

The Generic Spectacle

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

The completion of the CityCenter resort on the Las Vegas Strip in 2009 by MGM Resorts marks the single largest privately funded development in American history. It also marks a departure from all-encompassing themes of kitsch, masquerading as a self-sustaining city with condominium towers, an extensive public art program and a fire station. However, the development ultimately fails to deliver on its touted claims of a “pedestrian focused urban plan”, devoid of the essential public amenities that allow cities to meet the needs of its citizens.

French theorist Guy Debord prefigures this subsequent downgrading of ‘having’ into merely ‘appearing’ within contemporary capitalist society with the release of *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967. During the same time period, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour would release *Learning from Las Vegas*, identifying the increased prominence of the sign within the emerging “American commercial vernacular”. Rem Koolhaas followed with ‘Relearning from Las Vegas’ in 2001, a study of the Las Vegas Strip comparing then-and-now along with an accompanying text in which he credits *Learning from Las Vegas* as the first in a trend of books about cities. In the accompanying text, Koolhaas also states that the seminal study was “a manifesto for the shift from substance to sign...decipher[ing] the impact of substance on culture”.

This culminates in what I am proposing as “The Generic Spectacle”, a hypothesis that describes the widespread proliferation of Las Vegas Strip-style urbanism in countless contemporary city centres. The writings of Guy Debord and Rem Koolhaas will comprise a framework in which the development

of the region will be theorized, supported with contributions from the fields of economics, sociology, and geography. Subsequently, the history of development in the Las Vegas region will be divided into three distinct parts in order to define the pre-existing conditions that generate The Generic Spectacle.

The first includes the foundations of the spectacle as defined by Debord, with the aligning of State and economic interests alongside incessant technological renewal. It will be argued that the modernist concept of 'tabula rasa' would underscore these two foundations. Secondly, the widespread liberalization that occurred in postwar America would reinforce Las Vegas as the centre of resurgent capitalism with a service-based leisure economy as its primary vehicle. A powerful convergence of capital would give rise to increasing monopolization and result in an all-encompassing resort campus building typology. Finally, the manufacturing of fantasy inherent in the themed environments of the Strip serve to obscure a troubling duality of freedom, one that is reinforced by the close proximity of Las Vegas and the United States Air Force. A prevailing sense of destruction is apparent throughout the history of the region with the constant razing of buildings for larger resorts and the systematic dismantling of a collective public under the ongoing processes of neoliberalism.

Through a review of the development of the Las Vegas Strip, this thesis will theorize convergence, the erasure of labour and historical context along with the broader implications of The Generic Spectacle as it pertains to the fields of architecture and urbanism.

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Finally, a heartfelt thank you to my partner Francisco-Fernando Granados for your encouragement and compassion throughout this process. Your ambition and our ongoing dialogue inspire me in so many ways.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my loving parents Andrea and Bruce Kraler, who celebrated their honeymoon in Las Vegas on New Years Eve 1986.

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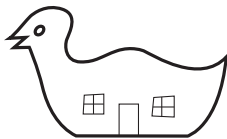
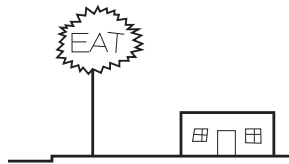
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1. Introduction

The 1960s would be an influential decade in the development of the Las Vegas Strip, both in its physical transformation and its positioning as an economic powerhouse. At the behest of American business tycoon Howard Robard Hughes Jr., the accumulation of numerous Las Vegas properties began, resulting in an increasingly consolidated ownership that would yield tremendous political influence in the years to follow. The much derided leisure economy would become a legitimate industry. The construction of Jay Sarno's Caesars Palace in 1966 also introduced sophisticated all-encompassing themes that came to define the Strip. In its meticulously detailed splendor, the sprawling resort campus would significantly advance the building typology with a complex programmatic mix that dominated its competitors in size and revenue generation. A year after the opening of Caesars Palace, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour arrived in Las Vegas with a group of students from the Yale School of Architecture. The group embarked on an ambitious survey of the new "American commercial vernacular", documenting the largely dismissed building typology that had emerged around the proliferation of the automobile. These studies were later published as *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), positioning the Strip's "low-brow" populist buildings as a subject worthy of study amongst architects just as the pop-art movement had embraced crass commercialism.



Figure 5: *Learning from Las Vegas* classified two building typologies; two variations of the “decorated shed” (Top & Middle) and the “duck” (Bottom).



Two building typologies were defined in the book with the first declared as “the decorated shed”, a building “where systems of space and structure are directly at the service of program, and ornament is applied independently of them” (**Figure 1**) (Venturi et al. 1972, 87). The second typology was defined as “the duck”, a building “where the architectural systems of space, structure, and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form” (**Figure 2**) (Venturi et al. 1972, 87). The duck received its name from the *Long Island Duckling*, a duck-shaped drive-in photographed by Peter Blake. These two terms would identify the growing prominence of the sign within commercial building (**Figure 5**). A slimmer, revised paperback edition was released in 1977 becoming more widely circulated as a result of its increased portability and reduced cost. In a testament to its widespread influence, *Learning from Las Vegas* spawned countless essays from a wide range of authors and several follow-up publications including that of architect Rem Koolhaas in the *Harvard Design Guide to Shopping* (2001).

Entitled “Relearning from Las Vegas”, the study led by Koolhaas was a side-by-side comparison of the Strip then-and-now, documenting the dramatic transformation of the Strip that had occurred during the 1990s. The accompanying text consisted of an interview with Venturi and Scott Brown themselves, in which Koolhaas praises their initial study as the first in a trend of books about cities, citing their influence in the creation of his own seminal text, *Delirious New York*. Koolhaas also noted that their work was “a manifesto for the shift from substance to sign...decipher[ing] the impact of substance on culture” (Obrist & Koolhaas 2001, 593).

French theorist Guy Debord similarly observed the subsequent downgrading of *having* into merely *appearing* within contemporary capitalist society in the 1960s, warning that social relationships between people had unwittingly become mediated by mere images. Published in 1967, Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* was written at the time when the initial survey of the Las Vegas Strip was being conducted, highlighting similar developments. Debord drew from Marxist theory to define the spectacle as “capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image”, exerting increased control over people’s lives to further consumption (Debord 1994, Thesis 34). However, unlike *Learning from Las Vegas* and Koolhaas’ subsequent work, Debord remained highly skeptical of the growing influence of the image, denouncing its reinforcement of class divisions and the exploitation of the working-class proletariat.

Several studies of the Las Vegas region have addressed its unique demographic and political characteristics, mostly

from a sociological and historical perspective (Gottdiener et al. 1999; Denton & Morris 2001; Rothman 2002). However, the fields of architecture and urbanism have largely remained detached from critical analysis and questioning its role in perpetuating these social, economic, and political implications. For instance, *Learning in Las Vegas* released by the Yale School of Architecture as a followup to the original study, presented a series of student design proposals for a new hotel resort. The publication included commentary from developers and casino owners boasting about the future development potential of the Strip with input from a former mayor of the city (Rappaport 2010). The only criticism offered was the need for more pedestrian friendly spaces which was conveniently addressed in the marketing for the recently completed CityCenter development.

The Las Vegas Strip

Primarily refers to a concentration of casino/hotel resorts that populate the South Las Vegas Boulevard from Sunset Road to Sahara Avenue, just outside of Las Vegas city limits.

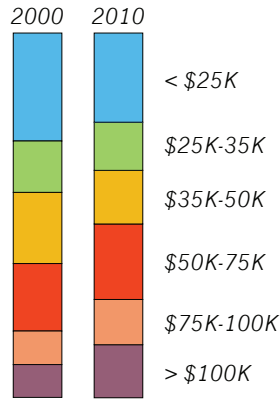
This thesis will attempt to consider the Las Vegas Strip as a serious urban precedent. The Strip will be examined as the core of the region, operating as the perpetrator of spectacular urbanism. The works of both Guy Debord and Rem Koolhaas will form a theoretical framework in which the development of the region will be analyzed with support from the fields of economics, sociology, and geography. This culminates in what I am proposing as “The Generic Spectacle”, a hypothesis that can be utilized to describe the widespread proliferation of Las Vegas Strip-style urbanism in countless contemporary city centres.

The history of development in Las Vegas will be segmented into three distinct parts with the intent to define the condition that generates the Generic Spectacle. The first includes the foundations of the spectacle as defined by Debord and Anselm Jappe, crucial to recognizing the influence of the society of the spectacle in urban development. Secondly, the widespread liberalization that occurred in postwar America which would reinforce Las Vegas as the centre of a resurgent capitalist economy, predicated on the sophistication of a leisure economy led by organized crime syndicates. We will end with the neoliberal processes that would topple the reign of organized crime in the region, placing control firmly in the hands of corporations and the resulting transformation of the Strip. A prevailing destruction weaves its way throughout the history of development in Las Vegas, signified by the close relationship to the military and the constant razing of buildings to make way for larger campus resorts. This wholesale destruction of properties would result in a clear break with history, of which Debord and Koolhaas have diverging outlooks. Koolhaas for instance, is optimistic about the increased accessibility of a city without history to newcomers, while Debord is concerned that this break results in the diminished social mobility of the working class.

Figure 6: Comparisons of household income for Clark County residents and tourists both show an expanding lower-to-middle income population. US Census, LVCVA Visitor Profile

Household Income

Clark County Resident



Tourist

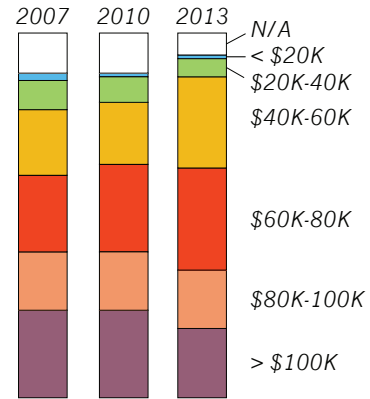
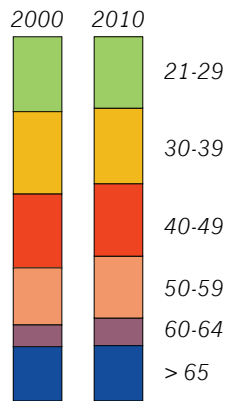


Figure 7: Age group comparisons between Clark County residents and tourists, showing a decrease in visits from retirees, traditionally the largest demographic of tourists. US Census, LVCVA Visitor Profile

Age

Clark County Resident



Tourist

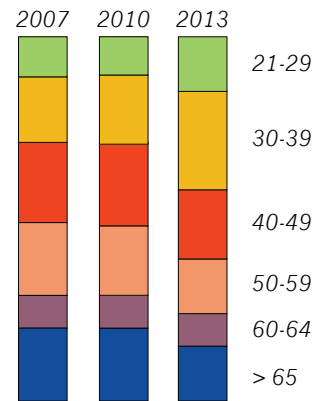
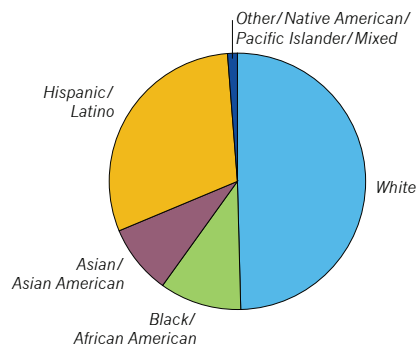


Figure 8: A comparison of ethnicity between Clark County residents and tourists indicates a dramatically more diverse local population than tourist population. US Census, LVCVA Visitor Profile

Ethnicity

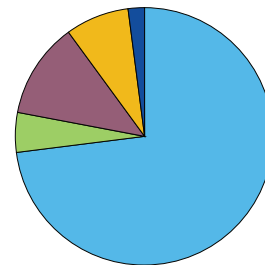
Clark County Resident

2010 US Census



Tourist

2013 Voluntary Survey



Given this analysis, it is crucial that race relations throughout the history of Las Vegas be included as well. This discussion will allow the reader to begin to understand the mechanisms that perpetuate difference and reinforce the oppressive hierarchies of power that is imposed by the society of the spectacle through architecture and urbanism. Ruth Wilson Gilmore states that racism is a product of the “fatally dynamic coupling of power and difference.” She also highlights the potential for capitalist crises to be exploited by radical activism for “liberatory ends” (2002, 15 & 22). Throughout the history of Las Vegas, it is apparent that architecture largely perpetuates systems of power and difference through tools such as segregation, restricted access, and the enclosure of public space.

(1) Fredric Jameson introduced the “vanishing mediator” as “...a catalytic agent which permits an exchange of energies between two otherwise mutually exclusive terms” as well as “a bearer of change and social transformation, only to be forgotten once that change has ratified the reality of the institutions.” Jameson, Fredric. “The Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber.” *New German Critique*, No. 1 (Winter, 1973), 52-89.

A demographic comparison reveals an obvious disjuncture between tourists and residents, calling into question how the Strip is experienced for various groups and how difference is perpetuated (**Figure 8**). The intersections of race relations and the Marxist proletariat will reveal these often obscured histories and formulate a more nuanced understanding of the social implications of development in Las Vegas.

On a final note, this thesis will avoid clichéd debates about postmodern architecture in Las Vegas. Aron Vinegar and Michael Golec have challenged the problematic notion of labelling *Learning from Las Vegas* as a manifesto for postmodern architecture. Instead they position the text as an in-between or a “vanishing mediator”, operating as a catalyst between modernism and postmodernism, eventually dissipating (Vinegar & Golec 2009, 2). (1) Venturi and Scott Brown have also rejected the designation of *Learning from Las Vegas* as a postmodernist manifesto (Obrist & Koolhaas 2001, 593). Instead, this thesis will embark on a review of the history of development in Las Vegas and apply theoretical reasoning and analysis in order to uncover the broader implications of its architecture and urban design.

2. Foundations of the Spectacle

The Strip as a spectacular form of urbanism would date back to the settlement of the Las Vegas Valley, satisfying the needs of the spectacle society. Anselm Jappe identifies the two foundations of the spectacle as “incessant technological renewal” and the “integration of State and economy” in his analysis of Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* (Jappe 1999, 7).

The formation of the Las Vegas Strip is dependent on the acceleration of movement resulting from the constant technological renewal of transportation. Established by various histories in a hostile desert climate, the valley would grow as a space of passage. As the economy came to rely on tourism as its prime industry, the introduction of the railroad, automobile and eventually air travel, significantly altering regional development with each advancement. A pervasive ‘tabula rasa’ condition or the literal clearing of the slate would arise as it facilitated rapid development and renewal in response to the acceleration of travel. The myth of Las Vegas as a frontier ripe for development, uninhabited by Indigenous populations, proved appealing to early Spanish and American explorers. This conception would be reinforced in the early settlement of downtown Las Vegas as it fashioned itself as an old Frontier Town with a main street populated by falsefront stores and saloon style establishments catering to tourists travelling through via the railroad. This portrayal of Las Vegas would continue well into the 1950s with themes of cowboys and Native American cultures that existed to reinforce the fantasies of East Coast travellers.



Figure 9: Timeline of Overlapping Historical Events in the Development of the Las Vegas Strip (1945 - 2010). Moehring & Green 2005, onlinenevada.org, LVCVA.com, Morningstar U.S. Andex Chart 2015

Falsefront Facade

A facade extending beyond and especially above the true dimensions of a building to give it a more imposing appearance. (Merriam-Webster.com)

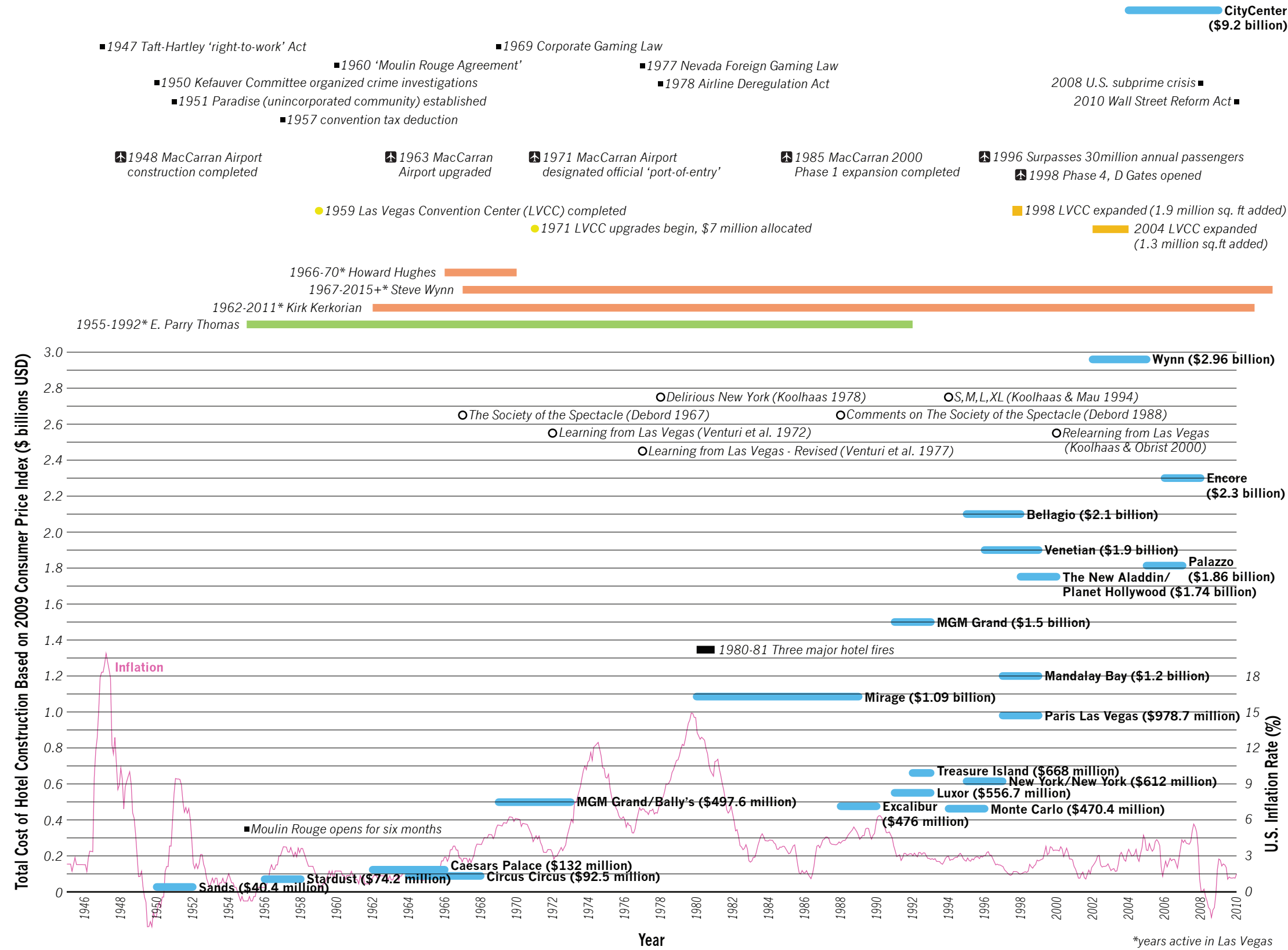
The integration of State and economy would also become increasingly apparent as the Las Vegas Strip was designated a township without municipal governance in the 1950s, clearing the way for constant development. Developers were granted increased powers in shaping the region as they began to control traditionally public services like wastewater treatment or garbage collection. As the Strip gained increased powers, its developers became an integral part of shaping American politics with generous political campaign contributions and empty promises to fund construction projects for an increasingly depleted public sector.

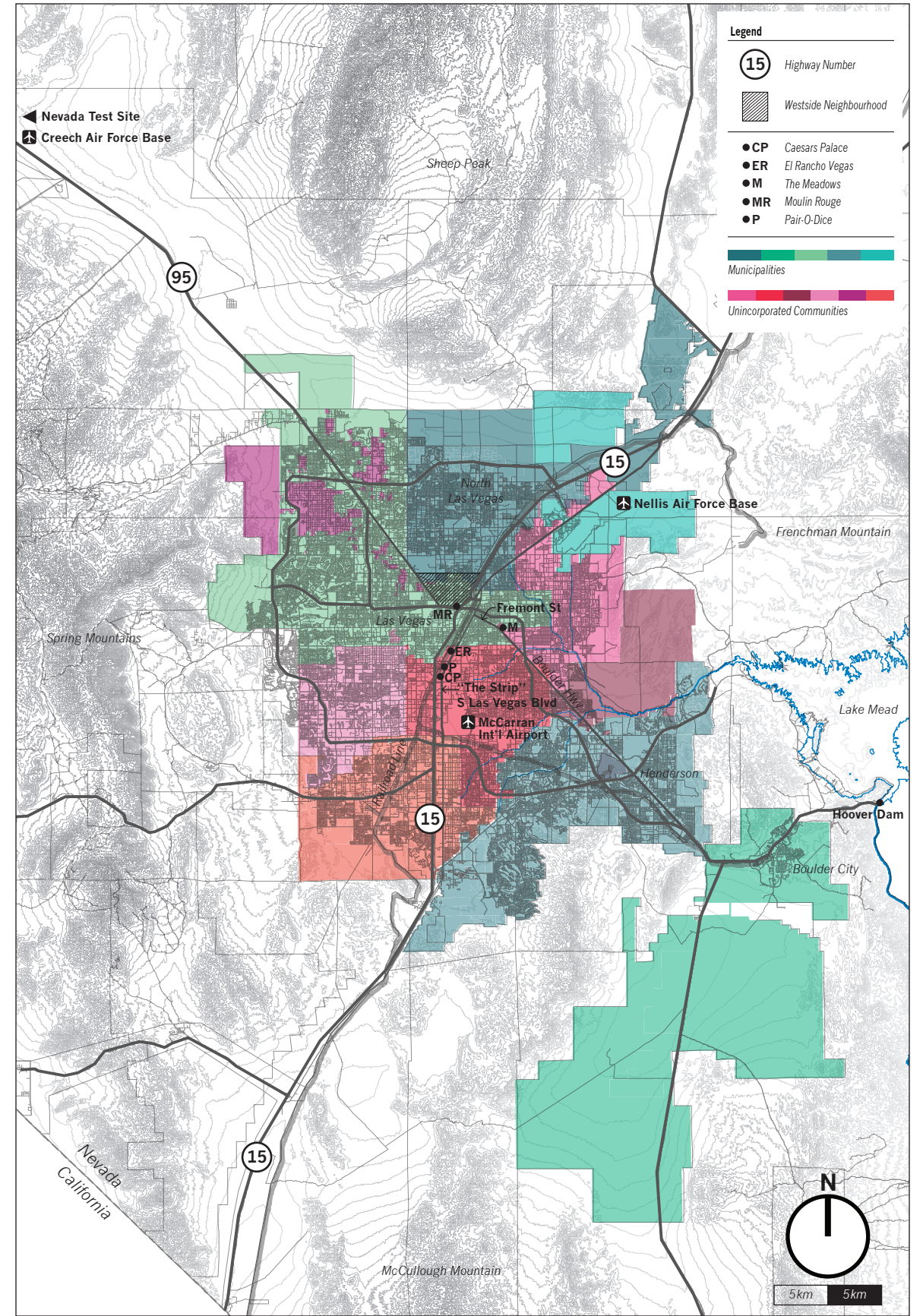
This designation would also secure the Strip as the new economic centre of the region transitioning development away from Fremont Street in downtown Las Vegas. The construction of several new resorts on the Strip in the 1950s provided increased visitor capacity that downtown businesses simply could not accommodate. A new interstate highway through the region would also impede direct access to the downtown core for several years as a result of construction delays and lengthy bureaucratic decision-making processes. Sure enough, traffic would be diverted to the Strip as it became an appealing alternative. The Strip would eventually overtake Fremont Street as it accommodated the integration of State and economy under the absence of a municipal governing body and continually adapted to incessant technological renewal (**Figure 9**).

The location of the Strip also reinforced notions of the tabula rasa, clearing the way for new development and increased capacity. The concept of the tabula rasa gained increased resonance with the onslaught of modernist architecture at the time. Just as Le Corbusier had boldly proposed in his Villa Radieuse project to raze entire blocks of Paris' historic city centre for the construction of high-rise apartment blocks, the Las Vegas Strip would position itself as an idealized blank slate with no affinity for preserving buildings.

Rem Koolhaas contemplates the potential of the “nothingness” perpetuated by the tabula rasa produced after the widespread adoption of modernism in his 1994 essay, “Whatever Happened to Urbanism?” (1994c). In “The Generic City”, he observes that interchangeable buildings without identities or histories are much easier to demolish, eliciting a pervasive condition of renewal in the drive to continuously generate profit (1994b). This constant renewal of development dependent on technologies of movement along with deregulation in the form of lax municipal governance aligns with the State with the powers of the market function as two key foundations of the Las Vegas Strip as the spectacle society.

TRUMAN EISENHOWER JFK JOHNSON NIXON FORD CARTER REAGAN H.W. BUSH CLINTON W. BUSH OBAMA





Space of Passage (700AD-1911)

Figure 10: Regional Map
Indicating Significant Historical
Developments. Clark County
GIS Info, Google Maps

Situated on a flat stretch of desert land surrounded by the Sheep, McCullough, Frenchman and Spring Mountains in Southern Nevada, the Las Vegas Valley would be formed as a place of persistent passage (**Figure 10**). At various points throughout its history, the valley facilitated intersecting flows of people, capital, and water, resulting in a region of constant flux. For instance, the stemming of the flow of water in the nearby Colorado River with the construction of the Hoover Dam fostered an accelerated flow of people and, by extension, capital. No only would the dam provide fresh water and electricity, it also served as a tourist destination drawing people into the region. The progression of transportation technology would also be instrumental in moving people at greater speeds, influencing the production of spaces on the Las Vegas Strip as result.

This relationship would be first noted in *Learning from Las Vegas*, which recognized the influence of movement by automobile in generating a new architectural form in the 1960s. This new architecture relied on bold communication visible at high-speeds over vast distances, relegating the building to serve merely pragmatic functions of shelter and program while the façade and roadside sign grew in prominence (Venturi et al. 1972, 9). More specifically, “casino fronts on the Strip often inflect in shape and ornament toward the right, to welcome right-lane traffic” (Venturi et al. 1972, 35). However, the connection of movement to architecture is not entirely exclusive to the era of the automobile in Las Vegas. The region has historically relied on continuous movement and passage, largely a result of its geographical positioning and inhospitable desert climate.

Dating back to as early as 700 A.D., an indigenous Paiute population would establish a presence in the area (Moehring & Green 2005, 2). They moved throughout the region in response to seasonal variations, spending summers in the nearby mountains and winters in the valley when temperatures were more forgiving, scouring the arid landscape for scarce food sources. The construction of their wickiups would accommodate this seasonal movement with the shelters often comprised of branches, grasses and other local resources that could be quickly assembled and dismantled (**Figure 11**) (Moehring & Green 2005, 2). This seasonal passage however, would be interrupted by an 1829 expedition by Spanish explorer and trader Antonio Armijo, who had ventured off the Old Spanish Trail in search of a shorter route to Los Angeles. The expedition designated the valley as “las vegas”, Spanish for “the meadows,” to describe the freshwater artesian springs that had produced a marshy basin

Figure 11: Southern Paiutes constructed their wickiups from branches, grasses and other local resources that facilitated seasonal movement between the mountains and desert valley.
Utah Division of State History



in the desert (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 2). This shortcut would bring increased traffic through the region, including American federal explorer Captain John C. Frémont in 1844. Frémont documented the area with a team of cartographers that would encourage the region's settlement despite the presence of Native Americans and Mexicans, whom he disdained (Moehring & Green 2005, 4).

This route of passage would be further reinforced by the arrival of Mormon missionaries in 1855 just after the United States had annexed the land. The missionaries settled the land as a rest stop along the Utah-to-California trade route. An adobe fort was built on a natural bench in the otherwise flat basin, providing a vantage point from which they could be protect themselves against attacks (Moehring & Green 2005, 4). They introduced new crops to the Paiutes and attempted to convert them to Mormonism while attempting to mine lead in the nearby Potosi Mountain. However, the missionaries would leave after just three years when it was discovered that the lead they had discovered was not pure and that the land was too arid to grow crops.

Ohioan Octavius Decatur Gass, acquired the abandoned fort and built a ranch, which would be turned over to his wife Helen Stewart shortly after his death in 1884 (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 2). She would continue to work the land with hired help and provided rest for travellers and postal services that passed through the area. Montana Senator William Clark purchased part of the land in 1902 from Stewart with the intent of developing a town around his San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad, further reinforcing the route to California. When the construction of his railroad began in 1904, Clark announced that he would soon be auctioning off lots to railroad workers (PBS, "People & Events").

Further establishing property rights in the region, Surveyor, J.T. McWilliams acquired land just opposite of the tracks from Clark in anticipation of future growth. Clark counteracted with an aggressive campaign to lure prospective buyers to the area for the land auction by offering full refunds on train fare (PBS, "People & Events"). To further undercut his competitor, Clark also formed the Las Vegas Land and Water Company, which had exclusive water rights for the area and would provide infrastructure construction and maintenance. Without access to clean water or proper sanitation, McWilliam's townsite would ultimately fail. By May 1905, over 3000 people had arrived for the land auction, escalating demand for lots and speculation, resulting in large profits for Clark (PBS, "People & Events"). Helen Stewart also provided 10 acres of downtown land to the Paiutes after they had been mostly dispossessed of their land by this point. The Las Vegas Indian Colony would be formed on this parcel of land, creating a small "town within a town", ultimately restricting the tribe to a designated area and fixing their movements (PBS, "People & Events"). The construction of a grandiose railway at the head of Fremont Street reinforced its status as the town's main street. Since it was aligned perpendicularly to the station it became the primary axis for the city's infrastructural development. As a key stakeholder in the railroad business and the largest private landowner in Nevada, William Clark together with Las Vegas politician Ed Clark (of no relation), would lobby the state legislature to form Clark County in 1909. This would shift the seat of power to Las Vegas and establish it as the political and economic centre of the newly formed county (Moehring & Green 2005, 26). Two years later, Las Vegas became an incorporated city in an attempt to provide more sophisticated infrastructure to a rapidly expanding population, attracting attention from federal legislators.

Federal Funding and the “Spatial Fix”

In the 1920s many Las Vegas politicians advocated for investment in the emerging interstate highway system in order to alleviate its dependence on the railroad. A railroad maintenance shop had recruited 400-800 workers who settled in town and frequented Fremont Street businesses. Las Vegas had earned a reputation as “one of the strongest pro-union cities on the Union Pacific line” partly resulting in a bitter six-year strike over wages (Moehring & Green 2005, 61). Sure enough, disgruntled railroad executives threatened to relocate its locomotive repair shops elsewhere and eventually left in 1927. However, local State senate representative E. W. Griffith successfully campaigned for the new highway to be routed through the city, connecting Las Vegas to both Southern California and Arizona and provided a quicker route for weekend tourists. Land speculation continued to rise as a result, reinforcing the Strip as the economic centre of the region, fuelling further urban development. As Reyner Banham observed in Los Angeles, freeways would come to shape the city, not buildings, with its urban and architectural vernacular a result of movement (Banham 1971, 183-193). Continuing the history of passage through the region, existing rail lines would largely be replaced by the construction of freeways in both Los Angeles and Las Vegas, further accelerating modes of passage. In another instance of fixing capital through the construction of an immobile interstate highway system ensured further mobility of capital, spurring accumulation and economic growth of the cities connected by the highway.

At this point, it is critical to introduce David Harvey’s concept of the “spatial fix” to understand the restriction of certain flows to accelerate others. Harvey develops the concept of the “fix” by highlighting the multitude of meanings for the term. Beyond the meaning of simply securing something into place, a fix can also mean to “fix a problem” by returning something to its original working order. This second definition also contains a “metaphorical derivative, as in ‘the drug addict needs a fix’, in which it is the burning desire to relieve a chronic or pervasive problem that is the focus of meaning” (Harvey 2001, 24). It is this second meaning that Harvey chooses to focus his study of capitalism’s demand for sustained geographic expansion. He notes that as in the case of the drug addict, “that the resolution is temporary rather than permanent since the craving soon returns” (2001, 24). Capitalism is ‘addicted’ to geographical expansion and economic growth, requiring more fixes for its inherent crises, propelling the invention of new technologies to speed accumulation. The invention of the locomotive would promote geographic expansion and settlement of the American

west. In the drive to increase accumulation, the advancement of technology fuelled by capital investment would result in the proliferation of the automobile, facilitating further ease of travel. It becomes apparent that the fix implemented by the advancement of technology only yields a temporary resolution. New fixes are required in order to satiate capitalist demand for sustained growth.

Harvey also notes that:

...capitalism has to fix space (in immoveable structures of transport and communication nets, as well as in built environments of factories, roads, houses, water supplies, and other physical infrastructures) in order to overcome space (achieve a liberty of movement through low transport and communication costs). This leads to one of the central contradictions of capital: that it has to build a fixed space (or “landscape”) necessary for its own functioning at a certain point in its history only to have to destroy that space (and devalue much of the capital invested therein) at a later point in order to make way for a new “spatial fix” (openings for fresh accumulation in new spaces and territories) at a later point in its history. (2001, 25)

Not only would federal interest in abundant Nevada mineral deposits including magnesium, gold, silver, oil, zinc, copper, lead, tungsten and iron keep the state afloat during the First World War, federal investment in the Hoover Dam project would sustain development throughout the Great Depression (PBS, “People & Events”). ‘Fixing’ federal funds in the construction of a dam for instance, restricted the flow of the Colorado River in order to generate abundant electricity and fresh water resources that would facilitate further accumulation of capital.

The promise of the federally funded Boulder Dam project, later renamed the Hoover Dam in 1947, secured Las Vegas as a safe haven for investors during the depressed markets of the Great Depression. A team of geologists and hydrographers selected the Black Canyon site as the optimal location for the dam, approximately 65 km from downtown Las Vegas (Moehring & Green 2005, 58). Construction began in 1931 with a consortium of six construction companies that would build the dam and along with a neighbouring company town to be named Boulder City. Developed as a town for labourers during the construction of the dam, Boulder City would fail to capitalize on the increased presence of tourists passing through. Instead, Las Vegas proved to be more enticing to tourists, reinforcing the city’s transition

into a resort destination. The legalization of gambling and the end of the Prohibition in 1933 also helped attract a robust tourist demographic jump from 230,000 people to 300,000 in a single year (Moehring & Green 2005, 86). The completion of the dam in 1935 brought plentiful energy and freshwater resources to the region in the midst of the Great Depression.

The introduction of President Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s prioritized municipal upgrades in a national effort to stimulate a stagnant economy by securing capital in fixed infrastructure projects. Here, the fixing of capital in both immobile and mobile technologies would "feed off each other to stimulate symbiotic forms of accumulation (suburbs need cars and vice versa) and collide to form a potentially serious contradiction" (Harvey 2001, 28). This contradiction would perpetuate a continuously expansive operation that would seek to capitalize larger and larger territories. As increased levels of speed were achieved with each new technological innovation, the diminishing of spatial barriers to passage would be required, often inflicted in violent and destructive ways. This process would give rise to the popularization of the 'tabula rasa' or the literal clearing of the slate to produce an idealized site for development and further accumulation.

With the investment of capital in the construction of the railway station for example, further capital in the form of commodities and visitors could be funnelled into the region, promoting future growth. The locomotive itself can also be considered a mobile form of fixed capital, requiring investment in its initial research and development as well as its sustained operation. This also depends on embedding capital in the land with the construction of immobile railway stations. This interdependence between mobile and fixed forms of capital would be crucial to the development a new landscape for capital accumulation (Harvey 2001, 27-28).

Establishing Tabula Rasa (1905-1962)

The desert condition would become an idealized tabula rasa, an identity-less vacant lot or “nothingnesses of infinite potential” (Koolhaas 1994c, 937). The flatness of the Las Vegas Valley in conjunction with the relative consistency in weather, the desert condition would be conducive to continuous development. A key contributor to the framing of the desert as a habitable landscape for development was the cultivation of an image of complete vacancy and unlimited potential. The region was also void of the obstacles of traditional city building, producing the perception of the ideal modernist tabula rasa. Explorer John C. Frémont’s portrayal of the American west as uninhabited and unclaimed territory was instrumental in the settlement of the region by Americans, despite the long histories of indigenous peoples occupying the land. The framing of the west as a frontier to be conquered would be referenced many years later in the theming of various Las Vegas establishments including its first railroad station.

The railroad station was the town’s first grand civic structure, setting a precedent for the design of future buildings in the area. Designed and constructed by the Fred Harvey Company in what was described as an exaggerated Western Frontier style, the station would reinforce the wild fantasies of East Coast travellers who were experiencing the west for the first time (Hess, 1993). Cultural Studies Professor Ian Buchanan, points to Edward Said’s concept of ‘orientalism’ to describe the experience of travelling with pre-established assumptions and fantasies to be affirmed upon arrival in a new city, only for those expectations to become naturalised in the process (Buchanan 2005, 23). Las Vegas businesses would largely be shaped by fantastical notions of the Western frontier largely perpetuated by naïve East Coast travellers. Early casinos reinforced these fantasies with themes that included depictions of cowboys, Navajo thunderbirds, and even caricatures of Arabian sultans. This destructive process of suppressing or trivializing long established desert cultures as themes of kitsch to be consumed, in effect would prepare the region for widespread future development and expansion (**Figure 12**).

The inherent violence in establishing favourable conditions for tabula rasa would coincide with the emergence of a military presence in the region. During the Second World War, the Basic Magnesium Incorporated (BMI) plant would be built in the neighbouring town of Henderson, producing metal parts for weapons and aircraft. These parts would benefit from the cultivation of magnesium mineral deposits that were abundant throughout the state of Nevada. The plant was also located

Figure 12: The Thunderbird Hotel and Casino referenced various Native American populations throughout the resort, an example of the “orientalist” trivializing of Indigenous desert cultures (1948).
Vintage Las Vegas Tumblr



in proximity to Lake Mead, a body of water produced by the flooding of the Colorado River following the construction of the Hoover Dam, in order to gain access to water for cooling purposes. The cultivation of the land for minerals along with access to freshwater resources, BMI would secure increased control over the Nevada landscape and economy. Henderson’s population continued to swell as production demand expanded as a result of successive wars, eventually becoming a self-sustaining town.

The United States Air Force located its largest flight school at the region’s only airport in 1941, as the clear skies and consistent weather were favourable for training pilots. This influx of military personnel also contributed the rise in popularity of casinos, 24-hour bars, and brothels, resulting in the military threatening to forbid soldiers from frequenting the area. In response, the city of Las Vegas instituted efforts to curb prostitution and limited operating hours for bars, resulting in increased gambling revenue and a dramatic decline in venereal diseases (Moehring & Green 2005, 105). The construction of an airport just south of the Strip on the site of a former military gunnery school in 1948 would serve to separate tourists from the operations of the United States Air Force, allowing the military presence to continue to flourish in the valley. With the onset of the Cold War era in the 1950s, the state of Nevada was designated as the nation’s nuclear test site, providing another



Figure 13: Nuclear fallout from atomic bomb detonations could be seen from downtown Las Vegas (1954). Don English, Las Vegas News Bureau

boost to the local economy. Naïve optimism would shroud the introduction of this technology however and further contribute to the allure of the Las Vegas Valley while securing its economic ties to sources of government funding.

Perhaps the strongest sign of the desert as tabula rasa would be the detonation of several atomic bomb tests in the region. The 1950s saw the intensification of the Cold War and an increased push to invest in the development of the atomic bomb in an effort to counter the fear of nuclear attack. At the time, atomic bomb testing was conducted at the Bikini Atoll military base in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Rising concerns over the instability of the region following the outbreak of the Korean conflict in 1950 along with fears of communist espionage, radioactive leaks and the increasing expense of shipping materials across the Pacific, the testing facility was relocated to the Las Vegas Valley (**Figure 13**) (Moehring & Green 2005, 135).

The relocation of the test-site to American soil was actually deemed “politically impossible,” with Nevada positioned as the most appealing candidate since it maintained a relatively low national profile and the federal government controlled over 85 percent of the land, falsely perceived to be vacant (Denton & Morris 2001, 138). Under assurances from Atomic Energy Commission chairman Gordon Dean, President Truman

approved the relocation of the test site to the existing Tonopah Bombing and Gunnery Range in Nevada, a mere 100km north of the City of Las Vegas despite known risks associated with nuclear fallout. Initial concerns of local residents were also mitigated by atomic scientists in what, historian Stewart Udall describes as the “beginning of a decades-long policy of public deception” (Denton & Morris 2001, 138). Not only were locals concerned about potential health risks but there was also concern that tourists would avoid the city or that detonations would disrupt gambling procedures by potentially bouncing dice and roulette balls off the tables. This led to the recasting of the detonations as celebratory occasions, depicted in promotional material for the City of Las Vegas along with promotions for “Atomic Cocktails” and sky rooms to watch the mushroom clouds. Even the grand opening of the Desert Inn on the Las Vegas Strip would be timed to an early morning atomic bomb detonation (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 79). After a decade of blasts however, it was revealed that the city had only been protected from harmful radiation by westerly prevailing winds distributing the radioactive fallout over eastern Nevada and Utah. This resulted in the indefinite halting of all future aboveground detonations at the test site (Moehring & Green 2005, 136).

The destructive reconfiguration of the landscape in the region reinforced notions of the tabula rasa, preparing the landscape for successive building and demolition with little regard for context. In fact, the cumulative effect of the capitalist process of accumulation would require the constant erasure of various contexts (ie. historical, urban, environmental) in the development of Las Vegas, producing potential for even further accumulation with each destruction. As Harvey summarizes:

(a) capitalism could not survive without being geographically expansionary (and perpetually seeking out ‘spatial fixes’ for its problems), (b) that major innovations in transport and communication technologies were necessary conditions for that expansion to occur (hence the emphasis in capitalism’s revolution on technologies that facilitated speed up and the progressive diminution of spatial barriers to movement of commodities, people, information and ideas over space) and (c) its modes of geographical expansion depended crucially upon whether it was the search for markets, fresh labor [sic] powers, resources (raw materials) or fresh opportunities to invest in new production facilities that was chiefly at stake. (2001, 25-26)

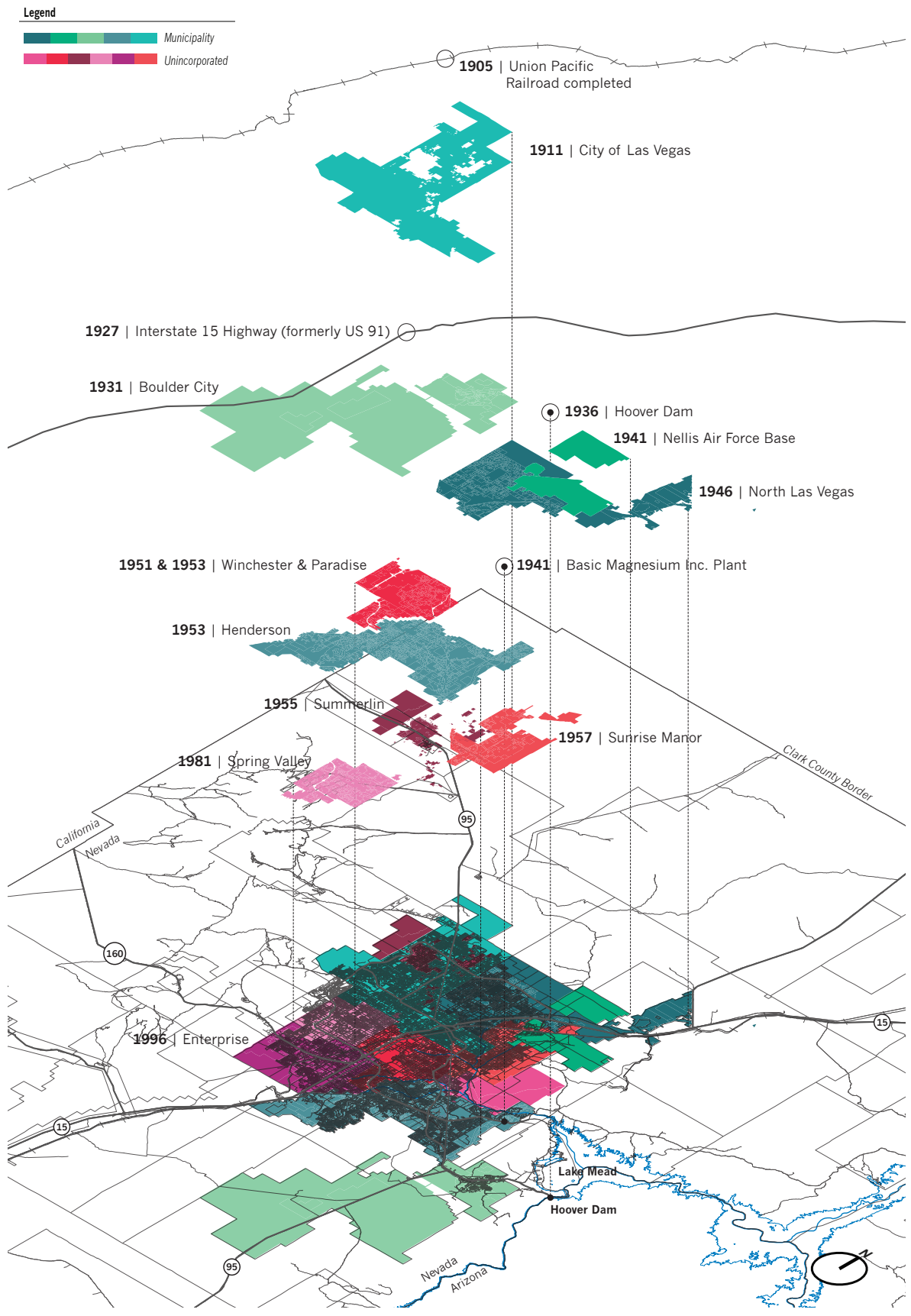
The barren Las Vegas desert landscape proved ideal for

unrestrained geographic expansion, situating the Strip as the new centre for regional development as new communities began to sprawl outward.

By the middle of the twentieth century, the Cold War was a key tool in the promotion of widespread liberalism and the silencing of critics. Accused of being ‘radicals’, ‘communists’, or wholly ‘un-American’, critics were effectively silenced in the national push to adopt capitalism as the dominant economic order (Sugrue 1996, 7). One of the most instrumental shifts in the development of the region would be the designation of a community that would be free of traditional municipal oversight, including regulations and taxes. This designation operated as a figurative tabula rasa in the clearing of regulatory boundaries in the endless pursuit of maximizing profits. Businesses along the Strip eventually surpassed Fremont Street as the most profitable community in the region as a result; wielding increased political influence and slowly depleting the provision of desperately needed public amenities.

Census Designated Place (CDPs)

“The statistical counterparts of incorporated places, and are delineated to provide data for settled concentrations of population that are identifiable by name but are not legally incorporated under the laws of the state in which they are located.” (Census.gov)



Paradise: Unincorporated (1951)

In *Enduring Innocence*, Keller Easterling states that “in some cases, building and subtraction are indistinguishable, and either may be equally aggressive, submissive, or constructive” (2005, 161). She also notes that the most violent forms of destruction are often not the most immediately apparent:

The least spectacular deletions, which operate in subterfuge, without dynamite or bombs, may even be the most violent. However gentle the tone of the rhetoric, fundamental to subtraction is the desire to remain innocent, to reduce, preserve, or purify anything that contradicts or threatens the prevailing power. (Easterling 2005, 179)

The perpetual tabula rasa can also take the form of deregulation, subjecting the larger urban scale to continuous destruction through unconstrained development and insufficient planning. This absence of regulation is particularly evident in the unusual prevalence of “unincorporated townships” in the Las Vegas region. Unincorporated townships are a designation “originally authorized to assist in the conveyance of land and are commonly thought of as a rural form of government with limited power” (Clark & Sharp, 2008). In other words, this designation is typically reserved for rural areas where a governing body cannot adequately provide municipal services like garbage collection, sewage and electricity. Clark County has come to exploit this exception however, with several of the nation’s most populated unincorporated communities located in and around the Las Vegas Strip.

The vast majority of the Strip sits in the unincorporated township of Paradise, which was established in 1951 in response to several annexation efforts by the city of Las Vegas. These attempts began with mayor Ernie Cragin, who lobbied to annex the Strip in the 1940s as he saw the potential to generate revenue off of the increased popularity of casino resorts developing just outside of city limits. The revenue generated through property taxes could effectively offset the mounting debt incurred by the provision of infrastructure for a rapidly expanding urban population. Cragin further justified annexation by implying that the Strip directly benefited from the tourist draw of Fremont Street, the main tourist destination at the time, and should be required to support the street’s maintenance and expansion. The first formal attempt to annex the Strip in 1946 was blocked when casino owners convinced local residents (many of whom were employees of the casinos), that higher taxes would be imposed upon annexation. A growing

Figure 14: The designation of the various communities in Clark County (1900-2014). *Las Vegas Sun Online, Las Vegas: A Centennial History, Clark County GIS Info*

Unincorporated Community

A region of land not governed by its own local municipal corporation, but rather is administered as part of a larger administrative division. Unincorporated communities are governed by the County and have an appointed Town Advisory Board which provide recommendations to the County Commission. Paradise is currently the most populous unincorporated community in the United States, according to the 2010 US Census.

Annexation

The action of adding something as an extra or subordinate part, especially territory. (Oxford-Dictionaries.com)

resentment of city administrators continued as allegations of favouritism and preferential treatment of Fremont Street businesses further entrenched resistance of annexation efforts (Moehring & Green 2005, 127).

A second attempt was blocked in 1950, coincidentally by legislature introduced by then part owner of Strip resort Thunderbird, which prevented “any city from annexing an unincorporated township without the county commission’s approval” (Moehring & Green 2005, 127). The Strip was designated as unincorporated upon creation of two communities named Paradise A and Paradise B, later respectively renamed Winchester and Paradise. With an unincorporated designation, municipal responsibilities are shifted to Clark County, which appoints a Town Advisory Board to oversee the needs of the township including the provision of recommendations on zoning bylaw changes and land-use designations. This move protected the Strip from annexation and formulated a unique set of conditions that would influence further development of the Strip and its divergence from the interests of casino resorts located downtown Las Vegas.

Paradise has grown to become the most populated unincorporated township in the United States, further challenging its continued status as an informal city (US Census, 2010). As documented by Jill Clark and Jeff Sharp in *City & Community*, “unincorporated townships have grown so large that they are functional equivalents of cities, providing a broad range of services beyond their original ‘rural’ responsibilities” (2008). The unincorporated township, once a state of economic and political exception has since morphed into an acceptable form of city building with essential services offloaded to the county level. Modelling themselves after Paradise as a precedent of smaller government and greater corporate influence, several adjacent communities have since claimed unincorporated status including Summerlin, Sunrise Manor, Spring Valley, and Enterprise, further resisting annexation by the City of Las Vegas (**Figure 14**). Residents generally prefer the absence of a municipal level of government as property taxes are typically lower.

This lax approach to urban planning as a result of the Strip’s designation as an unincorporated community would be a key factor in the development of a pervasive, indistinguishable generic condition, which Koolhaas coins as “The Generic City”. Koolhaas notes that, “The Generic City is always founded by people on the move, poised to move on” (1994b, 1252). Las Vegas as a place of passage certainly satisfies this characteristic of the Generic City, giving rise to an urbanism that Koolhaas

subsequently praises for its ability to adapt to the interests of the economy. In *Bigness or the problem of Large*, Koolhaas proposes that the professions of architecture and urbanism must conform and simply “go with the flow” in order to “restore the credibility of the field” (1994a, 495–516). However, Debord notes that simply going with the flow produces an urbanism that serves to destroy historical consciousness in the interest of delaying the potential for society to mobilize and “recapture its alienated powers” (1994, Thesis 146). The securing of the Strip as an unincorporated township facilitated a relaxed approach to urbanism and city planning, one that would fail to provide adequate public amenities for a growing city in lieu of maintaining favourable conditions for private development. Widespread social, political, and economic liberalization would encourage the widespread deregulation and marketization of various sectors in postwar America.

3. Post-War Tripartite Liberalization and the Rise of the Leisure Economy

Following the completion of the Hoover Dam in 1936 and the end of World War II, the designation of Paradise as an unincorporated community shifted future development away from downtown Fremont Street to the Las Vegas Strip. Additionally, the tripartite liberalization of political, economic, and societal attitudes that had emerged after several decades of rationing and restraint would encourage the sustained growth of a burgeoning service-based leisure economy. The production of leisure as 'time off' work would reinforce demand for a consumption based, leisure economy. Increasing consumption during this time of leisure would serve to drive demand for the further production of commodities and effectively reintroduce capitalism to a skeptical American public. The onslaught of Cold War communist paranoia which threatened these newfound liberties also encouraged the proliferation of capitalism and, by extension, the rise of the leisure economy. This expanding economy centred on the provision of leisure gave rise to the casino resort typology that included an array of programmatic elements and would require the transfer of skilled labour into service jobs at a time when other American cities were thriving on predominant manufacturing sectors (ie. Detroit, Minneapolis, Gary).



Debord notes that a service based economy of leisure is not independent from manufacturing since it is the result of increased productivity:

If automation, or for that matter any mechanisms, even less radical ones, that can increase productivity, are to be prevented from reducing socially necessary labor-time to an unacceptably low level, new forms of employment have to be created. A happy solution presents itself in the growth of the tertiary or service sector in response to the immense strain on the supply lines of the army responsible for distributing and hyping the commodities of the moment. (1994, Thesis 45)

Service jobs provided a surplus of moderately paid entry-level positions that require no formal education, encouraging individuals to forgo the completion of their high school education. This also impedes the workers' ability to advance within company hierarchies, producing a large segment of the population that is immobilized. The shift from wartime industries and dam construction jobs to a largely service based gambling economy diminished the influence of labour unions in Las Vegas. For instance, the dependence on customer tips to subsidize a substantial portion of wages would place an emphasis on individual performance, weakening collectivist ties among the working class. This would also restore power to a new upper class of managers and owners who would advocate for the overhaul of labour laws in the form of 'right-to-work' legislation, contributing to the weakening of unionized bargaining power in the region.

However, this tripartite liberalization would have some perceived benefits, evidenced by the opening of the Moulin Rouge in 1955 as "America's First Interracial Hotel" at a time when Jim Crow laws dominated a large share of the American south. The hotel and casino would serve as an incubator for social change in Las Vegas, providing a space of gathering for the city's black residents and access to amenities that they had previously been denied. This off-loading of the provision of adequate public services onto private businesses would eventually become common practice with the advancement of neoliberal processes in the mid-1970s. Even the strong presence of organized crime in the region would also be internalized by these early processes.

Business tycoon, Howard Hughes Jr. benefitted from increasingly liberalized economic policy in the late 1960s with the acquisition of several casino properties along the Strip. This consolidation of ownership would grant Hughes increased

capital and political bargaining power, reinforcing the Strip as the new geographical and economic centre of the region. Supplanting the historic downtown of Las Vegas, this new centre of the region would form an identity predicated on constant change and leisure.

Koolhaas stresses the importance of the centre in shaping regional identity as “Identity centralizes; it insists on an essence, a point” (1994b, 1248). The replacement of the urban centre with the Strip points to the emergence of a new urban form, a generic construction that is aligned to the demands of the economy. The construction of the Las Vegas Convention Center formalized the pervasive tabula rasa condition as it could facilitate accelerated rates of set-up and take-down. The convention centre as tabula rasa exudes the generic as an undifferentiated expanse, an interiorization of the desert. We will explore how these shifts in the urban centre, widespread tripartite liberalization and generic construction would come to be recognized as the processes of neoliberalism from the 1980s onward.

The Production of Leisure Time

After a long and protracted labour movement throughout the 19th Century, the 24-hour day would be compartmentalized into three 8-hour increments designated for work, leisure, and rest. The formation of a leisure economy would come at the behest of production, responsible for a continuous increase in consumption to spur further accumulation of capital through the production of more goods and services; leisure time would be the time of heightened consumption that would continue to drive production. (2)

The segmentation of the day into units of time would lead to the commodification of time. In the *Society of the Spectacle* Debord considers the concept of 'vacation time' a commodification of time through which leisure activities and services are to be consumed. Prepackaged vacations and time 'off' are framed as consumable units of time, which are to be earned and desired. Debord notes that the consumption of time in the form of leisure and vacations, are "moments portrayed, like all spectacular commodities, at a distance, and as desirable by definition" (1994, Thesis 153). This time of leisure is the time of the spectacle.

The integration of consumption and leisure is apparent with the societal obsession with 'saving' time, which can be achieved through reduced commute times via automobile or prepackaged, already prepared meals. This 'saved' time is overwhelmingly spent shopping online or watching television in a state of complete inactivity and heightened consumption. It is no surprise that television would be instrumental in fuelling consumption in the United States following the Great Depression, a time when families had become accustomed to saving. In an attempt to make people more comfortable with accumulating debt and restoring faith in the American capitalist system, television program plot lines in the 1950s were "often centered [sic] around formerly frugal immigrant families learning that it was acceptable, and even desirable, to buy on credit or to replace home-made domestic products with appliances bought in shops" (Simpson 2011, 198). As a medium dependent on advertisers, the television industry was intent on overcoming consumer resistance, reframing prosperity by giving people the "sanction and justification to enjoy it and to demonstrate that the hedonistic approach to life is a moral one, not an immoral one" (Dichter 1960, 209-210). This would resonate particularly with such illicit activities that had long become associated with Las Vegas, including gambling, liquor consumption and quick divorces. As a purveyor of hedonism, the region would gain increased attention and further

(2) "By extending the working day, therefore, capitalist production...not only produces a deterioration of human labour power by robbing it of its normal moral and physical conditions of development and activity, but also produces the premature exhaustion and death of this labour power itself." Marx, Karl. (1976). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books), 376.

Figure 15: Opening day at the Hotel Flamingo; the hotel's design drew inspiration from tropical Miami (1946).
UNLV Digital Collection



Figure 16: The Riviera built a 9-storey hotel tower, becoming the high-rise first building in the region (1955).
Loomis Dean, Life Magazine



acceptance within the American mainstream.

Furthermore, the growth of the American economy would be recast as the responsibility of individual citizens, framed as a call to duty rather than an act of selfish indulgence. Ongoing concerns over a relapse into another Great Depression would be absolved with calls for economic growth, which “influential corporate and business leaders considered increases in consumer spending – of 30% to 50% – to be necessary to perpetuate prosperity in the postwar era” (Lipsitz 1990, 46). This dramatic increase in consumer spending would be achieved through increased access to long-term, low interest home mortgages, immediately freeing consumer capital for the purchase of commodities and the financing of vacations.

In addition to television, Debord highlights the role of celebrities (or “media stars”) in broadcasting representations of leisure as a time for increased consumption:

Media stars are spectacular representations of living human beings, distilling the essence of the spectacle’s banality into images of possible roles...Themselves incarnations of the inaccessible results of social labor [sic], they mimic by-products of that labor [sic], and project these above labor [sic] so that they appear as its goal. The by-products in question are power and leisure – the power to decide and the leisure to consume... (1994, Thesis 60)

Notorious East Coast mobster, Benjamin ‘Bugsy’ Siegel, would foster a historic relationship between Hollywood and Las Vegas with the opening of the elegant Flamingo casino in 1946 (**Figure 15**). Through personal connections to the Hollywood elite, stars often made appearances at the Flamingo, rebranded as a departure from Western frontier themes that were popular at the time. The desert resort drew from tropical Miami as an unlikely source of inspiration, exuding a sophistication that had not previously been achieved on the Strip. Siegel’s resort portrayed Las Vegas as city of relaxed leisure and elegance, effectively obscuring illicit mob activities occurring behind-the-scenes. Siegel would ultimately succumb to his illicit ties however, a mere six months after the opening of the Flamingo when he was gunned down in his girlfriend’s home in a deadly show of territorial control (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 18).

Las Vegas in general would come to occupy the intersection of increased consumer spending with depictions of luxurious leisure, often featured as a popular destination for the Hollywood elite. The honing of this capital-intensive leisure

(3) The Second Industrial Revolution refers to the technological innovations developed in the late 19th Century in western Europe and the United States which significantly increased speed and volume of production of goods. The First Industrial Revolution is defined by the developments of coal produced steam-powered machinery in Britain in the late 18th Century (Chandler 1992, 80).

economy would focus on the provision of activities that would emancipate the worker from labour-intensive industries that had resulted from the Second Industrial Revolution in America. **(3)** With the improved efficiencies introduced by technological innovations in the workplace, the reduced demand for labour also resulted in a surplus of leisure time. Debord reinforces that, “...what is referred to as ‘liberation from work,’ that is, increased leisure time, is a liberation neither within labor itself nor from the world labor has brought into being” (1994, Thesis 27).

In conjunction with liberalized attitudes around consumer spending, the rapid growth of the tourism industry in Las Vegas in the 1950s was a response to the demand for a constant flow of capital required to maintain its economy of scale and scope that all capital-intensive industries rely upon. Business historian Alfred Chandler notes the cost advantages of such economies are only realized when a constant flow of materials, tourists in this case, are processed at increasingly high speeds, achieving high rates of efficiency while reducing costs per tourist (Chandler 1992, 81).

One example of this would be the construction of the valley’s first high-rise building at the Riviera casino in 1955 with the opening of a 9-storey hotel that included a casino, shops and 300 hotel rooms, largely seen as a departure from the low-rise motorcoach building typology that had come to define the region (**Figure 16**) (Moehring & Green 2005, 137). The increased capacity of the hotel would accommodate an increased flow of visitors through the ground floor casino gaming floor while diminishing operation costs of additional tourists as a result of the efficiencies associated with building tall rather than wide. High-rise building would also reserve the ground plane for the expansion of more profitable programmatic elements including entertainment venues, restaurants, and retail. The Strip sought to establish itself as a leader within the regional tourist industry as it continued to expand to maintain a dominant lead in an emerging industry. More tourists would be drawn in by an increasing array of services provided by sprawling casino resorts in an attempt drive consumption and contain the “expansive choreography of leisure” (Easterling 2005, 24). Speculation would fuel development of larger and more expansive resorts, serving as factories of leisure with ever increasing flows of capital. By 1963, the region would see “\$100 million in fresh investment [having] paid for 163 stories of new ‘high-rises,’ adding more than 5,000 rooms - the largest, fastest, most concentrated sustained expansion of its kind anywhere in the world” (Denton & Morris 2001, 226).

A key driver in the rise of the leisure economy and the

development of casino resorts would be an emphasis on popularizing gambling as a legitimate leisure activity. Gambling would encourage patrons to spend freely, diminish concerns of risk, and boost speculation. In his recent analysis of emerging gambling city Macau, China, Tim Simpson notes that casinos play an important role in conditioning society for the adoption of neoliberal principles. In particular, these principles include the “‘free’ movements of people and capital, increased individualism, market speculation, consumerism, [and] information technology.” His observation of Macau as an emerging capitalist centre in China resembles the rise to prominence of Las Vegas in the 1950s and 60s which would re-introduce capitalism to the American public. Casinos act as factories that “produce no tangible product but the manipulation of consumer affect, principally directed towards excitement and fascination”, leading to further consumption (Simpson 2011, 194). Furthermore, the themed casino functions as a ‘normalizing apparatus’ in which subjects are familiarized with the free flow of capital and a higher tolerance for debt (Barnett 2001, 11). Gambling would underwrite the rise of the leisure economy in Las Vegas, capitalizing off of liberalized social/economic/political philosophies while financing increasingly expansive resorts to propagate further consumption.

Social Liberalization in Las Vegas (1927-1960)

Nevada had garnered a reputation for looser social mores and tendency for hedonism, first established with the legalization of a convenient three-month divorce in 1927 in an attempt to fill vacant hotels during the Depression. Four years later, the waiting period would be reduced to just six weeks, becoming the fastest divorce in the nation while reinforcing its devious reputation (Denton & Morris 2001, 95). The widespread loosening of societal taboos around gambling would be attributable to the movement of religious institutions away from labelling gambling as a sin, themselves often resorting to the organization of bingo and lottery fundraisers in an attempt to compensate for declining congregation attendance (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 92). Additionally, the popularity of wedding chapels along the Strip from the 1940s onward also offered a particular freedom from restrictive traditions imposed by religious institutions, indicating further movement toward widespread societal liberation. Las Vegas would also become attractive to tourists at a time of rising prosperity amongst the growing middle class with increased access to modern technologies on the consumer marketplace.

An 'embedded liberalism' began to manifest in the American consciousness with the restructuring of state forms to maintain peace and tranquility through "some sort of class compromise between capital and labour" during the Great Depression and gained increased traction following World War II (Harvey 2005, 9-10). This class compromise would take the form of a variety of welfare systems that had been implemented under Roosevelt's New Deal along with increased power of labour unions. 'Embedded liberalism' describes the system in which market processes would be surrounded by regulatory constraints to ensure widespread benefit. This system would yield high-rates of economic growth after 1945, responsible for producing a large, prosperous middle class in the United States along with other wealthy capitalist nations (Harvey 2005, 11).

However, the principles of embedded liberalism would begin to unravel as it became apparent the system had been exhausted of its potential to fuel further economic growth. The unravelling of the system would begin with the dismantling of the collectivist organization of labour in favour of maintaining corporate competitiveness, also an early indicator of the process of neoliberalization (Peck & Tickell 2002, 386). In Las Vegas, a region long considered a unionized labour stronghold dating back to the early days of the railroad industry; the liberalization of labour laws would begin with the introduction of 'right-to-

work' state legislation in Nevada. The right-to-work provision of the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act granted individual states the ability to restrict the power of unions in imposing membership on all employees. Unfortunately, the law played to local sympathy after a bitter labour dispute by the Culinary Union in Reno on a busy Fourth of July weekend in 1949 proved unpopular with local residents, igniting anti-union sentiment which would eventually lead to the inclusion of the right-to-work provision in the Nevada constitution following a series of votes in 1952, 1954, and 1956 (Moehring & Green 2005, 152). The full impact of this state legislation would not become apparent until much later when MGM Grand, Aladdin, and Venetian mega-resorts opened in Las Vegas in the early 1990s, with fully non-unionized labour forces.

The economic influence of the Strip would continue to expand, uninhibited by a traditional municipal governing body, high taxes, or criticism. A form of 'urban entrepreneurialism' emerged, which David Harvey identifies as the growing demand for metropolitan centres to compete with other cities for visitors and residents, inevitably leading to the uneven allocation of resources. This ideology would gain traction in the late 1950s with the onset of the Eisenhower recession, forcing the Strip to undergo a large-scale transformation in a bid to remain competitive within the regional market, while maintaining a core group of visitors from neighbouring California. This demand for competitiveness would only add to anti-union sentiment.

The 1950s would also play witness to the initial efforts to end official segregation in Nevada at a time when discriminatory Jim Crow laws were being enforced. Notoriously racist Las Vegas mayor, Ernie Cragin would implement these laws, relegating black people to second-class status by restricting where they could live and work as well as their movements throughout the city. On the Strip and Fremont street in particular, black residents were only permitted to work such back-of-house positions as cooks, maids, janitors and porters, for very little pay. Visiting black entertainers were also subject to the same discrimination, often escorted out the back door after performances at 'white-only' casinos. The region had attracted a large population of southern poor whites with construction jobs at the Hoover Dam and the Henderson magnesium plant, bringing their racist views with them, forming what civil rights activist Sarann Knight Preddy would describe as the "Mississippi of the West" (Denton & Morris 2001, 144).

In a show of defiance, world-renowned American-born, French dancer and actress, Josephine Baker is credited with

the initial movement toward the ‘desegregation’ of the Strip. In her contract with the El Rancho Hotel in 1951, Baker had stipulated that black customers be permitted to purchase tickets to her show and subsequently seated and served, just as white customers were. However, when casino staff denied entry to black patrons, she sat on stage refusing to perform until everyone was admitted. Eventually management conceded and begrudgingly allowed all ticket-holders into the theatre (Cook 2013). Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. would also address racism in their performances and bring black patrons into Strip casinos, adding to the growing resentment toward such blatantly discriminatory policies.

The Moulin Rouge Hotel and Casino would be designated as “America’s First Interracial Hotel” in 1955, despite the entrenched racism in the region (**Figure 17**). Situated just outside downtown Las Vegas in the Westside neighbourhood where most of the city’s black residents were forced to live, the resort would attract locals and entertainers from the Strip as a popular afterhours destination (**Figure 18**). Despite only being open for six months, the resort itself would come to serve as a pivotal location in the push to end segregation in the Las Vegas region. The hotel as “social condenser” mixing various programmatic elements to produce unprecedented events, was a concept Koolhaas would apply in his examination of the Waldorf-Astoria in Manhattan, but it could also describe the significance of the Moulin Rouge Hotel and Casino in producing social change. Resources for much needed infrastructural upgrades in the rapidly expanding metropolitan region were exclusively allocated to white neighbourhoods, neglecting to provide sufficient access to water, electricity, or police and fire services to the city’s Westside (Moehring & Green 2005, 164). The Moulin Rouge not only provided a place of gathering, but also access to entertainment and adequate temporary hotel accommodation including the opportunity to work such coveted front-of-house jobs as card dealers and servers. All of these factors would converge as a powerful impetus for change.

In *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas would note the capacity of hotels to foster social change:

Day after day the Waldorf pulls society from its hiding places to what becomes in effect a colossal collective salon for exhibiting and introducing new urban manners (such as women alone - yet clearly respectable - smoking in public). (Koolhaas 1994, 135)

In its brief operation, the Moulin Rouge would introduce the concept of an interracial hotel to the American public for the

Figure 17: Exterior of the Moulin Rouge Hotel and Casino, "America's First Interracial Hotel" (April 1955). UNLV Digital Collection



Figure 18: Blackjack patrons at the Moulin Rouge Hotel and Casino (1955). Loomis Dean / Time Life Pictures / Getty Images, Smithsonian Magazine Online



first time since the implementation of Jim Crow laws, physically claiming space for the incremental advancement of civil rights. In a testament to the significance of the institution within the community, the abandoned hotel would come to serve as the meeting space for activists, business owners, and government officials in March 1960 (**Figure 19**). Civil rights leaders James McMillan and Charles West called the meeting after threatening to disrupt business along the Strip with a massive demonstration (Cook 2013). The result of the meeting would be a pact named the 'Moulin Rouge Agreement' after the meeting's location, which proclaimed the end official segregation in the region, a symbolic gesture toward more socially liberalized attitudes. However, as activist and professor Angela Davis has shown, racial violence and segregation would only continue to be perpetuated with the widespread implementation of neoliberal policies including the off-loading of governmental social welfare onto the individual.

Davis reconciles the seemingly contradictory political ideologies that support both social and economic liberalization by suggesting that the appearance of social emancipation is synonymous with the individualization of social activity (A. Davis 2012, 173). This distinction is another key neoliberal process, one that encourages the deregulation of the marketplace along with vast structural changes that ultimately result in the dissolution of community. The construction of the Interstate highway in the 1960s in order to accommodate access for visitors would be responsible for the widespread demolition of homes in the Westside neighbourhood of Las Vegas, resulting in the displacement and dispersal of many of the city's black residents (Moehring & Green 2005, 148). Without proximity, the community's ability to gather and mobilize politically would be compromised.

Keller Easterling likens the devastation that widespread development imposes upon these communities akin to warfare in its destruction and deliberation:

Demolishing areas deemed to be blighted is a long-standing municipal practice used to revalue property or recalibrate parcels. Shifting political climates may also delete ownership, value, or physical property with a slight change of laws or master plans. Although it may hide within the folds of legalities, this covert destruction may be as devastating as wars or natural disasters. (2005, 162)

These developments in urban planning in addition to major shifts in public policy continue to disproportionately affect

Figure 19: Meeting at the former Moulin Rouge Hotel café that would end official segregation in Las Vegas (March 1960). Marie McMillan Collection, UNLV Special Collections



people of colour. The failure to recognize the discriminatory allocation of services by public and private institutions is shrouded by the focus on the moral imperative of the individual. The Moulin Rouge capitalized on the need for spaces that would compensate for the inadequate provision of public amenities, largely a result of the off-loading of municipal responsibility onto business owners. The refusal to provide basic public services to all residents and the reliance on private spaces to fill the void would begin the transition toward positioning Las Vegas as neoliberal vanguard.

Early Processes of Roll-Out Neoliberalism Take on the Mob (1930-1970)

The overlapping processes of economic liberalization during the same period would also contribute to the rise of the leisure economy. The initial development of Las Vegas was heavily influenced by the involvement of organized crime syndicates, a group that operated largely outside of governmental control in a self-regulated 'free market'. Corporations would eventually adopt a form of form of this economic model but on a much larger scale with government legitimacy.

Organized crime had assumed control of a significant number of businesses on the Strip and in downtown Las Vegas by the 1930s. During the Prohibition when gambling and alcohol were declared illegal, the operation of bars and casinos would be reconfigured into an underground economy. Existing outside of the rule of law, the mob continued the operation of bars, casinos, and brothels, advancing the commodification of leisure and perfecting the provision of services. The presence of organized crime would also flourish under the lenient supervision of a County Sheriff who overlooked such operations and was even known to have partaken in certain illicit activities. This relaxed approach toward law enforcement permitted the presence of the mob to prosper under a veil of business fronts (Moehring & Green 2005, 152).

The Pair-O-Dice nightclub holds the distinction of being the first casino to open along an empty stretch of Highway 91 in 1930, which would eventually become widely known as the Strip, shortly after the re-legalization of gambling by the state of Nevada. Owner of the nightclub Captain Guy McAfee was a Los Angeles Police vice squad commander and secret owner of several illegal casinos in Southern California (Denton & Morris 2001, 98). McAfee was also affiliated with a litany of corrupt Los Angeles police members and crime boss Tony Cornero, who would open a casino resort known as The Meadows a year later (**Figure 20**). Cornero is largely credited with the introduction of the all-inclusive resort format to the region, incorporating dining, entertainment, and a hotel with the casino. Situated on Boulder Highway, The Meadows catered to tourists en route to the Hoover Dam. Boulder City, a town established to accommodate workers during the construction of the dam, would continue to prohibit gambling and liquor after the end of Prohibition in an attempt to prevent company workers from imbibing during their off time. Consequently, Boulder City would lose many overnight visitors to its tourist-friendly neighbour, glittering Las Vegas. Although The Meadows closed in 1936, it had brought the concept of a resort format merged

Figure 20: The Meadows introduced the supper club format to Las Vegas (1931).
UNLV Digital Collection



with entertainment to the Las Vegas scene, indefinitely shaping its architectural future (Hess 1993, 20).

By 1940, the city of Las Vegas sought to expand its tourist offerings by reaching out to Thomas Hull, an established developer of a successful California hotel franchise, the El Rancho. Despite the offer of prized land in the downtown area on Fremont Street, Hull would purchase property in the desert just outside city limits, recognizing the opportunity to develop an all-inclusive resort on a cheap swath of land while evading the municipal slot machine and ad valorem taxes (Moehring & Green 2005, 11). Although not a known mob affiliate, Hull's presence increased competition amongst casino owners fighting to maintain mob control of the Strip. An irreversible shift of new developments along the Strip would begin and the growth of a new all-inclusive building typology emerged as a result of plentiful space and low property taxes beyond the municipal boundary (**Figure 21**). Hull also saw the opportunity to attract visitors arriving from Los Angeles along the highway as well as increased control over the provision of key services such as water and security in a model that would benefit from cost advantages attributed to the process of vertical integration.

Vertical integration typically describes the combination of two or more stages of production under one company, with



Figure 21: Thomas Hull's El Rancho Vegas (1943). Burton Frasher Sr., Vintage Las Vegas Tumblr

services supplanting *production* in this instance. As Alfred Chandler notes, the consolidation of various services under a single owner reduces operating costs while concentrating capital and increasing bargaining power (1992, 85). For example, any additional ‘transaction’ costs associated with the hiring of a unionized security officer or the purchase of municipally supplied water could effectively be eradicated, resulting in increased profits. Chandler also identifies the effect of the administrative scheduling of flows that achieves a more intensive use of facilities and personnel, increasing productivity and reducing operating costs (1977, 7). This preliminary model of vertical integration and consolidation of capital would be adopted by competitors, including the Frontier, Flamingo, 91 Club, and the Thunderbird in the resort campus model.

Further sophistication of the campus model is attributed to another mafia affiliated business owner Major A. Riddle, credited with the revival of the Dunes hotel casino through an ambitious building campaign which saw the addition of a golf course, a gourmet restaurant, a high-rise hotel, and the Strip’s first topless revue (**Figure 22**) (Moehring & Green 2005, 137). The demonstrated revival of established casino resorts proved to be an effective development model, attracting renewed interest from increasingly fickle tourists who were presented with a

Figure 22: The Dunes motor coach building typology (1959). Kelly-Holiday Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.



growing myriad of entertainment and hospitality options. With the expansion of services capital would be further concentrated, sowing unease in Washington over concerns of monopolization. Senator Estes Kefauver would lead investigations into organized crime syndicates in the early 1950s with a focus on uncovering the infiltration of the mob into public governance, mobilized by increasing economic power. The committee conducted inquiries in fourteen cities in an ambitious nationwide campaign to reveal the extent of organized crime involvement with little success. In the end, the committee would uncover an unsettling reality that “nationwide organized crime Syndicates” inextricably bound up with the “support and tolerance of public officials,” in reality not two worlds, not two political or economic systems, but only one, indivisible” (Denton & Morris 2001, 85).

During the 1950s, additional casino resorts had become mafia affiliated operations including the Sahara, Sands, Dunes, Riviera, Tropicana and Stardust (German 2014). The Teamsters Central States Pension Fund, a labour union representing truck drivers also affiliated with mafia figures, provided millions of dollars in loans for new casino construction, becoming fully integrated into the growth of the leisure economy in the region (Moehring & Green 2005, 211; Gottdiener et al. 1999, 24). The easing of the banking industry in Las Vegas would begin to shift

the financing of new casinos on the Strip, particularly with the arrival of E. Parry Thomas as vice president and cashier of the Bank of Las Vegas in 1955. Thomas was a Mormon banker from a wealthy family who emphasized such democratic values as extending credit to the “little guy” and “banking service on a mass basis” while also offering high-interest savings accounts. The banker’s connections to the Mormon Church reserve and the vast Eccles’ family fortune in Salt Lake City could provide casino developers with access to even larger sums of money to cover the ballooning costs of building larger casino resorts, which the Teamster’s Union could no longer cover (Denton & Morris 2001, 168).

However, the underground economy continued to prosper alongside the increased competition from financial institutions in the region. In a particularly lucrative business venture, mob affiliates expanded into the provision of financial services themselves including loan-sharking which profited from the distribution of illegally high-interest loans to desperate individuals with bad credit or illicit intentions. This underground economy would function as a precursor to ‘roll-back’ neoliberalism in which companies or businesses operated in an unregulated marketplace, negotiating transactions through private contracts (Peck & Tickell 2002, 384). In

this phase, binding contracts are drafted to the benefit of the business owner while granting increased control over suppliers, employees, and distributors.

The provision of loans by mob operations would prove to be lucrative as it could engage a large number of individuals in binding contracts and enact increased influence in the region. In a similar development, the automobile industry would eventually begin to sell of financial instruments in the form of lease agreements to compensate for declining sales. Harvey highlights this financialization of the commodities based industry:

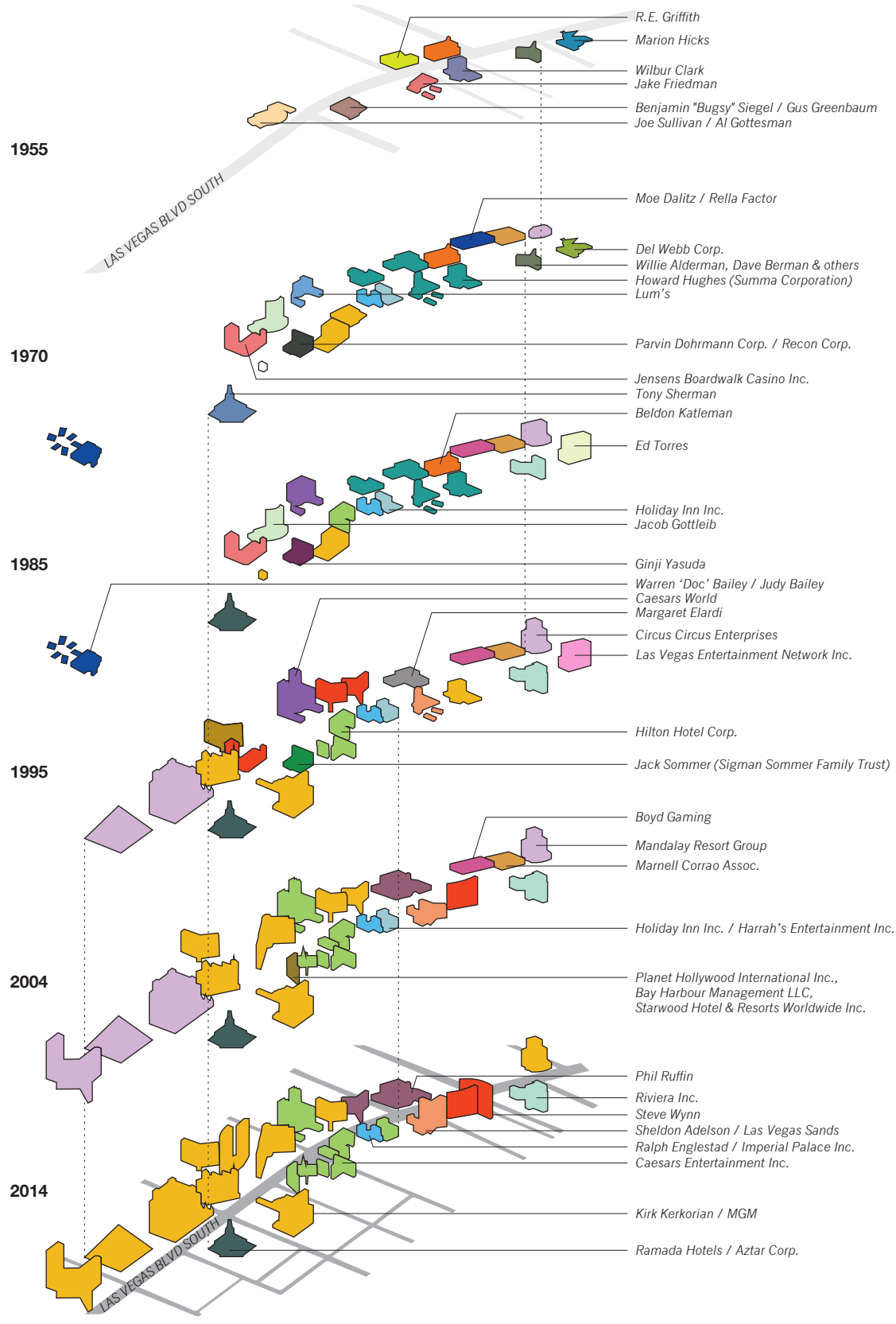
The large corporations became more and more financial in their orientation, even when, as in the automobile sector, they were engaging in production. Since 1980 or so it has not been uncommon for corporations to report losses in production offset by gains from financial operations (everything from credit and insurance operations to speculating in volatile currency and futures markets). Mergers across sectors conjoined production, merchanting, real estate, and financial interests in new ways to produce diversified conglomerates. (2005, 32)

The 'roll-out' phase of neoliberalism, as defined by Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, describes the processes under which regulation is reintroduced into a system that has undergone deregulation in an attempt to incorporate those groups who had been marginalized or dispossessed by the free market. Measures to incorporate these groups would include the criminalization of poverty and widespread incarceration under the premise of boosting 'productivity' (Peck & Tickell 2002, 389). Since the mob operated largely outside of governmental control through tax evasion, profit-skimming schemes, money laundering and intimidation of law enforcement, the government itself grew increasingly weary of such blatant violations of the law. In 1969, the Corporate Gaming Act was introduced, allowing publicly traded corporations to own casinos for the first time in Nevada, which would attract immediate interest from such hotel chains as the Ramada Inn, Hilton, and the Hyatt (Moehring & Green 2005, 120). In conjunction with the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) which gave the justice department increased agency in prosecuting suspected members of the mafia, the government would attempt to further capitalize off of the increasingly profitable Las Vegas Strip while slowly seizing control away from mob affiliated operations. Control of these businesses would transition to corporations, as they were deemed to be less corrupt.

These profit skimming schemes and practices of tax evasion often associated with organized crime operations would reappear under the deregulation of the American economy toward the end of the twentieth century. Nationally, the United States experienced rising deficit levels following the implementation of neoliberal policies introduced under the Reagan administration in the 1980s. Such policies would implement cuts to social spending to foster more favourable conditions for the growth of the economy. United States' government debt would increase from 25.7 percent of GDP in 1980 to 61 percent in 2010, largely attributable to continued reductions in corporate taxes (Sassen 2012, 21). Columbia University sociology professor, Saskia Sassen, even proceeds to suggest "the rise in government deficits has also been fed by the increase in tax evasion, partly facilitated by the development of complex accounting, financial, and legal instruments" (2012, 21). In 2006, The United States Internal Revenue Service estimated the tax gap to be at \$385 billion dollars, of which \$67 billion dollars is attributed to the underreporting of corporations along with individual compliance. **(4)** Corporations also benefit from "lawful" tax evasion through private contractual agreements which are not accounted for in the tax gap estimate, largely stemming from the loosening of antitrust policy in the 1990s which would encourage monopolization and increase corporate influence on public institutions (Sassen 2008, 236).

(4) "Tax Gap for Tax Year 2016: Overview," *United States Internal Revenue Service*, last modified January 6, 2012, http://www.irs.gov/pub/newsroom/overview_tax_gap_2006.pdf.

On the Las Vegas Strip, a few wealthy individuals would embark on an aggressive consolidation of ownership, predating the widespread monopolization of several large national industries. We will examine the acquisition of several Strip properties by billionaire Howard Robard Hughes Jr. along with how this consolidation of ownership would shape the future of development and yield tremendous political influence.



Converging Capital (1966-1974)

Howard Robard Hughes Jr. is often credited with forever changing the development of the Strip as a result of the consolidation of several properties (**Figure 23**). Hughes' involvement would prepare the Strip for a transition into corporate ownership that would redefine the casino business model. Despite his prominence as an influential historical figure, some historians have come to question the extent of his actual involvement in securing the acquisitions and the nature of his relationship with several politicians on the national stage. Upon his arrival to Las Vegas in 1966, an ailing Hughes would be transported directly to the penthouse suite of the Desert Inn via a private ambulance where he would occupy the top two floors of the hotel. Hughes would actually purchase the Desert Inn itself after hotel officials demanded he leave since he had overstayed his reservation. He would remain in the penthouse suite for four years, becoming a recluse who would orchestrate the purchase of a slew of properties. His business arrangements were carried out by his closest associates while, according to some accounts, he lay unkempt and naked in bed, drug-addicted with early onset dementia (Denton & Morris 2001, 270). It is even suggested that his associates maintained a high-level of secrecy on the severity of his condition in order to continue perpetuating his illness to maintain greater control over his vast fortune.

Within the span of a few years, Hughes would begin the consolidation of casino ownership in Las Vegas, purchasing the Sands, Frontier, Castaways, Landmark, and the Silver Slipper Casinos, all of which had previously been operated by notorious mobster Meyer Lansky. In addition to the casinos, Hughes would purchase several vacant lots along the Strip and around McCarran International Airport to be later sold for profit. With increased scrutiny from regulators, the transfer in ownership was a blatant attempt to further obscure ties to the mob while allowing Hughes to become the "biggest single economic developer in Nevada history," yielding tremendous bargaining power with the state and the Nixon administration (Denton & Morris 2001, 278). Hughes had promised \$5 million for the construction of a new medical school in his negotiations with gaming authorities for additional licenses required to continue the accumulation of additional properties. His connections to Washington also proved instrumental in the easing of antitrust laws, granting Hughes unprecedented control over the development of Las Vegas and its future transfer of ownership into the hands of corporate control.

Hughes' Las Vegas dealings built on an established relationship

Figure 23: Consolidating Ownership of the Las Vegas Strip (1955-2014). Atwood & Schwarz, *Las Vegas Sun*, UNLV Architecture Studies

between the government and the Hughes Empire through various lucrative contracts. For instance, the Hughes Aircraft Company would be granted contracts in spy satellite technology becoming closely aligned with the operations of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) along with massive defense contracts awarded to Hughes Tool as a result of his close relationship to the Eisenhower-Nixon administration in the 1950s (Denton & Morris 2001, 295). Hughes' continually expanding dominance and monopolization of several industries was largely overlooked by the Justice Department at the time.

In 1957, Senator Kefauver would be named chair of the U.S. Senate Antitrust and Monopoly Subcommittee, leading inquiries into the monopolization and concentration of power in several industries including pharmaceuticals and steel. However, any revelations would be in vain as the political system had become beholden by the economic forces at play (Denton & Morris 2001, 126). The true impact of monopolization in Las Vegas would be revealed upon Hughes' departure from the region in 1970, an all too familiar tale of greed and deception. Hughes' accumulation of properties would serve to stifle the construction of all new hotels and industry, effectively flattening any potential competitor (Denton & Morris 2001, 289). Additionally, Hughes' failure to deliver on the allocation of funds for the construction of a new medical school in the region would be an early indicator of the false premise of corporate philanthropy. Yet, as the true impact of monopolization would become increasingly apparent, authorities were powerless to the established lines of influence that had infiltrated much of the American political system. The Nixon Watergate scandal that would eventually lead to his resignation in 1974, would begin to reveal the corruption that had beholden the federal government (Denton & Morris 2001, 308).

Figure 24: Aerial photograph of the domed Las Vegas Convention Center (1965). *Las Vegas Sun*



Figure 25: The private Hughes Executive Air Terminal at McCarran International Airport in the late 1960s. *OnlineNevada.org, UNLV Special Collections*



Constructing the Generic (1950s-1970)

Sociologist and political economist William Davies, identifies the restructuring of the government to better suit the needs of the market as another key process of neoliberalism which subjects all sectors to competition and evaluates the output of the government in economic payoff (Davies & Mills 2014). Municipal and county governments became preoccupied with attracting more tourists in order to keep resorts full under the misguided belief that the public sphere would eventually benefit. The investment in the construction of the airport and convention facilities built largely with taxpayer money, pandered directly to private interests. This illustrates the coercive political power of Strip business owners in shaping future development of the region.

The selection of a site for the region's first standalone convention centre was manipulated to appease the interests of the economy. The convention industry in America received a boost as a direct result of an amendment to the income tax code under President Eisenhower that would grant generous deductions for travel to exhibit goods and for professional growth (Moehring & Green 2005, 146). Taking full advantage of the tax provision along with the added appeal of filling empty hotel rooms during the week, the Clark County commission appointed a subcommittee to select a suitable location for the construction of a new convention centre. After a few site options were considered, a location adjacent to the Riviera Hotel outside of Las Vegas city limits was eventually selected. In a blatant conflict of interest however, the owner of the selected site, Joe W. Brown was a member of the three-person subcommittee and directly influenced the site-selection process. This decision would be another deliberate attempt to weaken the public sector by avoiding municipal taxes which served to further antagonize an already tense relationship between Strip business owners and the city of Las Vegas (Moehring & Green 2005, 146-148). Completed in 1959, the 90,000 square foot Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC) would accommodate a growing convention industry, becoming a premiere destination for conventions and trade shows as well as an indispensable fixture of the Las Vegas economy (**Figure 24**). By 2015, the LVCC had undergone a number of expansions and renovations to reach a total 2.25 million square feet of meeting and exhibition space, comprising only a fraction of the nearly 11 billion square feet of convention space in the region.

The first event to be held at the LVCC upon opening would be the World Congress of Flight meeting, another emerging industry that would be instrumental in the future growth of the

region. Developments in air travel technology and increased affordability would contribute to the sustained expansion of the convention industry. The rapid development of aircraft technology also meant that the first iteration of the McCarran Airport completed in 1948 was deemed insufficient within a decade of its opening. A bond election was eventually held to allow voters to decide on the financing of future construction for a massive airport expansion project in order to accommodate larger jet planes and more visitors. A strong majority passed the bond issue, albeit with a dismal 12% eligible voter turnout, kick starting the construction of the new McCarran Airport. The airport would be completed ahead of schedule in 1963 in order to meet growing demand (**Figure 25**) (Moehring & Green 2005, 188).

As casino resorts continued to expand and hotel room counts increased in conjunction with the completion of the LVCC, the Strip had the capacity to accommodate even larger volumes of visitors. Alongside the growth of the aviation industry into previously untapped markets, various resorts began offering all-inclusive vacation packages, which often included flights. Both the Frontier and Hacienda Hotels began flying guests into the Las Vegas region on company-operated airlines, reaching a larger share of the domestic tourist market (Moehring & Green 2005, 145). This foray into the airline industry reflects the efforts of companies to integrate vertically as well as horizontally (through monopolization) in an effort to constantly expand visitor volume.

This continued consolidation of ownership alongside the construction of the LVCC and the McCarran Airport within proximity of the Las Vegas Strip would secure it as the new geographical and economic centre of the region. The Strip would replace Fremont Street in downtown Las Vegas as the regional centre, becoming the beacon of a new form of urbanism, one that was subject to the forces of capitalism in its absence of municipal governance. Just as Koolhaas emphasizes, “identity centralizes” and as the Strip occupies the centre, urban growth proceeds from within (1994b, 1248). The urban sprawl that would emanate from the Strip “is only disguised insistence on the priority of and dependency on the center [sic]: without center, no periphery; the interest of the first presumably compensates for the emptiness of the latter” (Koolhaas 1994b, 1248).

The constant expansion of the airport eventually merged with the Strip itself, adding to the conglomeration of strips etched across the desert’s surface. Not only was the airfield located adjacent to the Strip but an increasing share of visitors would

arrive by plane, reinforcing the interdependence of the two elements. Instead of long-term residents, short-term visitors would almost exclusively occupy the centre. This would position the Strip as an extension of the airport, a metaphorically enlarged 'wing' populated by passengers on an extended layover. In his observation of the growth of the airport typology, Koolhaas would note the increasing array of "non-aviatic attractors" that have been included, like "tax-free shopping, spectacular spatial qualities, the frequency and reliability of their connections to other airports" (Koolhaas 1994b, 1251). In its growing interdependence, the Strip would become the airport's largest non-aviatic attractor.

As a region founded on constant passage, Las Vegas came to rely on evolving forms of travel. In its first iteration, the railroad would supply visitors to Downtown Las Vegas, concentrating activity around Fremont Street. As the leisure economy gained traction along with the increased availability of the automobile, the Strip would begin to take precedence. In its third iteration, the growth of McCarran International Airport would come to dominate as the primary mode of transit. By 1970, passengers arriving by plane had exceeded those arriving by automobile, delivering almost four times as many visitors annually (LVCVA 2015). This increased dependence on the airport to supply visitors would continue to align both public and private interests, resulting in the integration of the airport into the fabric of the Strip. Koolhaas notes the emerging role of airports in their quest to dominate their associated cities:

Becoming bigger and bigger, equipped with more and more facilities unconnected to travel, they are on the way to replacing the city. The in-transit condition is becoming universal. Together, airports contain populations of millions — plus the largest daily workforce. (1994b, 1251)

The airport becomes the generator of this new urbanity, driving development and shaping its form into vast expansive interior landscapes in order to accommodate larger numbers of patrons and a greater turnover of activities. Once again, the tabula rasa returns but in this instance formalized as a convention centre, a building which facilitates an accelerated rate of set-up and take down, a constant clearing.

The generic condition persists alongside the interiorization of the expansive desert landscape into sprawling, conditioned spaces with low-ceiling heights, programmed as convention centres and casino gaming floors. Even hotel rooms in a standard Las Vegas high-rise tower are stacked in a parallel

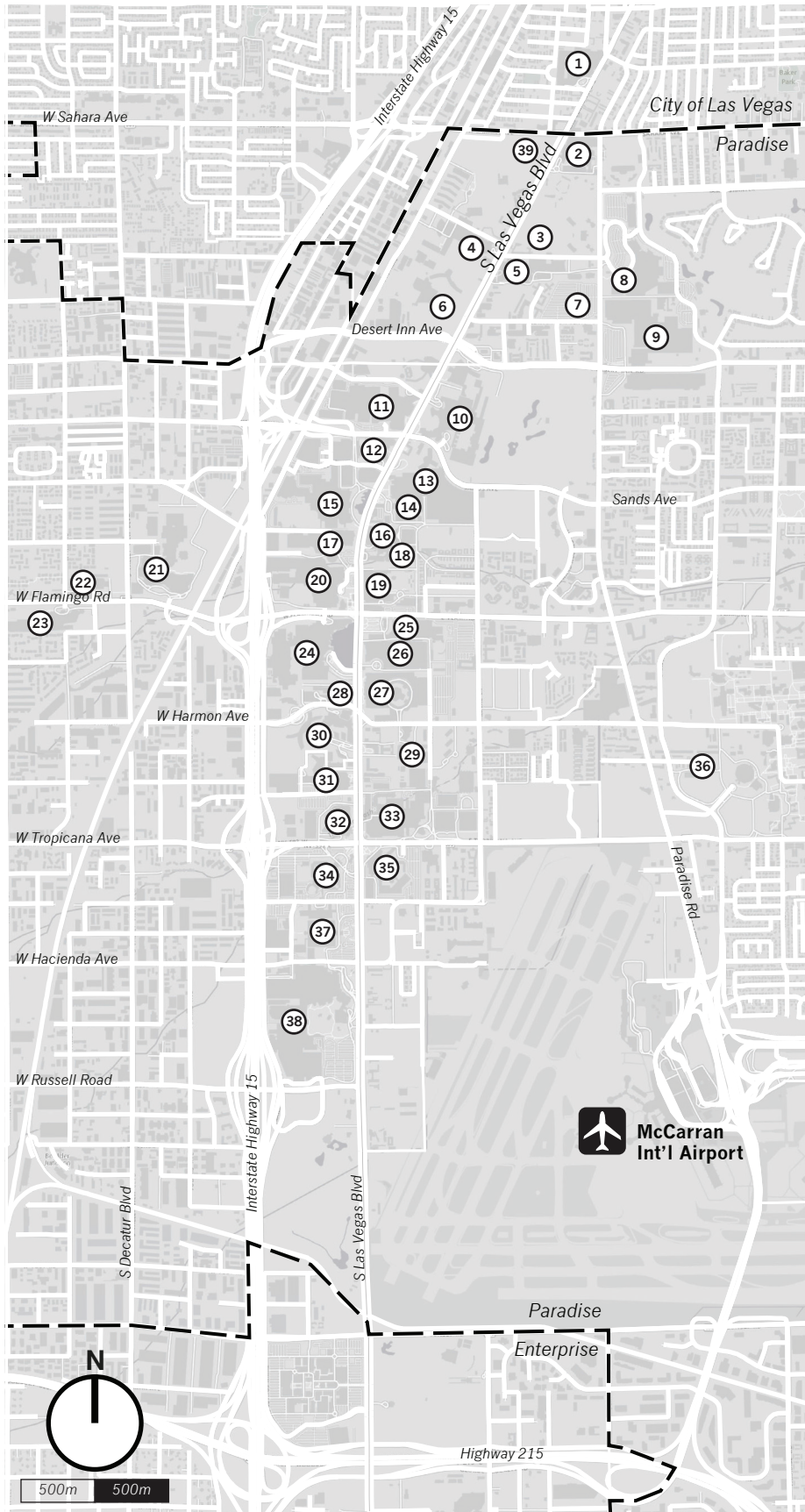
Figure 26: Map of Major Resort Locations on the Las Vegas Strip. Clark County GIS Info, Google Maps, Las Vegas Sun

arrangement, floor-upon-floor, sprawling vertically. Koolhaas declares that within the Generic City, that “hotels are its generic accommodation, its most common building block” (**Figure 26**) (1994, 1260).

In addition to the interiorization of the generic desert landscape with the construction of sprawling convention centres and hotel towers, the Las Vegas Valley is pathologically generic, dominated by the banalizing forces of capitalism. Debord elaborates:

...behind the glitter of the spectacle’s distractions, modern society lies in thrall to the global domination of a banalizing trend that also dominates it at each point where the most advanced forms of commodity consumption have seemingly broadened the panoply of roles and objects available to choose from. (1994, Thesis 59)

Perhaps the clearest indication of the “spectacle’s distractions” would be the reliance on a myriad of thematic tropes to obscure the pervasive generic-ness of the architecture of the Las Vegas Strip. Hotels wrapped in fantastical finishes, convention centres which sprout new interior arrangements each week and airports that pawn souvenirs depicting landmarks all converge under a single motivation; to accelerate the accumulation of capital.



Legend

- 25 **Bally's**
MGM Grand
- 24 **Bellagio**
Dunes
- 20 **Caesars Palace**
- 4 **Circus Circus**
- 30 **CityCenter**
Boardwalk
- 28 **Cosmopolitan**
- 3 **El Rancho**
Thunderbird
- 39 **El Rancho Vegas**
- 34 **Excalibur**
- 11 **Fashion Show Mall**
Frontier
Fair-O-Dice
- 19 **Flamingo**
- 17 **The Forum Shops**
- 22 **Gold Coast**
- 16 **Harrah's**
- 7 **Landmark**
- 9 **Convention Center**
- 8 **Las Vegas Hilton**
- 18 **The LINQ**
Imperial Palace
- 37 **Luxor**
- 38 **Mandalay Bay**
Hacienda
- 15 **The Mirage**
- 33 **MGM Grand**
- 31 **Monte Carlo**
- 32 **New York New York**
- 13 **The Palazzo**
- 23 **Palms**
- 26 **Paris**
- 27 **Planet Hollywood**
- 29 **Polo Tower Suites**
- 21 **Rio**
- 5 **Riviera**
- 2 **SLS Las Vegas**
Sahara
- 1 **Stratosphere**
- 6 **Stardust**
- 12 **Treasure Island**
- 35 **Tropicana**
- 36 **UNLV Campus**
- 14 **The Venetian**
Sands
- 10 **Wynn/Encore**
Desert Inn

4. Manufactured Fantasy

Until the 1960s, these developments in Las Vegas had largely remained isolated to a limited regional context with minimal influence outside of Nevada and Southern California. The expansion of the McCarran Airport however would extend access to untapped markets. The Strip would also attract a Yale School of Architecture graduate studio led by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour in 1967. A group of outsiders drawn to this peculiar outpost in the Mojave Desert, the studio would eventually publish the seminal *Learning from Las Vegas*, shifting the widespread derision of the Strip within the field of architecture to attitudes of curiosity and inquiry. The release of *Learning from Las Vegas* and Howard Hughes' acquisition of several properties in Las Vegas legitimized a much-maligned gambling economy dominated by ties to organized crime. In time, investment in casino developments would provide quick returns and demonstrated the lucrative potential of the industry on a larger scale, attracting speculation and driving profits. Hughes' influence would also result in the easing of antitrust laws to permit further consolidation across several industries. This monopolizing force culminated in the expansion of resorts to accommodate a larger array of program and unprecedented building.



The opening of Jay Sarno's Caesars Palace in 1966 introduced a new building typology to the region, a sprawling campus resort dressed in an all-encompassing theme. The campus would continue to expand as a direct result of the accumulative process of monopolization, an umbrella of ownership under which program are added and swapped out for newer more profitable options. This ability to accommodate new program is a key characteristic of the campus resort in securing further capital accumulation as new elements can be incorporated into the campus resort which refresh the programmatic mix without compromising the operation of the whole. This allows the casino resort to maintain high-level of consumer interest and offer an 'illusion of choice', a pre-planned selection of activities.

Michael Sorkin points to Disney as an effective purveyor of the manufactured fantasy:

Disney represents one of the forces seeking to establish a kind of capitalist hegemony over the structures of fantasy in our culture, through a reduction of our private fantasy to a limited series of public fantasies. (1992)

The distillation of fantasy into fewer possibilities yields greater efficiency for companies, which can disseminate a limited range of services and commodities to effectively cater to these preselected fantasies.

Neoliberal notions of a 'free marketplace' are also protected by a sowing of fantastical notions. Political economist Karl Polanyi emphasizes that there are actually two types of freedom, one good and one bad. The good includes the freedoms of conscience, speech, association, and choice of work which are initial products of the free market, and the bad includes the freedoms to exploit, accumulate immeasurable wealth and the freedom to prevent technological inventions from ever being used for public benefit (Harvey 2001, 36). The adoption of a globalized neoliberal marketplace from the 1980s onward depended on this duality, although only highlighting the positive benefits of restructuring foreign economies. Often, these interventions required the deployment of the military and aggressive restructuring campaigns.

The resurgence of resort development along the Strip led by the opening of The Mirage in 1989 would demonstrate this destructive duality of freedom. In a bid to attract families, the Strip spawned sanitized recreations of foreign cities, staged extravagant outdoor shows, and introduced Cirque du Soleil to the programmatic mix. The focus had shifted away from gambling and other adult-oriented activities toward infantilized

fantasies that appealed to a larger segment of the population. This development of manufactured fantasy in the region effectively eradicated all historic buildings on the Strip served to remove any semblance of the past, a condition that Guy Debord and Rem Koolhaas offer diverging views.

Debord laments the loss of a “historical consciousness” that could potentially mobilize an increasingly disenfranchised working class while Koolhaas proclaims this destruction is in fact a liberation from the “straightjacket of identity” that history imposes (Debord 1994, Thesis 177; Koolhaas & Mau 1994b, 1248). Koolhaas also notes the accessibility of the sprawling urban periphery as it typically means more affordable rents and larger properties, which are deemed a premium in the core.

This expansive building campaign would incur the “incessant technological renewal” of the Strip, reinforcing one of the foundations of the spectacle identified by Anselm Jappe (1999, 7). This would leave Las Vegas without a habitable core as the historic downtown Fremont Street had long been abandoned in favour of the Strip, an urban centre that continues to remain exclusively for tourists. Alongside the overhaul of the Strip is the neighbouring United States Air Force base, a proxy for destruction abroad in the maintaining of neoliberal freedoms that had come to form Las Vegas in the first place. It will be demonstrated that the long established relationship between the military and the development of the Las Vegas region is in fact not coincidental. The Strip as neoliberal vanguard is dependent upon this manufactured fantasy of freedom, a destructive duality that permits frivolous consumption supported by the freedom to exploit and destroy.

Campus as Monopolization (1966-1975)

The opening of Caesars Palace on August 5th, 1966 would be the first new casino to be constructed on the Las Vegas Strip since 1958 with the construction of the Stardust. Caesars Palace's business model would continually adapt to the demands of competition, expanding to accommodate new programmatic elements while maintaining a single theme throughout its long history despite the thematic reconfiguration of other Strip properties in the 1990s. The resort would introduce a highly profitable retail sector to the Las Vegas Strip with off-track betting and high-profile sporting events, allowing the brand to position itself as an industry leader. The Caesars Palace campus will serve as a datum against which the economic and political forces of the Strip will be analyzed.

Caesars Palace would be fashioned in an imperialist Greco-Roman theme that would come to represent the city's growing influence within the American 'empire', becoming the first casino resort to adopt an overarching theme across various platforms from the design of the hotel rooms, to the shared common areas and the grand 9,000 seat Circus Maximus theatre. Owner Jay Sarno, would largely finance the project with over \$20 million worth of construction loans from the mob-affiliated Teamster's Union Pension Fund, continuing the tradition of borrowing from illicit sources to construct casino projects (Denton & Morris 2001, 232). Designed by Miami architect Melvin Grossman, the casino resort was an attempt to "soften modernism" with a gently curved 14-storey hotel tower rising from a sprawling podium, extruded from the elliptical egg-shaped casino floor which the hotelier believed "relaxed patrons" (**Figure 27**) (Rothman 2002, 18). In a display of "revisionist historicism", Grossman would replace the central public square of a traditional Baroque urban plan with an open casino floor, serving as the nucleus of the layout which connected to a large outdoor pool area resembling Hadrian's Tivoli villa (Hess 1993, 83-86).

In *Learning from Las Vegas*, the complex intermixing of program at Caesars Palace would be described as "one of the grandest" (Venturi et al. 1972, 50). A dazzling array of styles, reconstructed in postmodern decadence:

It is also a combination of styles. The front colonnade is San Pietro-Bernini in plan but Yamasaki in vocabulary and scale; the blue and gold mosaic work is Early Christian tomb of Galla Placidia. (The Baroque symmetry of its prototype precludes an inflection toward the right in this facade.) Beyond and above is a slab in

Figure 27: View of Caesars Palace from the Strip, displaying a symmetrical 'softened modernism' as described by architect Melvin Grossman (1966). UNLV Special Collections



Figure 28: Aerial photograph of Caesars Palace after two hotel tower additions, departing from the symmetrical proportions of modernist architecture (1975). UNLV Special Collections



Gio Ponti Pirelli-Baroque, and beyond that, in turn, a low wing in Neo-classical Motel Moderne. Economics has vanquished symmetry in a recent addition. But the new slab and the various styles are integrated by a ubiquity of Ed Stone screens. The landscaping is also eclectic. Within the Piazza San Pietro is the token parking lot. Among the parked cars rise five fountains rather than the two of Carlo Maderno; Villa d'Este cypresses further punctuate the parking environment. Gian de Bologna's *Rape of the Sabine Women* and statues of Venus and David with slight anatomical exaggerations, grace the area around the porte cochere. Almost bisecting a Venus in an Avis, a sign identifying No. 2's offices on the premises. (Venturi et al. 1972, 51)

(5) Modern Living, "Gaudy Grand Hotels," *Life Magazine*, July 26, 1963, 75.

In another reference to the Roman Empire, Venturi would also note that the Las Vegas Strip embodied the spirit of the Roman Forum "with its eclectic accumulations" (Venturi et al. 1972, 51). *Learning from Las Vegas* would establish the Las Vegas Strip as the centre of the modern capitalistic world before gambling had been recognized as a legitimate industry in the United States, prophesying the widespread legalization of gambling.

The Caesars Palace project was initiated by Sarno's ambition to produce a flagship for his Cabana Motor Hotel chain of which he had just completed a hotel in Palo Alto California which boasted a 9-storey tower with a decadent black granite facade (Hess 1993, 84). In a 1963 *Life Magazine* advertising feature entitled "Gaudy Grand Hotels," the project's Romanesque flourishes included a nightclub named Nero's Nook with servers sporting thigh-high togas while serving such specialty whisky cocktails as Caesar's Seizure. (5) Caesars Palace's estimated \$20 million construction budget, would far surpass its \$5 million predecessor and would contain well over three times the number of hotel rooms. Caesars also marked "a departure from all the other properties in the valley, including the Fabulous Flamingo and Tropicana Hotels" with the specification of lavish marble finishes, imported cypress trees from Italy, eighteen fountains, and statuary that would line the 135-foot driveway to the front entrance. In another departure from existing casino resorts, surface parking was relegated off to the right side of the sprawling campus instead of in front (Moehring & Green 2005, 175; Denton & Morris 2001, 227).

As the initial owner of the Caesars Palace property, Kirk Kerkorian would make a small fortune from the \$4 million he collected in rent and the eventual sale of the land to the tenant for \$5 million in 1968 (Smith, Tilden & Lavelle 2014, 31). He would also profit from the sale of the Flamingo and

International resorts to the Hilton hotel chain, using this money to acquire MGM Studios which in turn would reinforce the connection of Hollywood to Las Vegas (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 24). By 1973, Kerkorian opened the original MGM Grand Hotel, surpassing rival Caesars Palace in “size, services and appeal” (Moehring & Green 2005, 205).

Economists Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler point to the role of ‘sabotage’ and exclusion as a tactic in acquiring influence through accumulation, demonstrated in the constant exchange of properties along the Strip, as owners jockeyed for position as industry leader (2009, 315). Sabotage is the power to incapacitate competitors through restriction or impeding on their profit-making potential in one form or another. Furthermore, “Capital goods’ yield profit not because of their individual productivity, but because they are privately owned to begin with – that is, owned against others.” (Nitzan & Bichler 2009, 228). Private ownership of land in particular, serves to exclude others from profiting, driving power and values.

In a demonstrated act of sabotage, bank of Las Vegas president E. Parry Thomas, would convince Howard Hughes Jr. to sell a sliver of land to his protégée Steve Wynn for \$1.1 million. Wynn would launch a campaign to build the “world’s narrowest casino” on the 25-foot wide property adjacent to Caesars Palace which also encroached on 1,500 feet of property line. The proposed development also threatened to obstruct the resort’s sightlines which were crucial to attracting visitors arriving by car. In 1972, Caesars begrudgingly acquired the property from Wynn for \$2.25 million, netting him a \$700,000 profit in less than a year after its initial purchase (**Figure 28**). This would position Wynn with increased buying power and prominence in relation to Las Vegas developers like Kirk Kerkorian. He would embark on a buying spree starting with the purchase of the troubled Golden Nugget casino on Fremont Street, investing in renovations and upgrades (Denton & Morris 2001, 321). Steve Wynn’s string of successive acquisitions both in downtown Las Vegas and abroad would net him increased wealth and power before the construction of his first resort on the Strip in 1989.

This process of accumulation illustrates Nitzan and Bichler’s theory of capital as a mode of power, which departs from the traditional Marxist notions of capital as means of production:

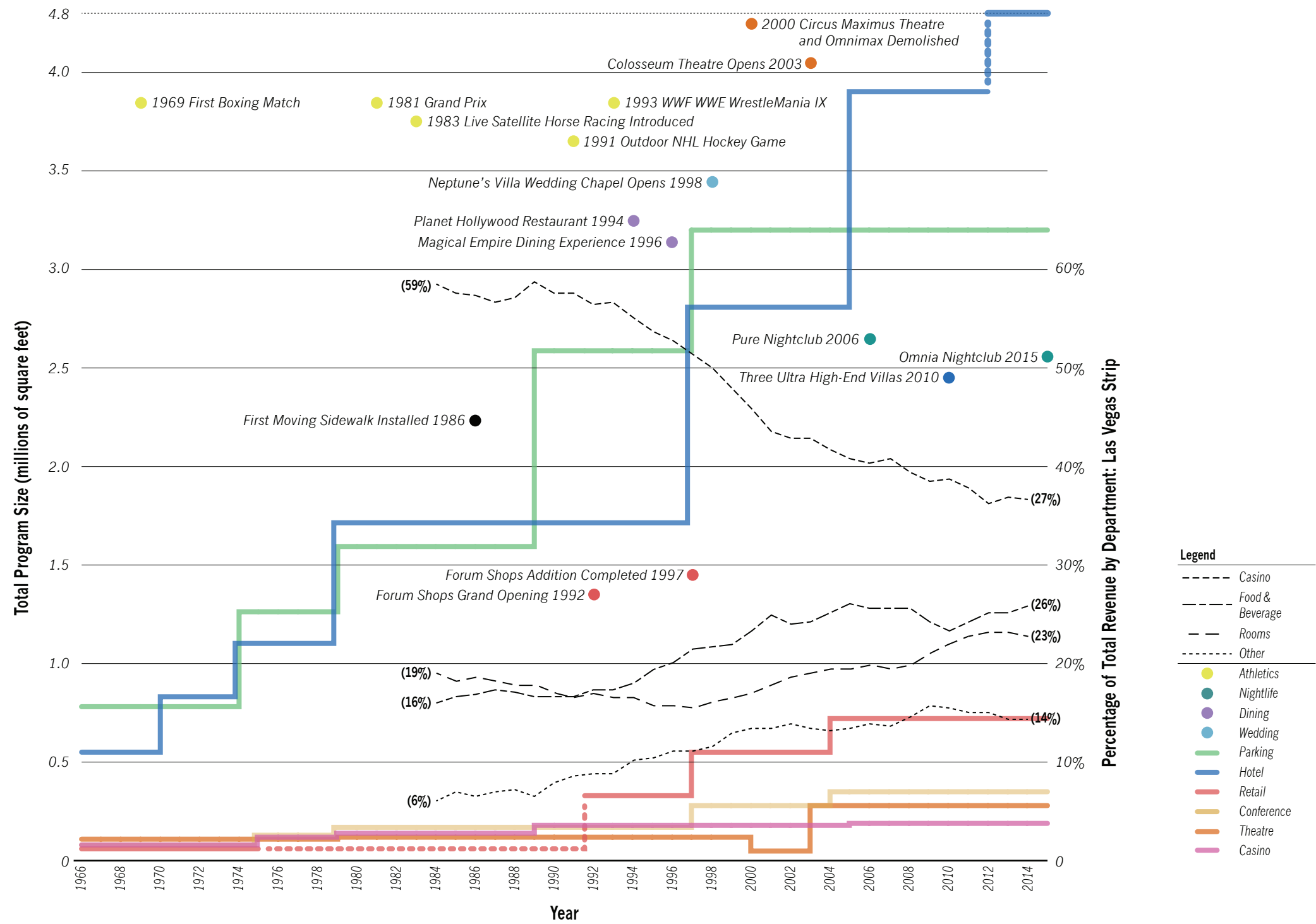
Our own framework fuses the two logics [power and capital]. Capital is still the starting point, as Marx correctly insisted. And ownership of the means of production indeed is merely one form of power, as the Weberians argue. But capital is not means of production;

it is a mode of power. And although there are many different forms of authority and power, in principle they can all be subsumed by capital. (Nitzan & Bichler 2009, 311)

Under this conceptualization, capital requires the constant reorganization of society in order to maintain control, more closely reflecting the behaviour of the markets where losses are opportunities for further accumulation and increased power. Thus power is not simply achieved through a continuous collection of capital goods but 'differential accumulation'. With differential accumulation, "the goal is not to maximize but to exceed, not to meet but to beat," outperforming the average (Nitzan & Bichler 2009, 309). This concept reveals the opportunities for further acquisition of power even during periods of loss and market crises.

This pattern of accumulation is particularly evident in the growth of the Las Vegas Strip, with Howard Hughes Jr. and other wealthy individuals acquiring properties and quickly selling them for profit, gaining increased power with each turnover. Within four years of opening, Sarno would sell Caesars Palace for \$60 million dollars at three times the initial cost to help finance his fledgling Circus Circus development, which was faltering as a result of its lack of hotel accommodation (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 23). Owner of the Lum's chain of restaurants Lum's, Inc. would buy Caesars Palace shortly after the Corporate Gaming Act was introduced in 1969, investing in the emergent gambling economy. The company created Caesars World to manage casino operations and oversee the further acquisition of several Strip properties, beginning with the Thunderbird in 1972 (Hess 1993, 92).

Caesars Palace had established itself as a 'first mover' within the leisure economy and would continually adapt to exceed its rivals through securing further capital with constant expansion and monopolization (**Figure 29**). Sociologist and political economist William Davies identifies a shift from the perception of monopolies as a problem that should be regulated with the help of antitrust laws pre-1950s, to the growing ideology that the market can regulate itself since it exists in a free society and competitors can be easily supplied through entrepreneurialism (Davies 2013, 2). He notes that this shift in economic policy would fail to account for the resulting concentration of 'dominant capital' (ie. industry leaders and key government organizations) to maintain power through nepotism, inheritance, and corporatization. Davies also incorporates Oliver Williamson's theory of the firm noting how social and dialogic interpersonal relationships within a firm



have much more of an impact than the marketplace itself since it operates on its own terms through the adherence to contracts, independent of governmental oversight (Davies 2013, 3). The push to monopolize in Las Vegas would stem from the distinct advantages attributed to continually incorporating potential competitors before they posed a threat.

Under this guise, architecture would manifest as sprawling buildings in a push to economize and profit from every square foot of property in order to accumulate further capital to constantly exceed competitors. The campus model of building could accommodate a multitude of services and businesses, all operated under a single company and/or theme, as demonstrated in the constant expansion of the Caesars Palace resort. Various program could exist within close proximity to one another with distinct roles, managed by contractual arrangements. In this manner, the casino resort typology is analogous to the operation of a firm; where employees are arranged in a totalizing hierarchical arrangement to improve efficiencies by eliminating subcontractors and maximizing profits. Alfred Chandler notes that “...by focusing on the firm can microeconomic theory explain why this legal, contracting, transacting entity has been the instrument in capitalist economies for carrying out the processes of production and distribution, for increasing productivity and for propelling economic growth and transformation” (1992, 99). The Caesars Palace resort could continually adapt to the demands of the leisure economy by incorporating new services under a consistent brand identity of references to classical architecture. The overarching image or theme would continue to dictate the form of these new services.

v. The growth of the all-inclusive resort campus model reflects this “universal system” and its dependency on the contradiction of “unity and division” to continue the processes of differential accumulation. The campus resort appears at once to offer an array of otherwise competitive services under a single, all-encompassing, unified theme.

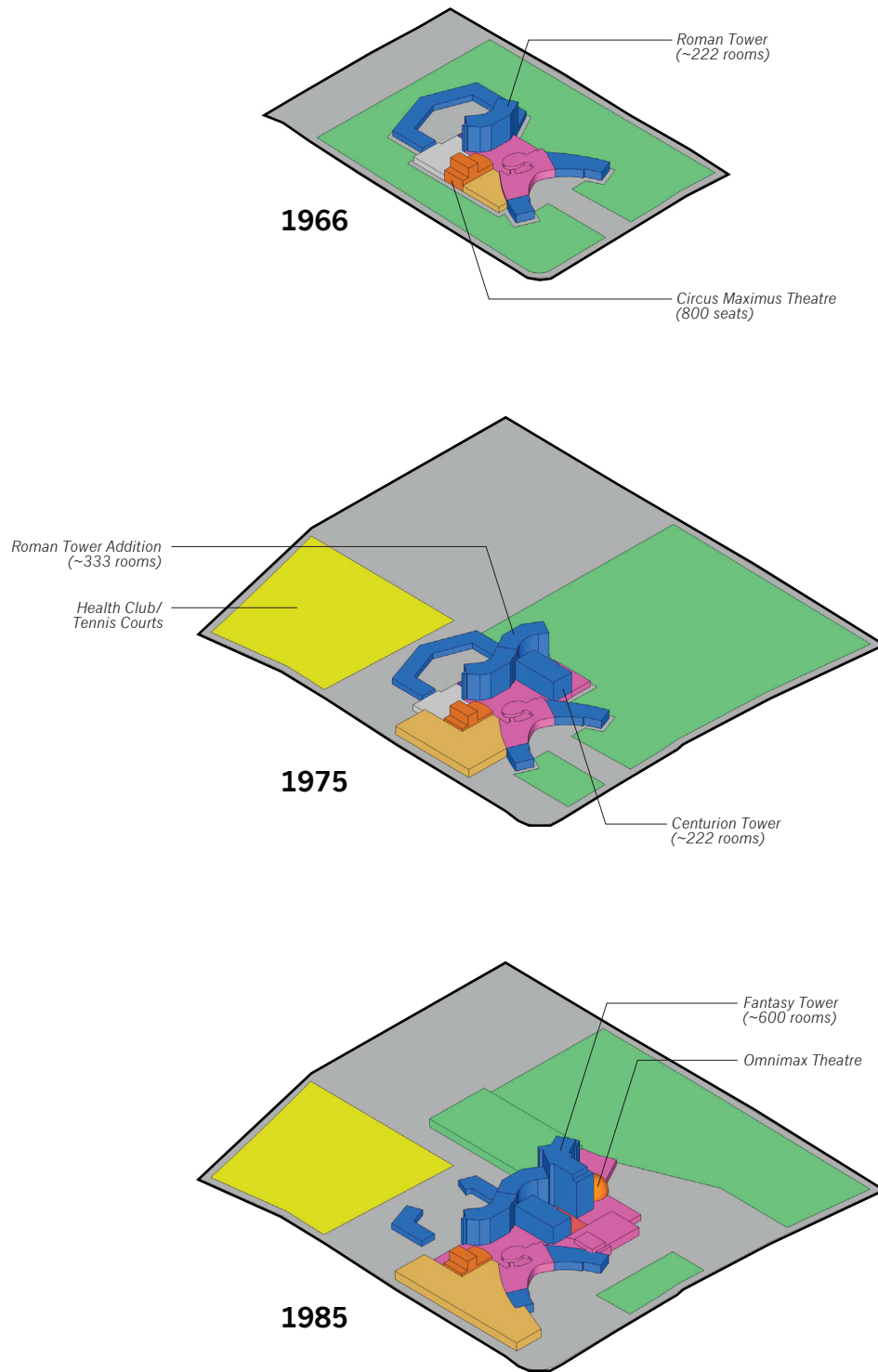
Similar techniques involving the illusion of choice have been adopted by totalitarian regimes, where “shifting stories and multiple masquerades” are required to continually refresh the “original myth or brand” (Easterling 2005, 27). Hal Foster identifies the totalitarian illusion implicit in the campus resort as expressed in his critique of Koolhaas’ *Junkspace*, describing the absurd juxtapositions of program and space contained within. Just as campus resorts appear to accommodate everyone in its aggressive sprawl, consumption is framed as a great equalizer. He also notes that this fantasy is the “contemporary

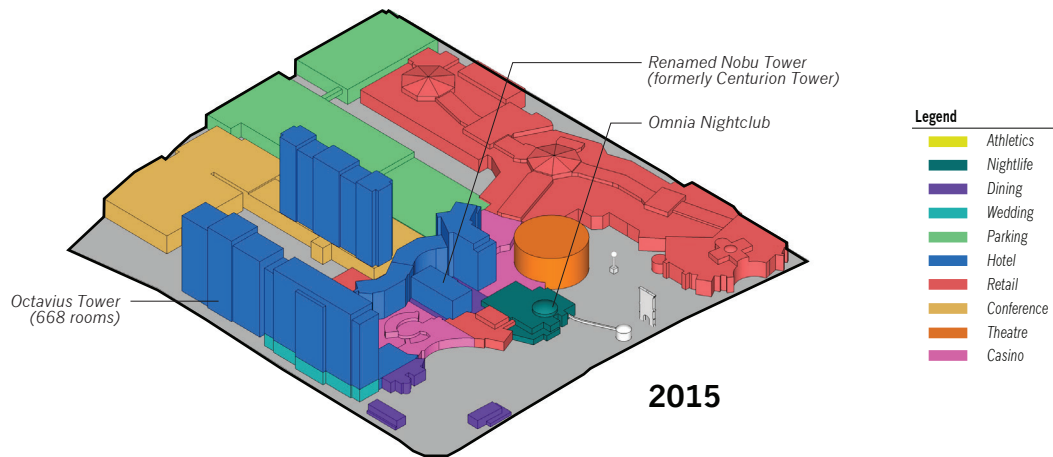
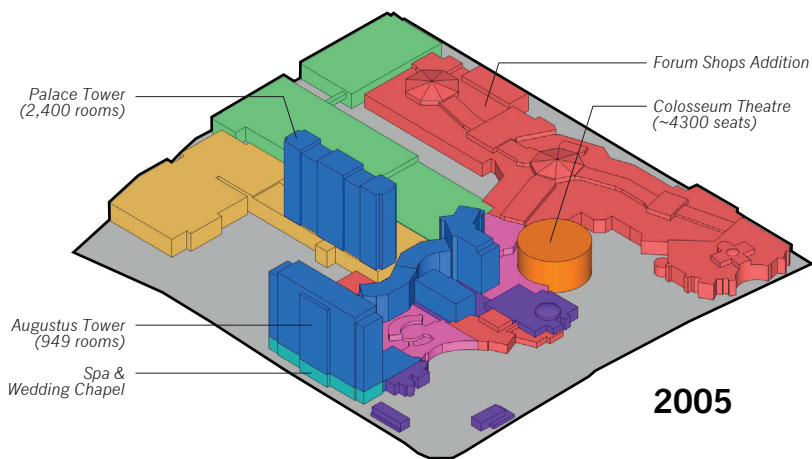
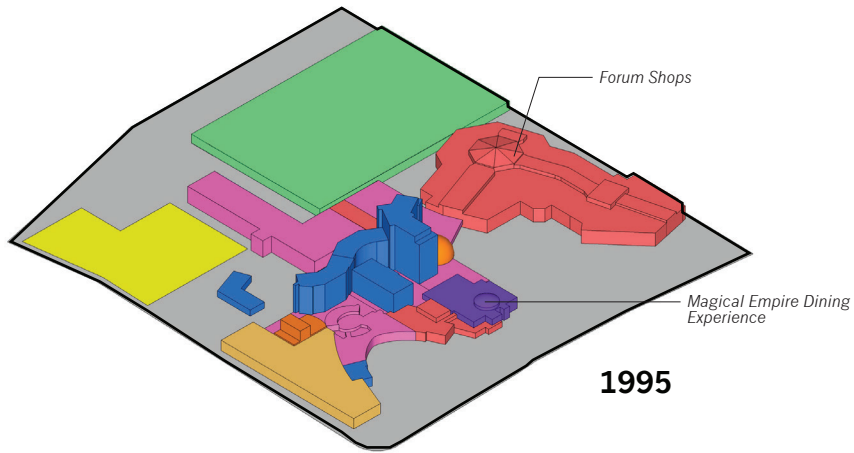
Figure 29: Caesars Palace Campus Programmatic Changes in conjunction with Departmental Revenue (1966-2015). *Las Vegas: A Centennial History*, UNLV Nevada Casino Departmental Income (2004-2014), Caesars World Press Releases, UNLV Special Collections

complement to the foundational myth of the United States: that such [class] divisions never existed here in the first place. It is this delusion that allows millions of Americans to vote against their interests at least every four years” (2013, 59-60).

Thus, the strength of the resort campus lies in its constant expansion, expanding its capacity to absorb underperforming or out-dated programmatic elements without compromising the operation of the whole. Throughout its history of expansion, Caesars Palace would incorporate such novel program as a Formula One race track, an interactive theatrical dining experience known as Magical Empire, an Atari arcade, an IMAX movie theatre, and a wedding chapel, most of which have since been discarded in favour of newer offerings. Parking would be relegated to the back of the property, stacked in garages to preserve the ground plane for the construction of sprawling retail malls (**Figure 30**). Foster concludes that this campus condition “thus concerns time as much as space: it is an effect of the continual transformation of space according to the accelerated temporality of consumption, not to mention the projected temporality of speculation” (2013, 48). The resort campus typology continues to expand in an eternal quest to dominate space for the differential accumulation of capital, a tangible effect of the spectacle society.

Figure 30: Caesars Palace Additive Resort Campus Model Growth Axonometric (1966-2015). UNLV Special Collections, Las Vegas Sun, Google Maps





Novelty, or Widespread Economic Restructuring (1975-2000)

“Novelty” becomes an instrumental tool in the securing of differential accumulation as it is “something new, original, or unusual...and cannot be predicted,...an adventure continuously re-written by its own characters” (Nitzan & Bichler 2009, 325). Each element that is incorporated into the campus resort typology utilizes novelty to refresh the programmatic mix, maintaining interest and the illusion of choice. This dependence on an ever-evolving juxtaposition of programmatic elements fuels constant growth while giving rise to a peculiar architectural problem. Koolhaas first identifies this condition in *Bigness or the problem of Large*, which reiterates the five theorems of Bigness originally defined in *Delirious New York*. In the first theorem, he observes the changing role of architecture in large buildings where such masses “can no longer be controlled by a singular architectural gesture, or even by any combination of architectural gestures. The impossibility triggers the autonomy of its parts, which is different from fragmentation: the parts remain committed to the whole” (Koolhaas 1994a, 499). This commitment to the whole is evident in the consistent level of theming across the campus environment. The “continual transformation of space according to the accelerated temporality of consumption” dictates architecture become smooth, all-inclusive and continuous to produce further efficiencies and increase profits (Foster 2013, 48).

A differential status of accumulation would also be imposed upon consumers in order to encourage spending where “the goal is not to achieve hedonistic pleasure but to establish ‘differential status’; to establish that the consumer can afford what others cannot” (Nitzan & Bichler 2009, 308). In part, this would be facilitated by the provision of “comps” or exclusive rewards for casino high rollers and frequent players. The more that the customer spent at any given casino, the more incentives they would receive to encourage further spending. As casinos grew and tourist volume swelled, it became crucial to establish a differential status amongst consumers to encourage further individualization. Particularly amongst middle class gamblers, access to typically unobtainable luxuries like hotel room upgrades, free steak dinners, and extravagant stage shows proved appealing, inducing an alluring sense of freedom through spending. This democracy of consumption would also manifest as the freedom to spend and consume from a vast array of retailers and services, amassing profits for just a few owners.

The sophistication of the campus resort model afforded Caesars World increased prominence on the national stage.

Figure 31: The original MGM Grand Hotel and Casino portecochère following an early morning fire that claimed the lives of 87 people (November 21, 1980). *Associated Press*



For instance, the influence of dominant capital would become particularly evident in the late 1970s with launch of a federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) investigation into a suspected “multimillion-dollar, international drug-smuggling organization” at Caesars Palace. However, the investigation would eventually be called off due to the fact that “the magnitude, scope, and complexity of the operations’ exceeded its field capabilities” (Denton & Morris 2001, 326). In addition to increased operations of scale through monopolization, corporations exercise immediate power over their employees as well as indirect power over other people through:

...[the] creation of loyal and predictable customers, the taming of voters, control of subcontractors, subjugation of governments, shaping of public policies, molding of culture and crafting of ideology, the harnessing of religion, the use of armies and police forces, the crafting of international relations. (Nitzan & Bichler 2009, 329)

Caesars World continued its expansion into previously untapped markets with the opening of a casino resort in Atlantic City in 1979, taking full advantage of the recently introduced Foreign Gaming Law which allowed Nevada-based operators to operate casinos out of state (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 32). This temporarily shifted attention away from the Las Vegas Strip, which was receiving unfavourable national attention at the time for the questionable business practices of its casino resorts. The national crime syndicate had become completely intertwined in the Nevada state economy with mob affiliates providing up to a third of the state’s 424,000 jobs by the 1980s in addition to posted profits that comprised about half of the state’s income (Denton & Morris 2001, 335). **(6)** This provided the mob tremendous influence amongst state politicians, ensuring their illicit activities remained unquestioned by federal investigators and gaming authorities. However, the persistent presence of the mob and its growing desperation to remain a regional stronghold continued to ward away many domestic tourists, limiting its appeal to regional visitors from the Southern California area. They could not quell Las Vegas’ problematic reputation, which could no longer be concealed by thematized façades and was not considered to be an appealing vacation destination for the vast majority of travellers by the end of the 1970s.

In the span of a single four-month period from 1980-1981, three separate fires at major hotels would further discourage travellers from visiting the Strip, calling into question the safety of Nevada hotels (**Figure 31**). One particularly devastating fire at the MGM Grand hotel claimed the lives of 85 people

(6) Publicly posted profits were only a portion of actual gambling revenue with profit skimming schemes rampant at most casinos at the time; “... there was always the financial front, the visible money at play on the tables, the reported profits, losses, bank deposits, and taxes, the set of books for the government and the “clean” accountants. Behind that was a second or even third set of books recording the millions being skimmed off the top for licensed or secret owners, and the tens of millions more in criminal money from around the country and world being laundered and redistributed. “Three for us, one for the government, two for Meyer [Lanksy],” as someone present in the casino counting room recalled the routine formula for the skim and tax evasion performed three times a day, at the end of every shift” (Denton & Morris 2001, 102).

(7) Kane, Robert M. (2003). "Civil Aeronautics Board." *Air Transportation*. Kendall Hunt, 121.

as water sprinklers had not been installed in the building, prompting a state mandated retrofitting of all high-rises in the Valley (Moehring & Green 2005, 206). Such tragic incidents highlighted the need for more thorough regulatory oversight and accountability, which would be instrumental in the shift toward the corporatization of Strip resorts. With the reputations of large companies at stake, dramatic building overhauls would be required along with the diminishing of unsavoury mob ties.

Formed in 1940, the federal aircraft governing body known as the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) was responsible for allocating flight routes and investigating accidents. The CAB was also largely responsible for diminishing the threat of monopolization amongst airlines and worked with Las Vegas authorities to increase flights into the region. In 1971, McCarran was designated as an official "port-of-entry" allowing it receive international flights, significantly broadening its reach to foreign markets, facilitating further growth of the tourism industry. The Airline Deregulation Act of 1978 would dissolve the role of the CAB and was subsequently disestablished by 1985, signalling a further shift to neoliberal processes of deregulation under the Reagan administration. This nationwide process of deregulation in the 1980s would encourage widespread corporatization and the monopolization of various industrial sectors, including airlines, telecommunications, and pharmaceuticals. (7)

Reagan presented the market as a self-regulating mechanism that was cable of fostering competition and innovation in an attempt to overcome a period of stagflation that had defined much of the 1970s. However, these processes "depicted ideologically as the way to foster competition and innovation, became a vehicle for the consolidation of monopoly power" (Harvey 2005, 26). Newcomers were prevented from accessing the marketplace due to the hegemony established by monopoly forces, which could generate cash flows through efficiencies associated with higher volumes of production along with the abilities to set prices low while maintaining a margin of profit (Chandler 1977, 299). Dramatic personal and corporate tax cuts for the wealthiest income earners during the Reagan administration would also ensure that market leaders would maintain a strong lead over rivals through further monopolization. Deregulation of international markets also facilitated the widespread loss of manufacturing sector jobs that pursued countries with relaxed labour laws and worker protections. Since Las Vegas had developed a largely service based economy, it would not be affected by widespread losses in the manufacturing sector. Several cities (ie. Detroit, Atlantic City, and Joliet, Illinois) would actually adopt a Las Vegas style economic model and implement larger service sectors to

compensate for climbing levels of unemployment. These cities would contribute millions of dollars into infrastructure for out-of-town visitors, promoting tourism and entertainment as fixes to the problem of bleeding capital. These cities would further abandon their poorer residents, as demonstrated in Atlantic City where a string of large resorts were built along its seaside boardwalk, with “windowless casinos connected to giant parking garages to buffer gamblers from the city’s increasingly black, impoverished population” (Sugrue 1996, xlii). The widespread investment in a service-based economy would also inherit the same social ills that would come to plague Las Vegas residents.

The foray into untapped markets also encouraged resorts in Las Vegas to remain competitive with efforts to upgrade existing facilities in order to maximize consumer spending. Evident is the lull in new casino construction projects throughout the 1980s, instead relying on the addition of hotel towers to existing properties and renovations to increase accommodations while new properties were being developed in other cities (**Figure 32**). One innovation to drive consumption in Las Vegas was the installation of the first moving sidewalk at Caesars Palace in 1984. This allowed the resort to sustain expansion internally, reducing consumer fatigue while traversing vast distances at higher speeds. In addition to the moving sidewalk, the escalator would also facilitate further “smoothness’ of flow through these structures, while the air-conditioner supplied ‘life support’ for the consumers who pass through them” (Foster 2013, 46). Together, the technological advances in movement and the air-conditioner would produce the condition of what Koolhaas calls *Junkspace* or the “endless building”, one that “is never closed”. Koolhaas notes that “conditioned space inevitably becomes conditional space” which eventually becomes *Junkspace* in its interchangeable existence (Koolhaas 2001, 408). Las Vegas would continue its long established tradition as a place of continuous passage, with each incarnation of increased flows.

The opening of Steve Wynn’s Mirage in 1989 would be an update to the prevailing resort model. Becoming the Strip’s first new construction project in nearly 15 years, the sprawling 3 million square foot “megaresort” cost more than \$700 million to build. The Mirage was also constructed adjacent to Caesars Palace after Wynn had accumulated substantial capital through the sale of junk bonds and sold his Atlantic City Golden Nugget casino (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 33). By comparison, The Mirage had nearly double the number of rooms of Caesars Palace with 3,044 rooms in total and it was estimated that The Mirage generated nearly \$2 million dollars a day in revenue, far surpassing the \$1 million baseline required in order to service its interest payments and cover operating costs (Gottdiener et

Junk Bonds

A high-yield, high-risk security, typically issued by a company seeking to raise capital quickly in order to finance a takeover.

“Low-grade bonds may be issued by companies without long track records, or with questionable ability to meet their debt obligations. Because most brokers do not invest in these low-grade bonds, they are known as junk bonds. However, because of the very high interest rates these bond issues typically offer, they are also referred to as high-yield bonds. Because junk bonds have a high default risk, they are speculative. Default risk is the chance that a company or government will be unable to pay its obligations when the bonds mature. Defaults on bonds most often occur within the first several years of a bond’s issue.” (Morningstar News)

al. 1999, 34). T-shirt sales alone contributed nearly \$25,000 toward daily revenues, indicating the rising prominence of retail in Las Vegas.

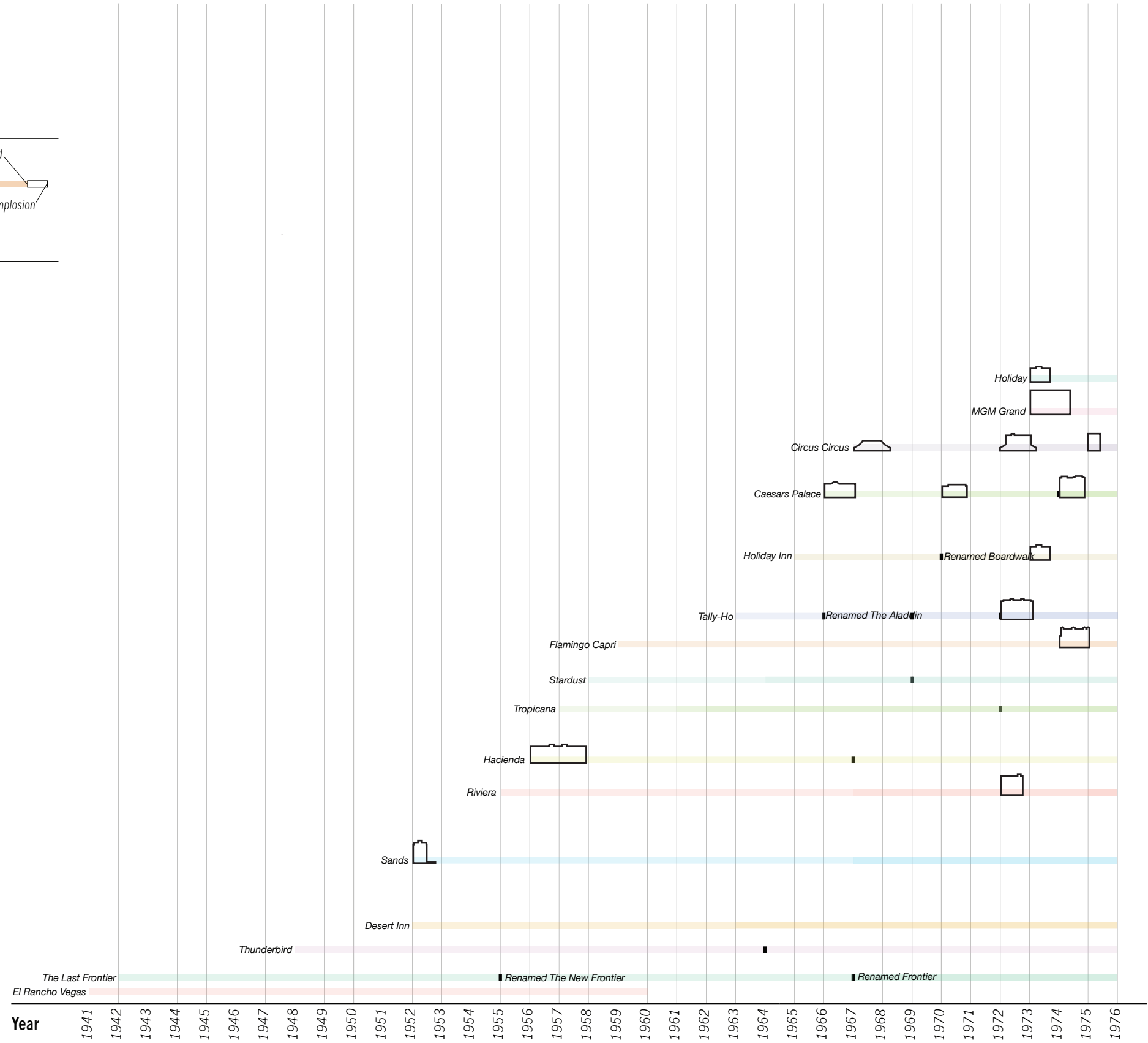
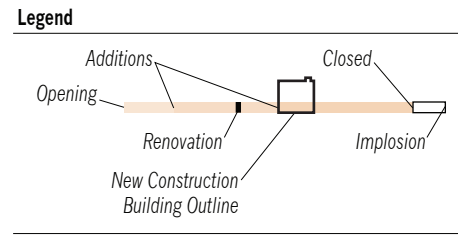
Caesars Palace would dramatically increase revenues with the opening of the Forum Shops shopping centre in 1992, “posting earnings of \$1,200 per square foot, compared to the national average of \$300 per square foot,” becoming America’s most profitable shopping centre (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 121). The Forum Shops would extend the Greco-Roman theme into retail and emphasize attractions over a traditional shopping experience. This lucrative foray into retail yielded a followup \$90 million, 1.8 million square feet addition in 1997. In the span of ten years, brand new resorts would be added to the Strip, including the Luxor, Treasure Island, the new MGM Grand Hotel, Stratosphere, Monte Carlo, New York/New York, Bellagio, Mandalay Bay, the Venetian, and Paris. By the end of the 1990s, gambling would be overtaken as the sole revenue generator for casino resorts on the Strip, indicating the growth of other market sectors like entertainment, dining, and retail (Schwartz, 2015). In another exchange, Wynn would sell his properties to Kirk Kerkorian in 2000, which included The Mirage, Treasure Island, Monte Carlo, Bellagio, in order to finance the construction of his namesake Wynn for \$2.7 billion in 2005 (Moehring & Green 2005, 211).

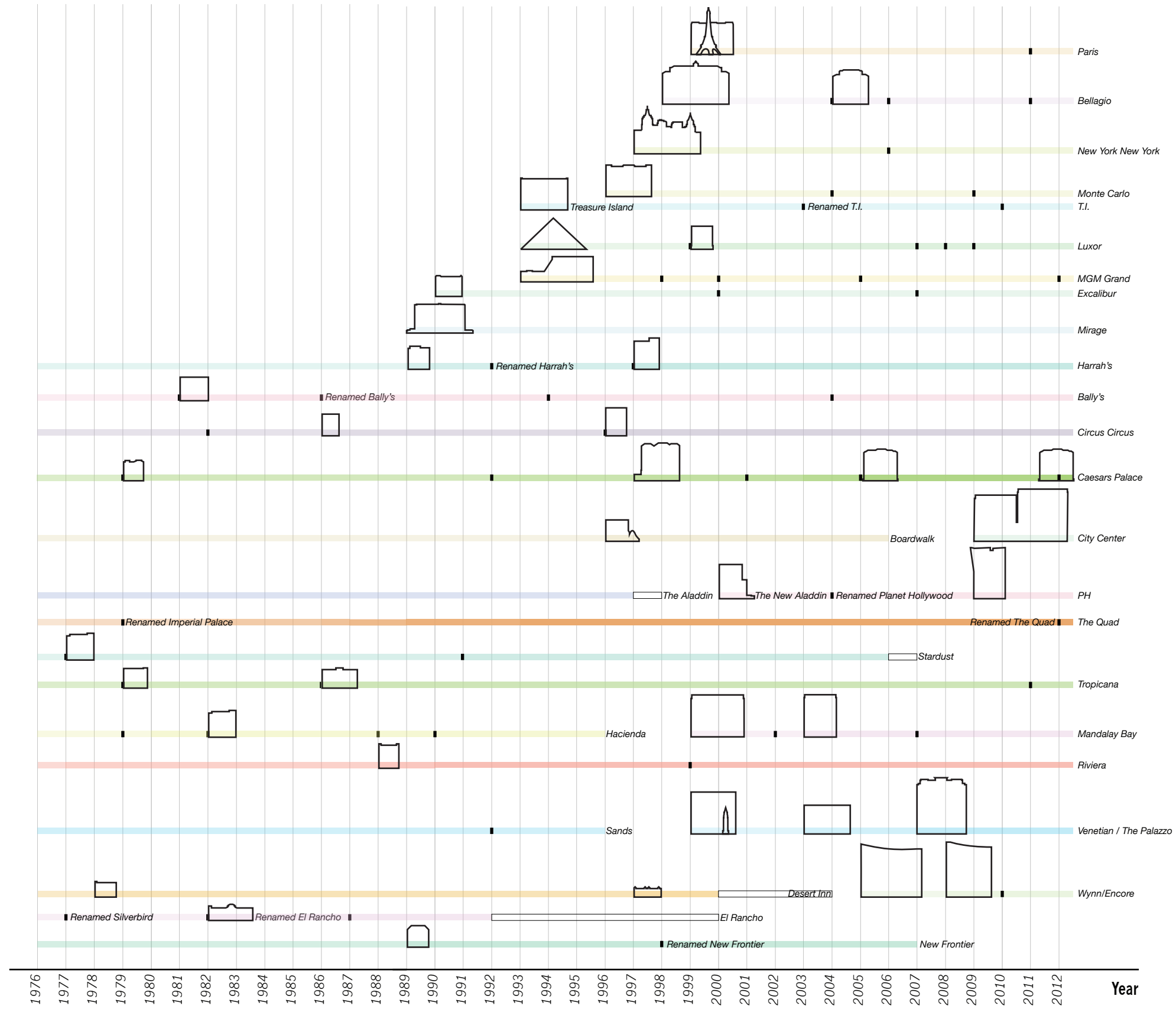
The dramatic transformation of the Las Vegas Strip would be matched by an equally dramatic regional expansion becoming “the fastest-growing metropolitan area in the nation” by the year 2000, with the population expanding from 270,000 in 1970 to 1.3 million (Moehring & Green 2005, 205). This accelerated growth would further compromise already strained public infrastructure with the transference of municipal responsibilities to private homeowner associations and gated communities. The unincorporated status of several townships in the region would also further encourage the development of gated communities to oversee the provision of amenities and services.

Mike Davis fittingly describes the militarization of the public realm after documenting the enclosure of affluent lifestyles within gated communities in Los Angeles as “police battle the criminalized poor” in the streets (Davis 1990, 224). By 2008, 46.6% of properties in the Las Vegas metropolitan region were contained within gated communities, ranking amongst the highest proportion in the United States (Danielsen-Lang 2008, 50). The enforcing of gated communities and the luxuries contained within represents at an urban scale the enforcement of neoliberalism abroad to protect domestic American freedoms.

Under the processes of neoliberalism, militarization would increase at various scales from the urban to the national, enforcing difference to perpetuate dominance. The restructuring of foreign economies to participate within the expanding global marketplace would serve to benefit those nations that had implemented these processes first, maintaining a dominant lead in a new American imperialism.

Figure 32: Timeline of Key Building Construction and Renovations Along the Las Vegas Strip (1966-2012). *Las Vegas Sun Online, UNLV Special Collections*





Displays of Neoliberal Power (1940-2015)

The push for free trade following WWII in an effort to stabilize the economies of individual nations resulted in the adoption of the robust American dollar as the global reserve currency beginning in the 1940s. However, with the free flow of the dollar beyond the American border came an increased involvement of the US military in protecting its value (Harvey 2005, 10). This would contribute to a flexibilization of borders and foster an increasingly globalized marketplace that substantiated calls for the restructuring of ever-more economies. This regulated marketplace would produce an 'embedded liberalism' that encouraged economic growth in advanced capitalist countries in the 1950s and 1960s (Harvey 2005, 11).

The growth of Las Vegas as a metropolitan area has also been historically linked the presence of the military, providing off-duty personnel to frequent leisure establishments during the week and a reliable tax base for the provision of new infrastructure. A large share of Nevada's economy is attributed to the well-paid jobs of the nuclear test site in the 1950s along with the construction of Area 51, reinforcing the dependence on national security and intelligence spending. It was estimated that by the beginning of the 1960s, 12,000 workers were commuting from Las Vegas to the test site, which contributed over \$100 million in wages to the region (Denton & Morris 2001, 143).

As initially introduced in Chapter 2, the military was also instrumental in reinforcing the region as a tabula rasa for unbridled construction, a condition that has become intrinsic in the development of the ever-evolving Strip. The military's involvement abroad also secured the potential for future development, an opportunity which Las Vegas casino owners seized. The push to dominate untapped markets would be evidenced by the involvement of Las Vegas based casino operators in the development of Macau as the gambling capital of China. This proved particularly lucrative for developers when Macau surpassed Las Vegas in total gaming revenue in 2006, generating \$6.95 billion. **(8)**

The relatively free marketplace that generated the development of the Las Vegas Strip is predicated upon a destructive duality, which political economist Karl Polanyi identifies as two kinds of freedom, one good and the other bad (1954, 256-258). He notes that along with the freedoms of conscience, speech, association, and choice of work as initial products of the free market, come the freedoms to exploit, accumulate immeasurable wealth without contributing back to society, and the freedom to prevent

(8) Barboza, David. "Macau Surpasses Las Vegas as Gambling Center." *New York Times*, January 23, 2007. Accessed October 29, 2015. <http://nyti.ms/1P54SPg>.

(9) Congressional Research Service, "Table 1. Federal Land by State, 2010," *Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data*, by Ross W. Gorte, Carol Hardy Vincent, Laura A. Hanson, Marc R. Rosenblum, R42346, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2012), 4. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42346.pdf>, accessed September 22, 2015.

(10) *Ibid.*, 11.

technological inventions from ever being used for public benefit (Harvey 2004, 36). Based on this duality, David Harvey notes that:

...the only way this liberal utopian vision could be sustained is by force, violence, and authoritarianism. Liberal or neoliberal utopianism is doomed, in Polanyi's view, to be frustrated by authoritarianism, or even outright fascism (1954, 256-258). The good freedoms are lost, the bad ones take over. (2005, 37)

Considering the Strip as a "liberal utopian vision" along with its designation as neoliberal vanguard, it becomes increasingly apparent that the simultaneous development of both the Strip and the adjoining air force bases are inextricably linked. A few entrepreneurial stakeholders, particularly owners of aircraft technology, would reinforce this interdependent relationship.

Developers Howard Hughes Jr. and Kirk Kerkorian both profited from lucrative military contracts. Just as the Hughes Aircraft company would be granted several contracts with the CIA, Kerkorian began to amass his fortune with the purchase of a single-engine Cessna after World War II. He started a small airline that would transport gamblers from Los Angeles to Nevada, shortening travel times for weekend visitors (Denton & Morris 2001, 313). Before long, he secured a military contract transporting air cargo during the Korean War with his aircraft, which contributed to his growing wealth and influence in the region (Barlett & Steele, 317). Kerkorian would eventually sell his charter airline to Transamerica Corporation for \$100 million in 1968, which fuelled the acquisition of Las Vegas properties and financed the construction of casino resorts (Denton & Morris 2001, 314). Financed by defense contracts, Kerkorian would become a powerful Strip developer, eventually earning the distinction of "being the only person to build the largest hotel in the world on three separate occasions", rivalling Howard Hughes' influence in the region (Moehring & Green 2005, 206).

The federal government also owns the vast majority of land in the state of Nevada. The Federation of American Scientists (FAS) estimates that the federal government, through various agencies, owns 81.1% of the land within the state of Nevada, the largest proportion of federal land ownership of any state within the United States. **(9)** In addition to federal land ownership, the Department of Defense in particular wields enormous power as the Nellis Air Force Range controls approximately 3.1 million acres of land in order to support "mission-related activities" with the base airfield situated a mere 20 km from the casino

resorts of the Las Vegas Strip. **(10)** The statewide military presence has risen to increased prominence in recent years with the designation of the Joint Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (JUAV) Center of Excellence (COE) at nearby Creech Air Force base in 2005, positioning it as the primary base for the operation of Predator and Reaper drones in conflict zones, which include Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. **(11)** Only 75 km North of Las Vegas, the Creech Air Force base is located within an hour drive of the Strip, reinforcing the correlation between the military industrial-complex and the leisure economy.

(11) David Axe, "How America Broke Its Drone Force," *The Daily Beast*, June 20, 2015, accessed September 22, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/06/20/how-america-broke-its-drone-force.html>.

It is no coincidence that the glittering facades of the Strip would come to serve as the new frontlines of contemporary American warfare. Not only is the Strip the product of unbridled neoliberal processes but it also serves as a distraction from the renewed role of the Creech Air Force base as the central command centre for the deployment of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), or military drones. The co-mingling entities, the extreme duality of freedom, would reinforce the growing presence of the military in conjunction with the expansion of the gaming industry in Las Vegas; the glittering façades of the Strip obscuring the sinister ambitions of the military just beyond city limits.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore concisely describes the violence inherent in American nationalism:

In my view, the founding moments of U.S. nationalism, well rehearsed in mainstream histories, are foundational to both state and culture. First, the U.S. was "conceived in slavery" (Jones 1992, 292), and christened by genocide (Stannard 1992). These early practices established high expectations of state aggression against enemies of the national purpose — such as revolutionary slaves and Indigenous peoples—and served as the crucible for development of a military culture that valorized armed men in uniform as the nation's true sacrificial subjects (DuBois [1935] 1992; Stannard 1992; Englehardt 1995). (2002, 20)

Gilmore positions racism as the outcome of the "fatal coupling" of power and difference, the imposition of difference, particularly along racial lines, by a ruling master class. Debord's observation of the separation of individuals in order to maintain capitalist hegemony also notes the effect of the dissolution of community ties through differentiation. The demolition of neighbourhoods for highway infrastructure, the adoption of a 24-hour work schedule, the dissolving of unionized labour through the razing of entire properties, and even the role of mass incarceration in disrupting familial structures are

Figure 33: Video stills from the implosion of the Dunes hotel which employed pyrotechnics to dramatize the event (October 22, 1993). *Las Vegas Sun*



just a few examples of the sustained attack on communal ties. As Gilmore makes clear, differentiation and separation disproportionately affects racialized populations, where “the unreal unity the spectacle proclaims masks the class division on which the real unity of the capitalist mode of production is based” (Debord 1994, Thesis 72). Oppression occurs through alienation by difference, allowing ruling class managers and owners to continue to thrive.

The work of Controlled Demolition Incorporated (CDI) further highlights the alignment of state-sanctioned violence with displays of capitalist progress. A series of implosions would precede the Strip building boom of the 1990s in the quest to accommodate the construction of increasingly elaborate megaresorts. Keller Easterling points the involvement of CDI in the US Department of State as well in its campaign to dismantle foreign regimes as an output of this dual notion of freedom. CDI president Mark Loizeaux, has declared with some certainty that Las Vegas is “the implosion capital of the world” at the behest of their services. **(12)** Their work with the US Department of State has ranged “from the design of and modification to missile fabrication facilities in South Africa to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction in Central European countries” (Easterling 2005, 174). The interconnecting demolition services that CDI provides is yet another indication of the forces of the destructive deployment of neoliberal processes.

Journalist Thomas Friedman has even proposed “The Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention” to describe the interlocking forces of the military in advancing neoliberal economic restructuring abroad. He notes that, “no two countries with a McDonald’s franchise had ever gone to war against one another (Dunham-Jones 2015; Friedman 2000). Conflict was essentially neutralized by the facilitation of goods and ideas, noting that the three countries that were experiencing conflict were countries without McDonald’s: Syria, Iran, and Iraq (Friedman 2000, 277). However, he clarifies that globalization will not end geo-politics but has redirected the forces of war toward those economies that have not yet been subjected to neoliberal deregulation or free trade arrangements. Once all economies have been restructured, other conflicts will likely ensue, but until then this theory has held true.

Easterling also observes that the “shock and awe” strategy employed by the military in Iraq was “visually very similar to the mock battles that destroyed the Dunes Hotel in Las Vegas,” the levelling of two landscapes for capitalist expansion **(Figure 33)** (2005, 175). Such historically significant buildings as the Dunes, the Aladdin, El Rancho, and the Stardust were all imploded

Implosion

To collapse inward as if from external pressure; also: to become greatly reduced as if from collapsing (Merriam-Webster.com)

(12) Anderson, Ric. “Las Vegas: ‘the implosion capital of the world’” *Las Vegas Sun*. May 4, 2015. Accessed October 29, 2015. <http://lasvegassun.com/news/2015/may/04/next-implosion-saying-goodbye-riviera/>

Figure 34: In anticipation of a protest following their decision to transfer to an entirely non-unionized workforce, the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino petitioned the Clark County Commission to privatize the sidewalks surrounding its property. As a result, several protesters were arrested for trespassing (1993). *Source Unknown*



within a 15-year span, signalling a clear break from the past. A prevailing condition emerges, which declares that ““on this spot nothing will ever happen - and nothing ever has”” with which “...the forces of historical absence have set about designing their own exclusive landscape there” (1994, Thesis 177). The erasure of historical buildings continues the accelerated passage of capital through the region, absolving of all references to the past while intensifying the generic-ness of the city. Koolhaas proclaims that:

The Generic City breaks with this destructive cycle of dependency: it is nothing but a reflection of present need and present ability. It is the city without history. It is big enough for everybody... It is equally exciting — or unexciting — everywhere. It is “superficial” — like a Hollywood studio lot, it can produce a new identity every Monday morning. (1994b, 1249)

David Harvey’s “spatial fix” can be reintroduced here to describe the perpetual state of renewal the Strip experiences in its maturity. As buildings, brands, and/or program fail to sustain profit, they are eradicated and replaced with a new “fix”, satiating the capitalist demand to continuously exceed the average. Akin to an addiction, Harvey reminds us that the spatial fix only temporarily relieves this chronic condition until “the craving returns”, a particularly fitting analysis of the constant renewal of the Las Vegas Strip (2001, 24).

The result is an urban form that is not comprised of an index of historical buildings and places, a condition that Koolhaas declares is liberated from the “straitjacket of identity”. He is particularly optimistic about this departure from historical time, ruminating about the potential advantages of blankness, deeming it preferable for newcomers since they can more easily access the identity-less city (1994b, 1248-1249). However, Debord challenges this outlook with a reminder that “the city is the locus of history because it embodies at once a concentration of social power, which is what makes the historical enterprise possible, and a consciousness of the past...[that] will enable society to recapture its alienated powers” (Debord 1994, Thesis 176). A city without consciousness, removed from its history, is a city without social mobility. As the centre disseminates into endless sprawl, communal bonds are spread thin.

Labour union contracts would be subject to renegotiation with the opening of several new megaresorts in the 1990s, further compromising the integrity of labour unions amidst widespread prosperity. In addition to the liberalization of labour laws with the Taft-Hartley Act ‘right-to-work’ legislation, the opening

(13) “A similar sidewalk-privatization request was granted to the Mirage in an effort to eliminate the proliferation of smut peddlers who were harassing tourists and restricting sidewalk access there.” (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 117)

of the MGM Grand Hotel in 1993 further compromised the influence of labour unions in Las Vegas. Anticipating a strike over its decision to transition to an entirely non-unionized labour force, MGM persuaded the Clark County commission to designate the sidewalks surrounding its new hotel as private property (**Figure 34**) (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 117). This resulted in the arrest of several protesters for trespassing and provided a template for several other resorts to coerce the county into privatizing sidewalks around their properties. **(13)**

Not only would the destructive forces of neoliberalism diminish the collective bargaining power of union workers, it would also wreak havoc on the public sphere. Just as Koolhaas reminisces about the comforting familiarity of generic urbanism he observes, “the serenity of the Generic City is achieved by the evacuation of the public realm, as in an emergency fire drill” (Koolhaas & Mau 1994b, 1251). Considering that the region has the lowest proportion of public parks per capita in the United States alongside the privatization of sidewalks, the evacuation of the public realm is quite tangible (Gottdiener et al. 1999, 250). Furthermore, the region has long been plagued with the highest rates of suicide in the country, the largest share of unauthorized labour forming 10.2% of the labour force (NACCHO 2007, 53; Pew Research Center, 2012). These extreme anomalies even date back to the 1950s, when Las Vegas employed “three times as many police as any other city its size...dealing with record breaking crime rates in bad checks, burglary, as well as liquor consumption more than 200 percent above the national average” (Denton & Morris 2001, 146).

Without regulatory checks or adequate social systems, the Las Vegas region was also one of the hardest hit regions in the United States during the subprime mortgage crisis. The US Census Bureau estimates that up to 6.1 percent of homeowners were evicted at the height of the crisis in 2008, more than double the national average at 2.9 percent (2005-Present). The ‘hands off’ approach to municipal planning in many of the unincorporated townships around the Strip has resulted in a patchwork of urban sprawl, gated communities abutting each other with minimal street presence. As a result of the subprime mortgage crisis, residents have become more and more dispersed over ever-expanding clusters of abandoned homes. Furthermore, Rex Rowley’s qualitative study of Las Vegas neighbourhoods provides a bleak description of a pervasive “preoccupation with the self”, where cinderblock walls separate properties and garages ensure a private entrance to the home (Rowley 2014, 399). This has sustained the separation of residents that the spectacle society thrives on, diminishing notions of community and the possibility of collective gathering.

Harvey concludes “redistributive effects and increasing social inequality have in fact been such a persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structural to the whole project” (2005, 16). The immense concentration of wealth accumulated by just a few large developers in the Las Vegas region, would result in the construction of the most gratuitous resort yet.

The completion of the \$9.2 billion CityCenter project by MGM Resorts International in 2009 marked the single largest privately funded construction project in the United States (Smith et al. 2014, 41). The resort campus includes several luxury hotels, a Daniel Libeskind crystal containing high-end retail shops, an extensive public art collection, and slightly askew condominium towers that offer prime views of the Strip. Even the name of the resort suggests that it is a departure from all-encompassing themes of kitsch, instead employing signifiers of gentrification and “sophisticated urban metropolis”. Marketing material for the project also claims that the development is “the world’s largest environmentally sustainable urban community”.

However, urbanist Aseem Inam notes that upon closer inspection the development fails to deliver on its touted claims of a “pedestrian focused urban plan” or “mixed-use programming” (Marshall 2015). The project masquerades as a thriving metropolis yet is devoid of the essential programmatic mix of public and private spaces that constitute a functional city. Absentee condo owners, the lack of schools and grocery stores for instance, begin to suggest that this is just another resort campus with casinos and leisure activities. Yet this brand of resort building has replaced prominent urban centres in major metropolises around the globe, indicated by the development of hotels, shops, and a pervasive leisure economy. This has resulted in the proliferation of the Generic Spectacle.

5. Conclusion

The Generic Spectacle has come to occupy the centre of the peripheral Generic City. Koolhaas noted in 1994, that the old city centre had become stretched and “diluted” by an ever expanding periphery, diminishing its authority and influence (1994b, 1248). As the urban sprawls outward, the downtown is depleted and subsequently abandoned. In Las Vegas, casino owners began to develop new properties outside city limits to evade property taxes and planning restrictions, eventually draining the historic downtown of its prosperity. However, instead of replacing the downtown once it had become dilapidated like other American city centres, the Strip formed a new centre — one that caters directly to the demands of the society of the spectacle. The architecture of the Las Vegas Strip is the product of the two foundations of the spectacle, reliant on a chronic tabula rasa condition.



Figure 35: Pop star, Britney Spears as seen in the final act of her Las Vegas show at the Planet Hollywood. The one-and-a-half hour show features no discernible live singing, instead relying on familiar songs, large set pieces, LED screens, and a litany of high-energy backup dancers (2015). *Author's Photo*



The Generic Spectacle has occupied other American urban centres, particularly after the migration of predominantly white residents to the suburbs followed by the implementation of roll-out neoliberalism in the 1980s which served to criminalize those who had been previously dispossessed by the system. The perceived desolation of the centre served as a figurative tabula rasa, despite the presence of those who remained, demonstrating a fundamental element in the establishment of the Generic Spectacle. The centre would be occupied by the powerful convergence of capital and consolidation of ownership to the point where it became image. The distillation of “time off from work” into commodities like tourism, vacation packages and leisure activities resulted in a tremendous accumulation of capital. As a result, buildings are increasingly designed for iconic value including sports venues, museums and galleries - just to name a few. This development would render the inverse true; “image has accumulated to the point where it becomes capital” (Foster 2013, 67).

(14) “Our Mission,” *The Downtown Project*, accessed April 22, 2015, www.downtownproject.com/about.

CEO of online shoe retailer Zappos.com, Tony Hsieh would kickstart a wholesale redevelopment of the long abandoned Las Vegas downtown, consolidating ownership of abandoned properties and investing \$350-million in over 300 new business ventures. (14) Aptly named the Downtown Project, this initiative resembles the massive CityCenter development on the Las Vegas Strip, not just in name but in its totalizing urbanism tied to a single private developer. Although executed at vastly different scales, similar design tactics were employed in both projects, with the provision of a ‘pedestrian-friendly’ ground plane punctuated by public art and consumer oriented activities. Hsieh’s investment however, is only temporary as it expires in 2017 with no contingency plan yet in place.

The Downtown Project is centred around a development named Container Park, an enclosed area surrounded by shipping containers that have been converted into small shops and eateries. The park has controlled access points and is subject to enforcement with limited operating hours, producing a private enclosure of a segment of the city. This is a key characteristic of the Generic Spectacle, one which relies upon the juxtaposition of various program under single enclosure. The strategy of planning mixed-use spaces within large buildings propagates this effect, producing a microcosm of a city under a single owner. In *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas describes this effect in the Downtown Athletic Club skyscraper where “each ‘plan’ is an abstract composition of activities that describes, on each of the synthetic platforms, a different ‘performance’ that is only a fragment of the larger spectacle of the Metropolis” (1994, 157). The Strip is an aggregate collection of interiorized cities,

(15) "Quick Facts About Toronto's BIAs", *City of Toronto*, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://www1.toronto.ca/>

with some resorts quite literally recreating actual cities (ie. Paris, The Venetian, New York New York) (**Figure 36**). The interiorization of the city can also be found in other downtown cores increasingly dominated by all-inclusive condominium towers, office buildings and shopping malls, concealing the public realm within.

The Generic Spectacle attempts to eradicate risk and smooth any potential spontaneity. Carefully planned city streets replicate precedents from other cities, applying a formula that will generate the most income for private developers. Closely tied to the globalizing forces of the free market, the Generic Spectacle favours large, multi-national corporations that have a demonstrated ability to produce robust profits and draw a devoted consumer base. Resident Las Vegas performer, Britney Spears embodies the Generic Spectacle as a pop star who relies on familiar songs, various special effects and carefully choreographed dance moves to supplement any actual live singing (**Figure 35**). The lip sync allows the performer to generate nearly identical performances each time, a precedent that other performers have increasingly adopted. The smoothing of spontaneity with each hour of rehearsal and the mitigation of risk through lip syncing generates a safer investment for both the ticket buyer and the theatre owner.

New York's Times Square bears an obvious resemblance to the Las Vegas Strip in both form and urban development. Billboards obscure large swaths of building façades, retail spaces and hotels dominate the programmatic mix and vast quantities of tourists pass through these spaces on a daily basis. Not only reserved for Times Square and the Las Vegas Strip, the Generic Spectacle is pervasive with outposts in London's Piccadilly Circus, Tokyo's Shibuya District, and Toronto's Yonge and Dundas Square, among many others. They serve as visible outposts of the global domination of neoliberalism but also echo Thomas Friedman's "Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention" which contends that no two countries with a McDonald's has ever gone to war with each other (Friedman 2000, 277). Once an economy has been restructured to participate within the global marketplace, the Generic Spectacle occupies its centre.

The Generic Spectacle centralizes, a departure from Koolhaas' notions of Bigness. The Generic City, a product of Bigness, is described as "all that remains of what used to be the city", an undifferentiated, unconstrained sprawl that defies concentration (1994b, 1252). However, the Generic Spectacle challenges this concept, instead what remains of the city is a convergence driven by capital and increased speculation. The centre is infinitesimally split into smaller and smaller portions,

relying on images or 'lifestyles' to increase exchange-values. The Generic Spectacle is indeed image accumulated to the point where it becomes capital. This prominence of the image initially identified in *Learning from Las Vegas* as roadside sign, façade and atmosphere has now totalized to the point of *city*. Urban rejuvenation and gentrification rely on a set of images, reproducing the same urbanism for the expressed purpose of accelerating consumption.

Toronto's Business Improvement Areas (BIA) signify the intertwining of State and economy, a key foundation in the development of the Las Vegas Strip. The world's first BIA was formed in Toronto as a public-private initiative in 1970, allowing businesses to contribute to beautification efforts, the organization of cultural events and neighbourhood advertising. **(15)** City administrators view these initiatives as particularly lucrative investments as every dollar that is contributed by the city is matched by the private sector up to ten times the amount. One of the implications however, is that these partnerships grant private business owners increasing influence over the public realm. These spaces are designated as public but are often surveilled by security guards and police who restrict access through tactics like carding young people of colour or administering unwarranted bag searches. These operations demarcate a clear zone of restricted access.

The Generic Spectacle ultimately distracts from its inherent violence with the allure of novelty and "fascination", operating on an "externally structured compulsion (enchantment)" which directs the internal desire for gratification and seduction (Schmid et al. 2011, 6). The bright twinkling lights, the reassuring sounds and the comforting aromas synonymous with these spaces, all serve to compel the consumer to seek further gratification. Again, "power is omnipresent and inherent to fascination" as it carefully orchestrates the consumer experience through the structures of the urban environment to sustain its appeal (Schmid et al. 2011, 7).

Debord states that "everything life lacks is to be found within the spectacle", allowing the society of the spectacle to thrive despite the degradation of daily life and the continued separation of the labourer from the product of their labour (Jappe 1999, 6). Low paid service workers are unable to access the very services they provide while being transformed into actors, which "presumably transforms their work into play" (Sorkin 1992, 228). Thus, the Las Vegas Strip operates as the spectacularization of the city, possessing what all others lack; a city that is seemingly free of labour in its strict devotion to the provision of leisure.

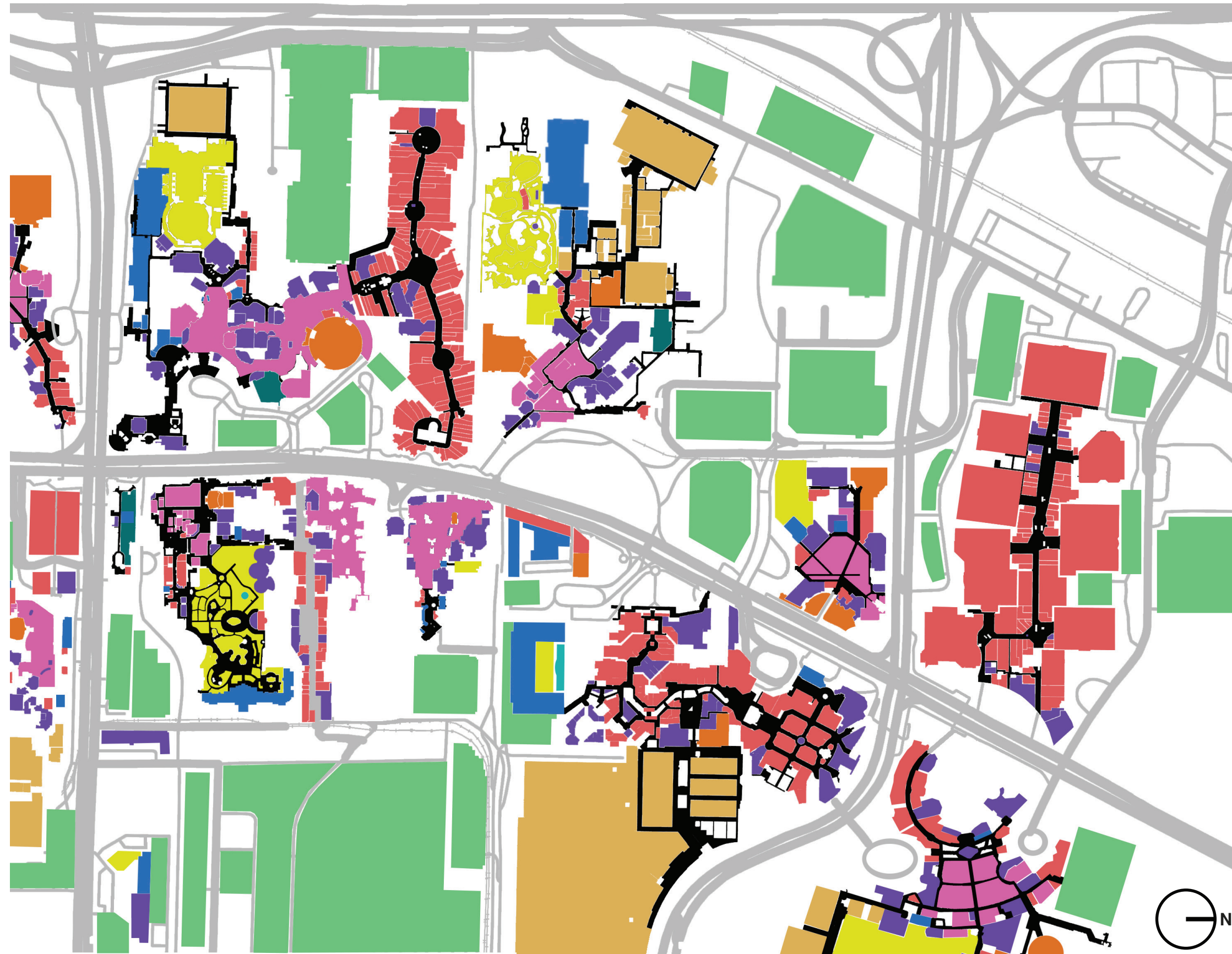
Figure 36: Campus Program
Figure Ground (2015). Google
Maps, Casino Property Maps

Legend

- Athletics
- Nightlife
- Dining
- Wedding
- Parking
- Hotel
- Retail
- Conference
- Theatre
- Casino

- Roadways/Sidewalks
- Interior Walkways





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5. Conclusion

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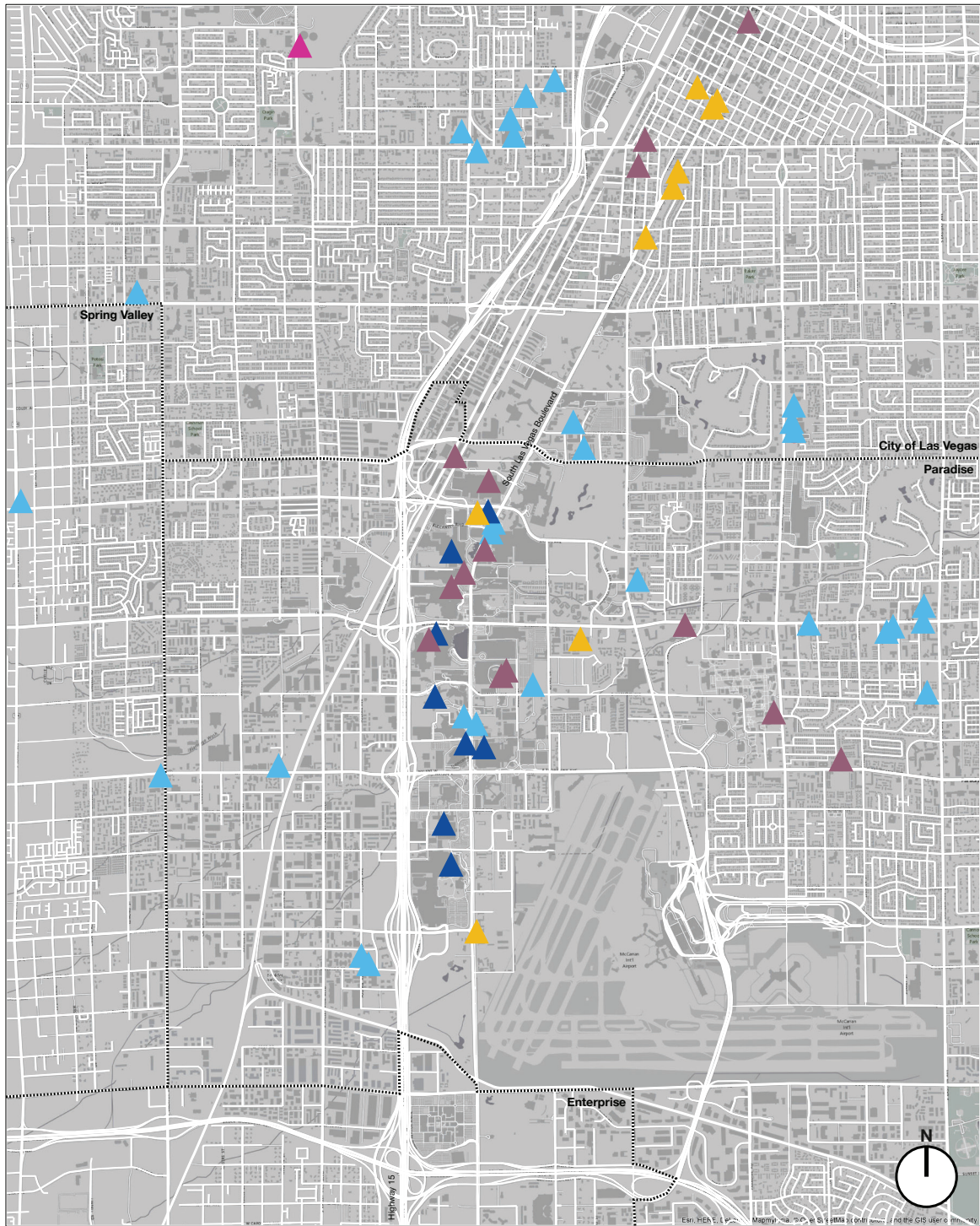
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Appendices

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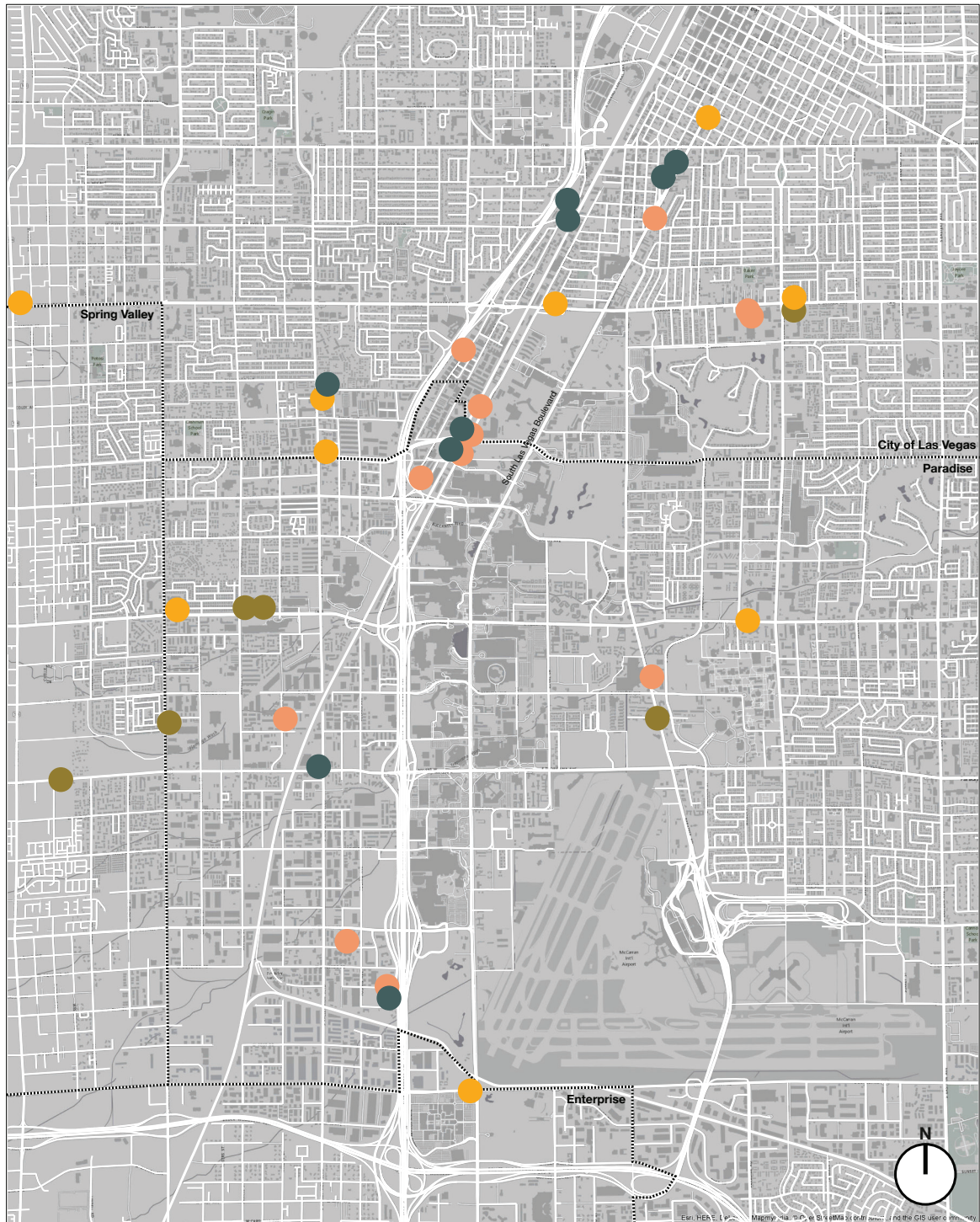
Appendix A: Comparison of Centre to Periphery



LEGEND | MUSEUMS/GALLERIES | CIRQUE DU SOLEIL | WEDDING CHAPELS | HOSPITALS/EMERG CLINICS

Appendix Figure 1: The Strip as Centre: Locations of Wholesome/Civic Las Vegas Activities (opposite page). Google Maps, Clark County GIS

Appendix Figure 2: The Periphery: Locations of Illicit Las Vegas Activities. Google Maps, Clark County GIS



LEGEND

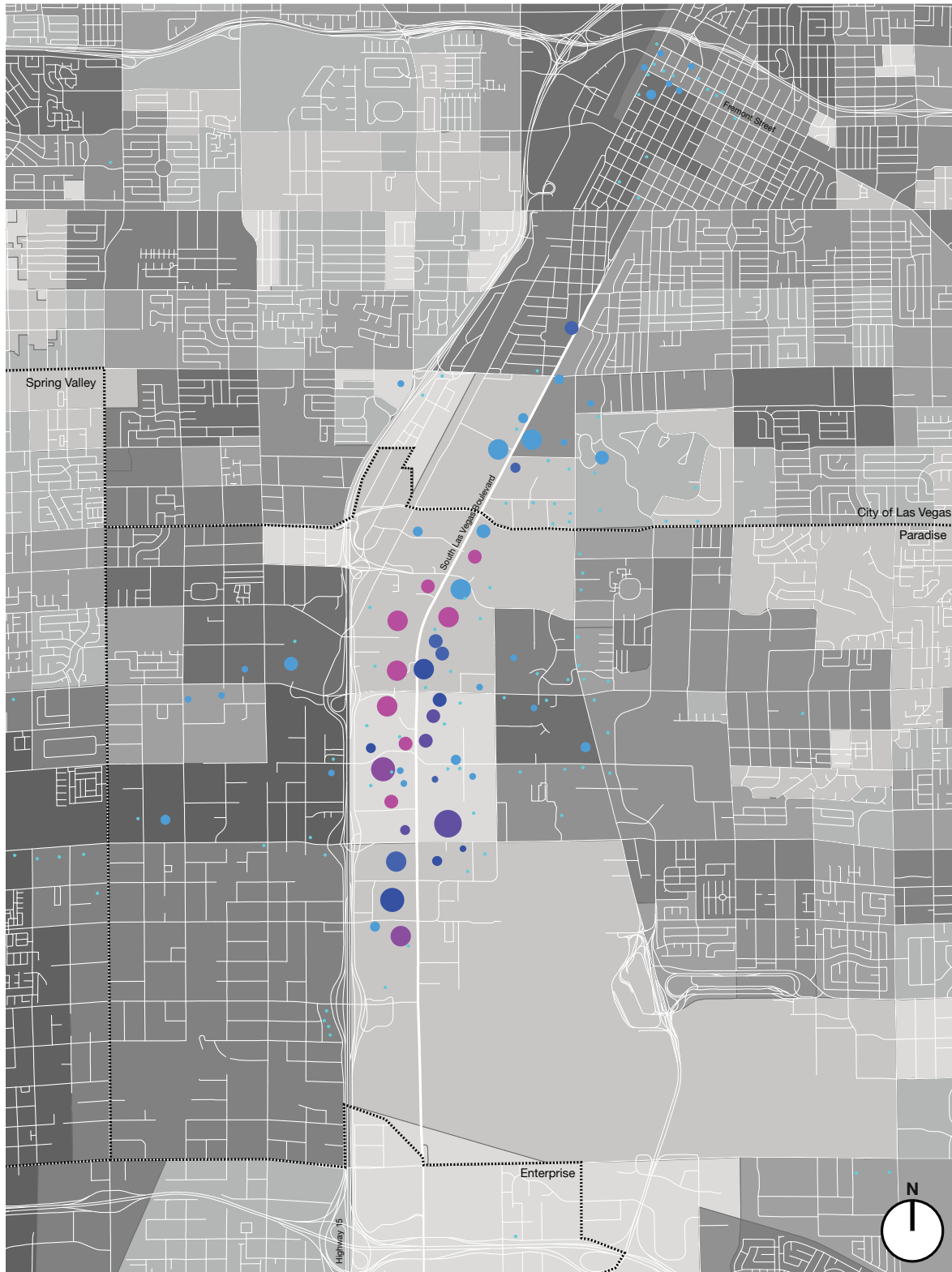
SEX SHOPS

STRIP CLUBS

PAWN SHOPS

MEDICAL MARIJUANA DISPENSARIES

Appendix B: Comparison of Strip Hotels and Surrounding Population



Appendix Figure 3: A comparison of hotel size, location, and room rates to the local resident population in 2014. A concentration of hotels dominate the Strip while surrounding areas are home to a sprawling local population. *Clark County GIS Info, Expedia.ca Search*

Legend

Number of Hotel Rooms

- 1 - 499
- 500 - 599
- 1000 - 1999
- 2000 - 2999
- 3000 - 3999
- 4000 - 4999
- 5000 - 6000

Average Nightly Rate

- < \$49
- \$50-99
- \$100-149
- \$150-199
- \$200-249
- \$250-299
- > \$300

Resident Population | 2010 Census

- 0 - 369
- 370 - 939
- 940 - 1479
- 1480 - 2089
- 2090 - 2889
- 2890 - 4074
- 4075 - 5744
- 5745 - 8194
- 8195 - 13859
- 13860 - 28824

Appendix C: Implosions as Events



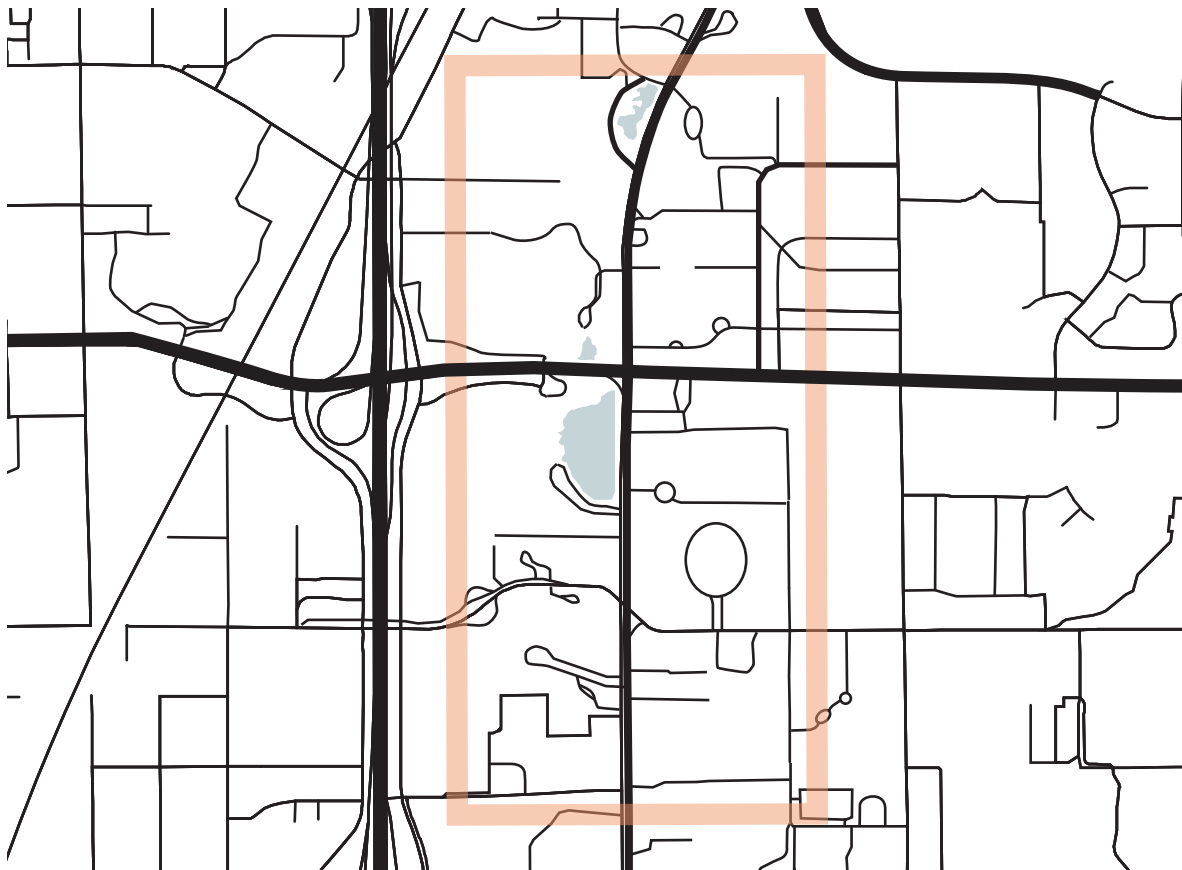
Appendix Figure 4: Video stills of implosions of various Las Vegas Strip properties. Top to bottom row: Castaways (2006), Frontier (2007), Boardwalk (2006), Sands (1996). "Top 10 Las Vegas Casino Implosions", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5igVwiXk-gM>



Appendix D: Case Studies

A series of case studies were conducted in an attempt to identify the characteristics of Las Vegas style urbanism in a range of contexts. To some degree, these precedents embody at least one element of the Generic Spectacle as identified in Las Vegas and demonstrate its widespread application. Urban plans are provided at the same scale for comparison between precedents.

Las Vegas, Nevada



Appendix Figure 5: Concord Pacific condominium towers dominate the Vancouver waterfront skyline. SelectVenues.ca



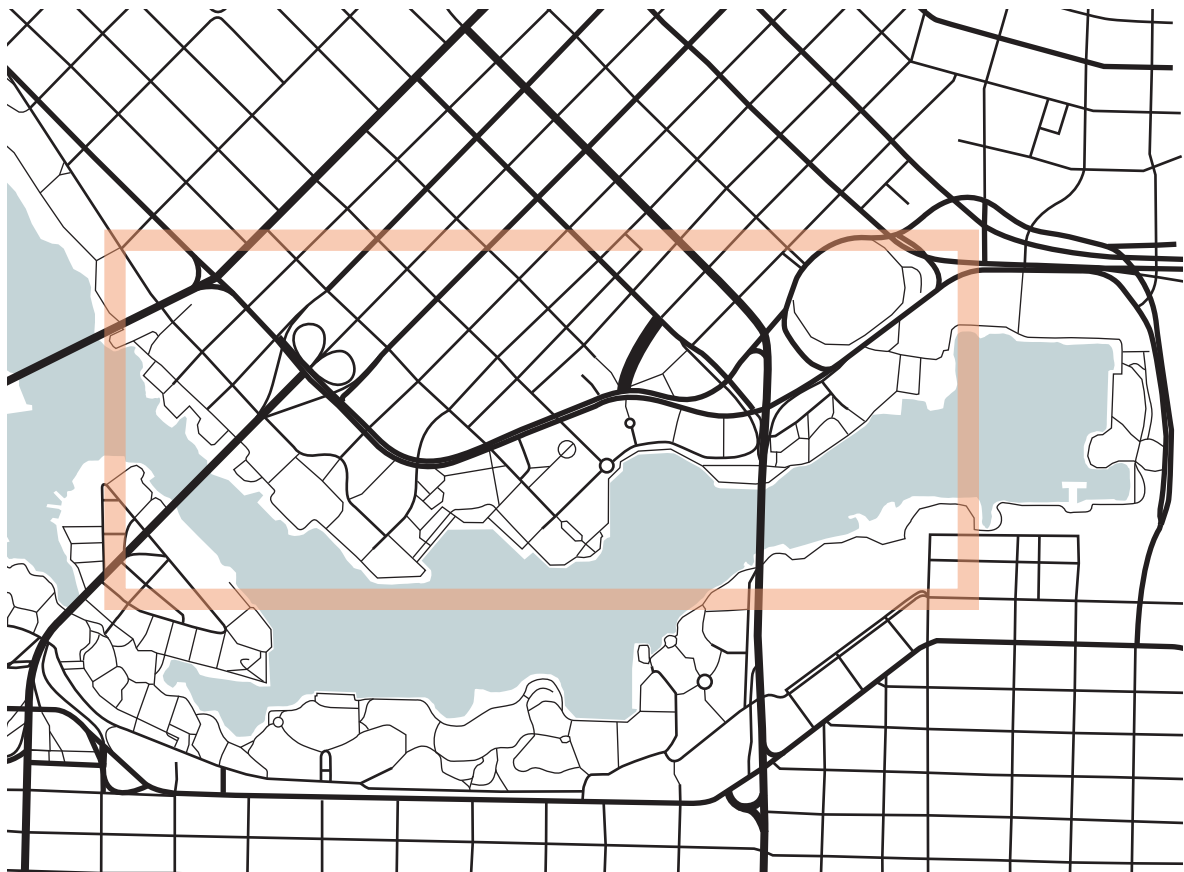
Appendix Figure 6: "Canada's Largest Community Builder": A marketing strategy that resembles the appearance of the Las Vegas Strip at night. ConcordPacific.com



Concord Pacific, Vancouver

A developer claiming to be “Canada’s Largest Community Builder”, Concord Developments has built condominium projects in Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver. Concord’s Vancouver developments dominate the city’s waterfront, monopolizing control of over 50 different buildings, resembling the ownership patterns of the Las Vegas Strip.

As the developer continues to expand, certain themes and elements are repeated as marketable amenities for potential buyers. “Canoe Landing Park”, the Douglas Coupland sculpture park at CityPlace in downtown Toronto, presents an example of valuable amenity space designed to increase property values while simultaneously contributing ‘public space’ back to the city in exchange for certain concessions. Concord Developments package a lifestyle brand that is consistent throughout their properties, presenting the ‘city as theme’.



Appendix Figure 7: Golf carts are the preferred mode of transit in The Villages. Google Street View



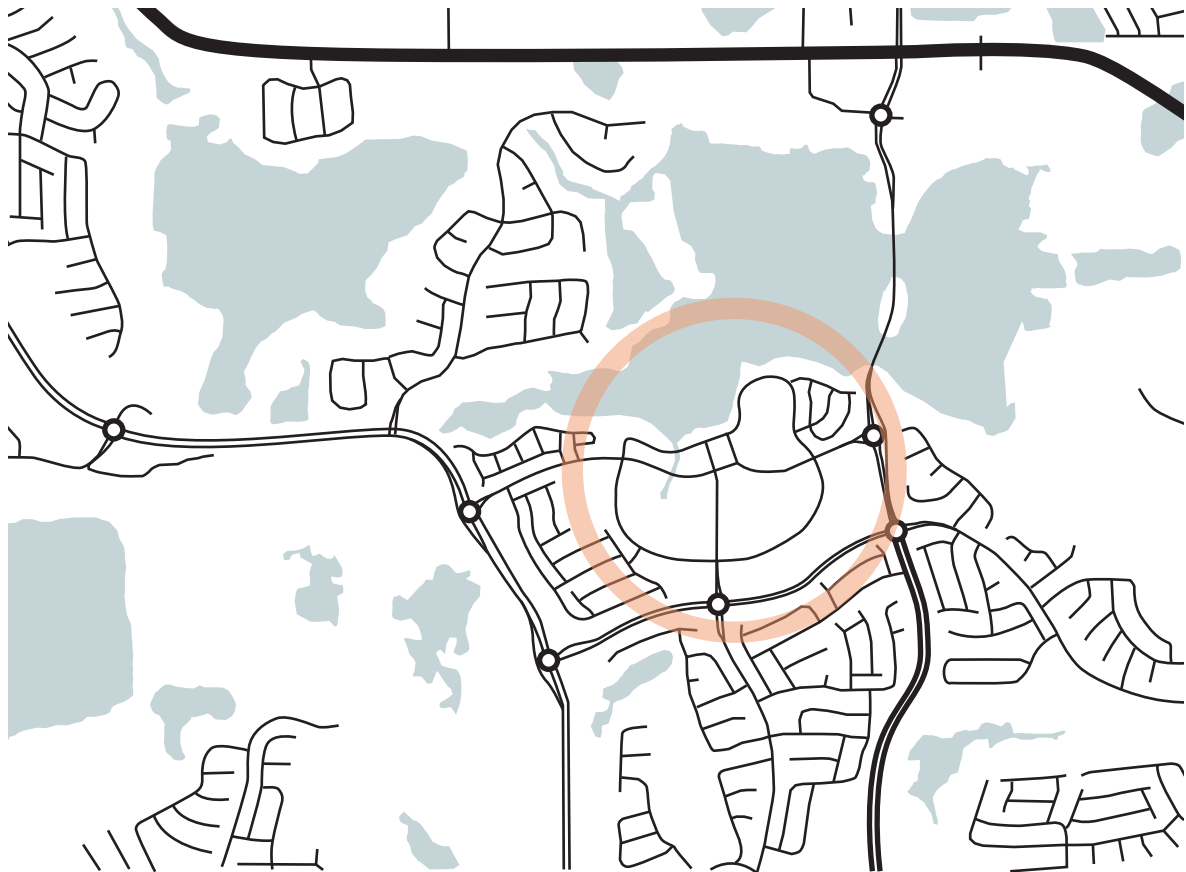
Appendix Figure 8: Daily boat tours of Lake Sumter feature a staged ship wreck and fictional stories about the town's historical past.



The Villages, Florida

Branded as “Florida’s Friendliest Hometown!”, The Villages is a themed active adult community for retirees and features a fictional town history that is reinforced through cultural activities, boat tours, and retail branding. Residents primarily travel by golf carts and can participate in golf cart parades on a regular basis (**Appendix Figure 7**). The development features all of the amenities of a city, creating a self-sustaining society of leisure. Residents are often unfamiliar with what aspects of their community are contrived and choose to revel in the full flung fantasy.

The Villages Director of Design, Gary Mark, is quoted as saying “...It’s funny, we make up stories for some of these buildings and some of the residents think they’re real... They don’t even know any better because we even go to the trouble of painting old graphics on the buildings and people think that’s an old general store when it really isn’t...”



Appendix Figure 9: Elements of New Urbanism are incorporated into the design of the retail campus.



Easton Town Center Code of Conduct

Welcome to Easton Town Center! All of our buildings, the garages as well as the streets and Town Square, are privately owned. We reserve the right to define the rules of conduct acceptable to us in order to allow admission to our property. We have listed below some of these rules for the information of our guests and ask that you be guided accordingly.

Easton Town Center is for shopping and entertainment. While here, treat others as you would like to be treated. The following conduct is not acceptable on Easton Town Center property.

Discourteous Behavior – This can be described as rude behavior or behavior which may cause inconvenience to others, anything that is ill-mannered or disrespectful.

- Standing, walking or sitting which may cause an inconvenience to others. This could be described as anyone blocking a walkway, stairway, doorway or storefront.
- Loitering – Includes inactivity, blocking access, hindering movement, and/or failure to move to a dining, entertainment or retail venue. This also includes loitering in vehicles.
- Underage smoking or smoking in Easton Station is not permitted.
- Cruising in vehicles or on foot.
- Car stereos playing too loud.
- Congregating in groups larger than (4).
- Running, yelling, skating, skateboarding, rollerblading, scooters, playing of radios, littering.
- Failure to present photo identification – To enforce rules applicable to minors, we require all patrons on our property to carry appropriate photo identification with proof of age.
- No pets – Only animals in the company of and trained to assist physically challenged persons are permitted on Easton Town Center property.
- Weapons of any kind are not permitted on property.
- No unauthorized photography or videotaping permitted

Disorderly Behavior – This type of behavior is described as obscene, offensive, may cause a hindrance or disturbance to others visiting the facility or interrupt our normal business activity.

- The use of offensive language such as swear words or racial slurs as well as inappropriate hand gestures, including but not restricted to gang signs or symbols, loud or boisterous behavior, or throwing of objects.
- Appropriate attire must be worn when visiting Easton Town Center, no offensive message or picture may be displayed on clothing. Wearing clothing which deliberately obscures the face: such as hooded tops, will not be permitted.

Please remember 8:00 means 8:00

Parental Escort Policy

Children age 15 and under may not remain in public spaces of Easton Town Center after 8:00 PM unless accompanied and supervised by a parent or legal guardian over the age of 21.

Please Note

The purchase of a movie ticket does not exempt a child from compliance with the Parental Escort Policy.

Children exiting the theaters after 8:00 p.m. may wait at the Community Room for parental pick-up, or they must leave the property.

Appendix Figure 10: An excerpt from the Easton Town Center Code of Conduct which outlines the rules that govern the use of the space. EastonTownCenter.com

Easton Town Center, Ohio

Described as a 'destination mall', the Easton Town Center is a destination for shopping, dining, and entertainment in a themed environment that resembles a small town. Retail outlets are within walking distance of each other and promote walkability along with the provision of other pedestrian friendly amenities including benches, fountains and trees for shade (**Appendix Figure 9**).

A Code of Conduct is made apparent to visitors entering the space which includes detailed guidelines for acceptable behaviour, dress, as well as the stipulation for patrons to carry identification at all times. It also clearly stipulates that the Code of Conduct can be enforced on all privately owned property including parking garages and streets which may otherwise appear to be public spaces. A curfew is also enforced on site, requiring all children under the age of 15 to be with a parental escort after 8pm or they will be evicted from the premises.



Appendix Figure 11: The MGM Grand as seen in Macau.



Appendix Figure 12: A former Portuguese colony, Macau's buildings incorporate a mix of architectural styles in addition to the more recent casino/resort developments.



Macau, China

Located in China across the Pearl River Delta from Hong Kong, Macau is a gambling destination home to such Las Vegas staples as the MGM Grand, The Venetian, and the Wynn. It surpassed Las Vegas as the world's largest gambling centre in 2006 with a steady rise of tourists visiting from mainland China as a result of more lax travel restrictions. It is also the only place in China where gambling is legal along with increased competition from international investors after a 40-year monopoly expired in 2002. Additionally, more shows and entertainment options have become available, further drawing a wide range of tourists.

As with Hong Kong, Macau governs itself as a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China and is considered to one of the world's most wealthy cities.

