipients from casinos, such as Tom DeLay, Ralph Reed and Americans For Tax Reform President Grover Narquist, do not see the vice of gambling. Money soothes a lot of pain.

Each side has compiled statistics that support their cases to the detriment of the opposing view. If the gaming industry really is having a devastating impact on American culture, to the general public its a yawn. A March, 2004 Gallup lifestyle poll found only 6% of the surveyed found gambling a family problem. So, Americans continue to enjoy the roll of the dice.

— Wally Reemelin

Data from Reason Magazine



Definitions . . .

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Capitalism, American style:

You have two cows. You sell one, buy a bull, and build a herd of cows.

Democracy, American Style:

You have two cows. The government taxes you to the point you have to sell both to support a man in a foreign country who has only one cow, which was a gift from your government.

Bureaucracy, American Style:

You have two cows. The government takes them both, shoots one, milks the other, pays you for the milk, and then pours the milk down the drain.

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