

#M0054321 NC

T1955 ✓

NC 0020926 0



NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN  
FACULTY OF DESIGN  
DEPARTMENT OF FASHION AND TEXTILES

"THE ALL-AMERICAN DREAM"  
*BY DEBORAH DONNELLY*

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND  
DESIGN, AND COMPLIMENTARY STUDIES, IN CANDIDACY  
FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF DESIGN 1998. *R*





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and personal statement

## **Chapter 1: The development of Vegas, through film – 4**

- Section I: History of Las Vegas
- Section II: Las Vegas and 'the gangster'
- Section III: Las Vegas' changing reputation
- Section IV: The American dream?
- Section V: Las Vegas today

## **Chapter 2: Postmodernism in Las Vegas – 18**

- Section I: The origin of the sign
- Section II: Themed architecture
- Section III: Postmodernism in Las Vegas
- Section IV: The Casino design and gambling
- Section V: The future of Las Vegas

## **Chapter 3: Culture and society in Vegas – 33**

- Section I: Residential Vegas

## **Chapter 4: – 38**

Conclusion

Bibliography

Videography

Illustrations referenced throughout thesis and list of same



## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1997, I travelled to Las Vegas. The whole layout and operation of the city was overwhelming. The Strip and Fremont Street, the big neon signs, all night gambling arcades, casinos and the continuous stream of entertainment.

I am interested to find out more about Las Vegas, how it originated, why it is popular and how it is so successful. It is this initial fascination which provides the basis of my thesis. I will explore the gradual transformations of Las Vegas, through its visual representation in film over the years, its architecture and Vegas' surrounding residential areas through the 60s up to the present day.

This thesis will be a journey along the Strip and Fremont Street, taking in the famous hotels and tracing the development of Las Vegas as an urban theme park and a banal suburban area. Also how their growth has affected its reputation through the years, which is evident in film.

Before you read my thesis, I have included my personal experience of Las Vegas to give you a visual idea of how a 'consumer' reacts to the city.

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

I arrived into Las Vegas Airport at 1.00am. Forty minutes before we landed, a glare of light was visible. It looked like daylight. As we got nearer the lights became brighter and the sky was multicoloured. It resembled a big light bulb that had been switched on and illuminated everything that came in contact with it. It was clear I had arrived in Las Vegas.

The moment my feet touched ground I could hear the jingle of money. The arrivals lounge is unlike that of Dublin Airport, as slot machines, big moving neon signs and amusements





surround the visitor. It was full of people handing out leaflets of shows, amusements, hotels and casinos. My first vision of Vegas was 'the Strip', it was decorated with huge luminous neon signs shining on the crowds of people lingering on the sidewalks, being entertained by pirates, volcanoes and just the sheer spectacular of the array of lights. Limousines and palm trees took over the main road. Everything was so exciting and new. However, Vegas seemed strangely familiar. Its look already known to me through all those movies that have celebrated Vegas. Las Vegas resembles a TV remote control, travelling down the strip is like flicking through all the stations, from pyramids to Roman buildings, New York to Mount Venious to a huge circus - I had arrived at my destination.

On arriving through the front doors of the hotel <sup>the</sup> reception was nowhere to be seen only a mass of people and slot machines. I wandered through these cash registers in amazement before I arrived at reception, which was situated at the rear of the hotel. Finding my room was the next dilemma. It was a shuttle journey away to room no. 2,133 in Block D.

My room was an array of bright lights, lit up by the surrounding signs, which decorated Las Vegas. Too excited to sleep I decided to investigate the casino. I always remember Bond in DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER (~~Director~~, Guy Hamilton, 1971) - his most remarkable moment, 007 puts on his white jacket and black tie and goes down to the casino. But when he enters everybody else is wearing gaudy Bermuda shorts and tee-shirts the colour of tropical fruits. You can see Bond recoil - who are all these slobs? This isn't Monte Carlo, Bond, it's Las Vegas! The casino when I arrived was filled with people. I found myself in the middle of a circus performance. There were trapeze artists 'flying' above the casino, clowns juggling gold coins, beautiful girls serving free drinks. Although it was 4.00am, the night was only starting.

People were sliding credit cards through slot machines. My first quarter went on a slot machine of my star sign. It is casino policy to receive complimentary drinks as soon as you start gambling, so I took advantage of this. At least \$100 passed through my hands that night. I got so drunk that money had no value and I was enjoying the adrenaline rush that



gambling gave me! I was too excited to realise that I was being taken advantage of . Hungry and tired I found an 'all you can eat' buffet for \$1 where I spent the rest of my money and then continued to my room. A room which was lit by the morning sun. The view was of big green buildings, dirty streets filled with leaflets, big mountains, red sand. It was then during the daylight, I realised I was in the middle of the desert - I turned on the air-conditioning and fell asleep.

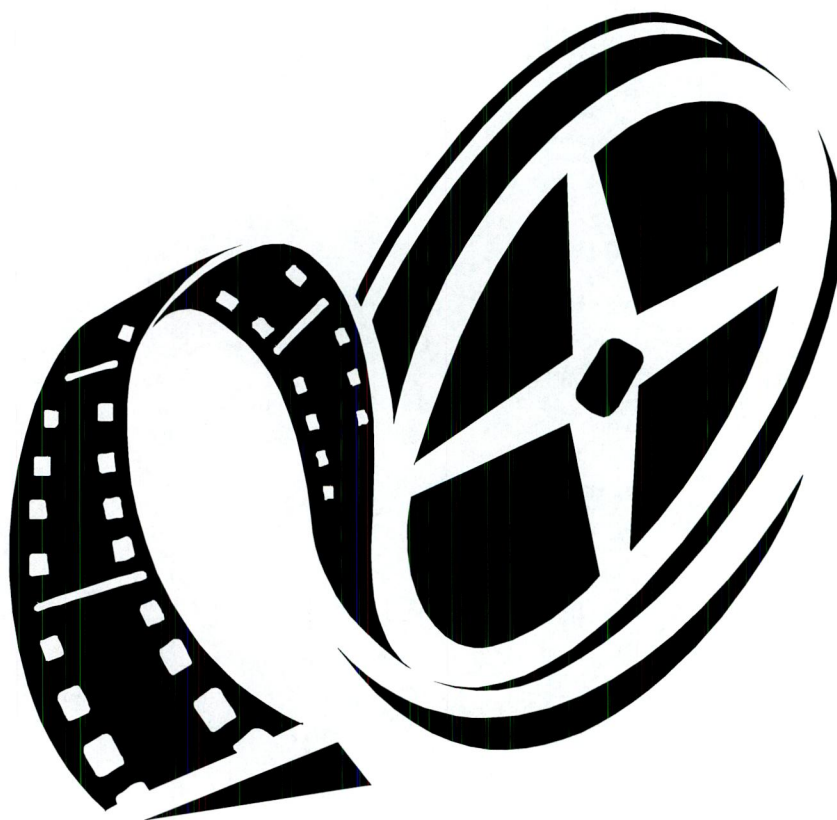
"Welcome to 'fabulous' Las Vegas".





CHAPTER 1:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VEGAS  
THROUGH FILM REPRESENTATION.





## Section 1: History of Las Vegas

Las Vegas, which means "the meadows" in Spanish, got it's name when explorer and scout Rafael Riverpart of a 60 man party seeking a more direct route to the missions in California in 1829 was sent in search of water. After wandering in the desert for two weeks, he spotted a hundred-acre grassland fed by an artesian well. These areas became a vital link on the old Spanish trail; eventually, it was marked an area mapped as Las Vegas or "the meadows".

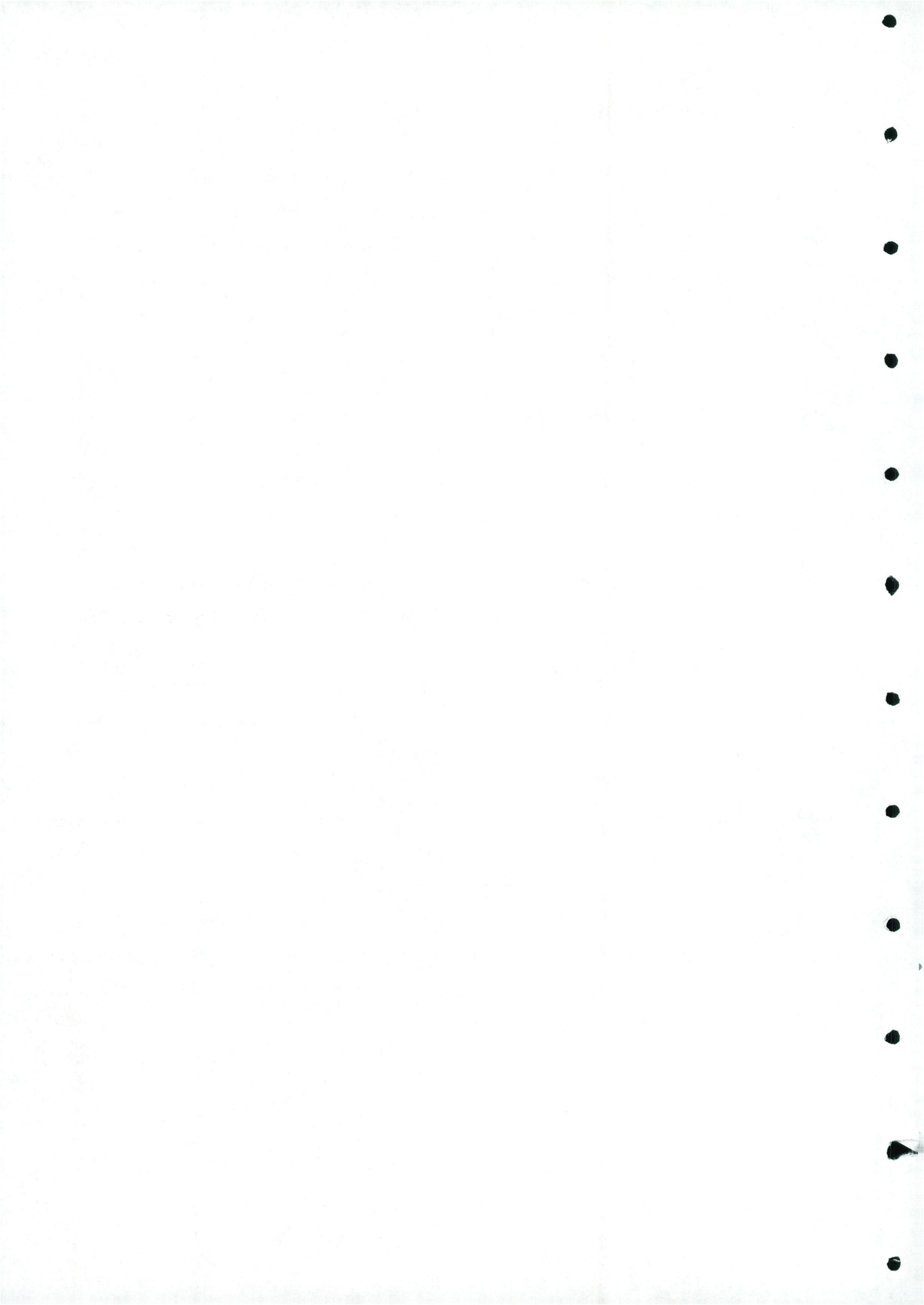
In 1841 on a surveying expedition for the US Army, John C. Fremont arrived in Vegas in 1841. He and a group of Mormons have the honour of being the first settlers in this remote outpost. Mormon activity continued between 1855 and 1858 but had all but ceased by 1861 when the Nevada Territory was established.

However, it was at an auction on the 15th of May in 1905 that Las Vegas was officially recognised, with a number of allotments being sold off for the paltry sum of \$265,000 (Millar, 1986, pg 8).

In 1920 it's population was a mere 2,304. All this had changed by 1928 when congress passed the Boulder Dam Project. Las Vegas became the main rail access and supply centre for the dam site. Construction began in 1930 and saw the population grow to 5,165 (Millar, 1986, pg 10),

Surplus electricity, warm climate and the abundance of water produced an environment suited for rapid growth. Small existing casinos on the Las Vegas gambling centre - Fremont Street (named after John Fremont) were among some of the first to take full advantage of the cheap electricity available, resulting in the street being filled with artificial light by the 1950s.





Fremont Street was the first well established street in Las Vegas, with casinos such as Ladd's Hotel, Miller's Hotel and Apache Hotel, dating back to 1904.

Union Plaza on Fremont Street, a 1,000 room hotel-casino with a stunning location was the "zero-point", where the original town site auction was held in 1905, and from which all street numbers and directions emanate.

One of the first multi-million dollar resorts/ hotels to open was Al Ranchio in 1941. It has established the model which has been followed ever since, in terms of luxury, and casino design. Dining room terraces and a pool encouraged people to prolong their visit for more than just one night.

**Section 2: Las Vegas and 'the gangster'**

People are looking for illusion; they don't want the world's realities. And, I asked where do I find this world of illusion? Where are their tastes formulated? Do they study it in schools? Do they go to the museums? Do they travel to Europe? Only one place - the movies. The hell with everything else.

(Morris Lapidus, 1970, Progressive Architecture)

Benjamin Siegal, nicknamed "Bugsey" opened the Flamingo Hotel with millions of mob dollars in 1946. It wasn't the first hotel on the LA highway; the western themed Al Ranchio and the Last Frontier (1941) preceded it by half a decade.

But it was the first gangster hotel, with architecture direct from Miami and a market directed at Hollywood. It changed the course of Las Vegas' history forever. There is a myth in Vegas, that Bugsey was the person who discovered Las Vegas (Cinema Papers, no. 88, May/ June 1992, pg 55-56). Vegas welcomed Bugsey as the founder of a glowing, gorgeous, artificial environment.



But how do people know they are in Vegas? There is a continuous sequence of neon-framed marquees featuring names like Dean Martin, Elvis, Wayne Newton and Kenny Rogers.

In the movies, the hero drives into town and we watch the reflections of neon signs dance across the windscreen. While most cities flicker black and white, Vegas is an explosion of Technicolor (fig 1).

Vegas' reputation has altered over the past 50 years, much of this has to do with Hollywood.

*"Bugsey Siegal was a killer, who fucked underage girls. That's the guy who invented Las Vegas", James Ellroy (Sight and Sound, November 1996, Vol 6 (11), pg 22).*

In the film BUGSEY (Dir: Barry Levinson, 1991, USA) we watch Bugsey (actor Warren Beatty) murder people yet we take his side because he lived flamboyantly, loved his wife Virginnia Hill and of course invented Las Vegas.

America has always been intrigued by the gangster, whose life contained all the spectacular grandeur missing from ordinary life.

The two most successful creations of American movies are the gangster and <sup>the</sup> westerner: men with guns. The gangster is the "no" to that great American "yes" dream. He is the one who can move like a dancer among the crowded dangers of the city, his commitment to enterprise is always clear because he operates outside the field of utility. The gangster is lonely and melancholy but has the impression of a worldly wisdom. He appeals most to adolescents with their impatience and their feelings of being outsiders, but more generally he appeals to that side of all of us which refuses to believe in the "normal" possibilities of happiness and achievement. The story of his career is a nightmare inversion of the values





of ambition and opportunity and because of this everyone wants to kill him and eventually somebody will.

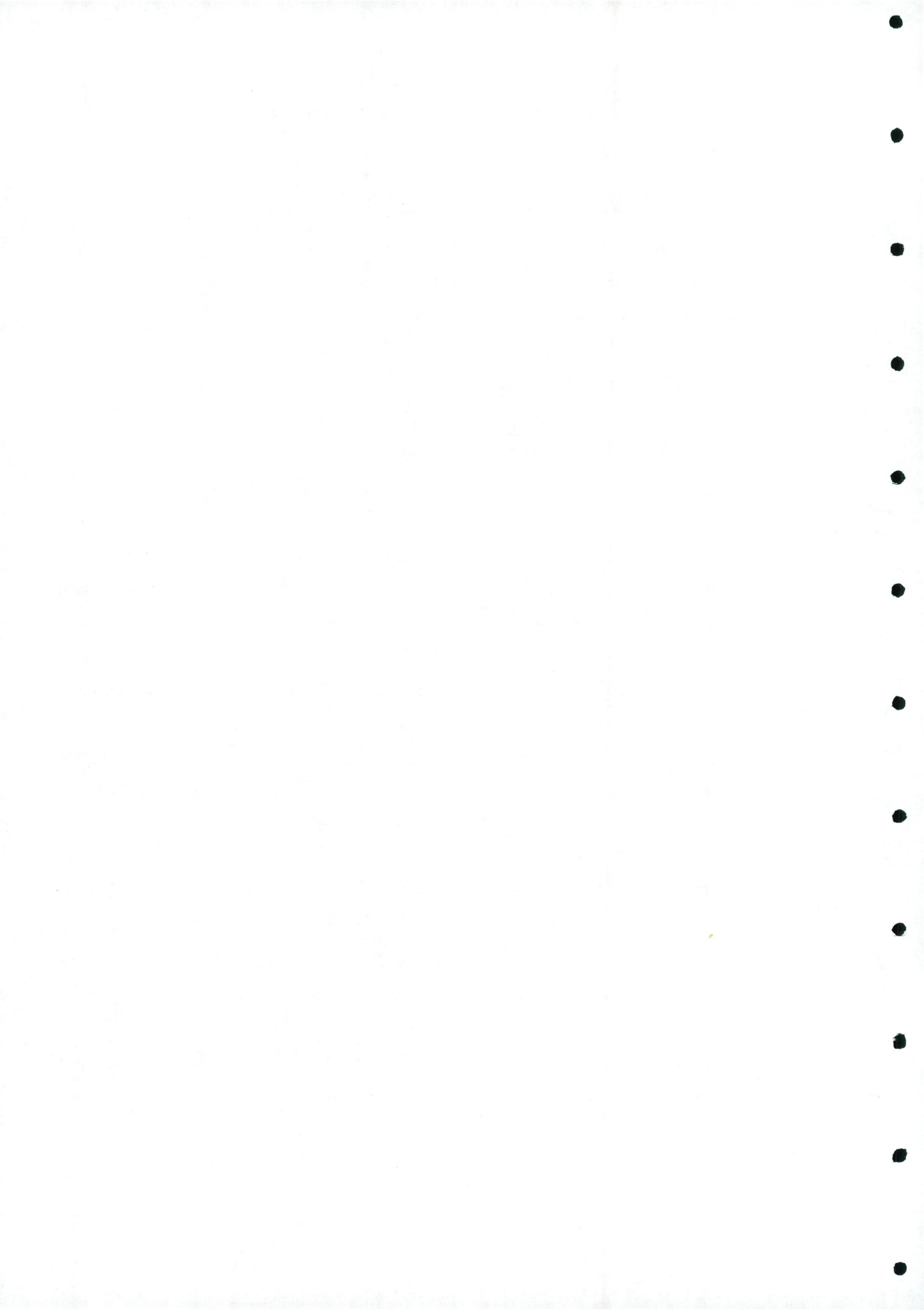
In the end it is the gangster's weakness as much as his power and freedom that appeals to us; the world is not ours, but it is not his either, and in his death he 'pays' for our fantasies, releasing us momentarily for the need to succeed, which he shows to be dangerous (Warshaw, Film Theory and Criticism, pg 467-471).

This is why 'Bugsey' has become immortalised as the 'founding-father' of Las Vegas.

A year after the Flamingo Resort/ Hotel was opened, Bugsey was assassinated, because he had a dream to succeed. He was a hero in the eyes of Hollywood. While watching BUGSEY, the spectator becomes a witness to the world he's living in. In looking at the characters in detail and the voice-over, which is sustained throughout the montage sequence, we are hearing Bugsey's point of view, to engage the spectator through identification with the look of his character. Here, however, identification is not simply with the character (Bugsey) whose point of view dominates the sequence of the film, but also and perhaps the investigation he is conducting (the building of Las Vegas). Personality traits are represented through costume, gesture, facial expression and speech. BUGSEY is a story where the character Bugsey can do no wrong, the audience throughout the film is on his side (Charles Barr, Cinema Scope; 'Before and after' in G Mast and M Cohen, 1974).

Hollywood has continuously attempted to capture Bugsey Siegal's city in the desert, which is a type of WESTWORLD fantasy town in the middle of the desert.

Today Las Vegas is the world's largest entertainment centre, drawing more visitors than Disneyland in California, Walt Disney, Florida and the remaining number of America's theme parks combined (Nevada Visitor's Guide, 1998 Brochure). But for Vegas to achieve this status, its structure and reputation has had to be remodelled a number of times. This is evident in the films I will look at.



### Section 3: Vegas' changing reputation

In November 1950, the Committee to Investigate Organised Crime, came to town. Las Vegas had completed its transition from a railroad company town to a gambling company town. The casinos in Las Vegas were controlled by the biggest gamblers and criminals from every other state in the country. On the 20th anniversary of legalised gambling in 1951, the public woke up and began questioning the people who controlled the casinos. First, it created a media hysteria which flooded the divisions of police departments around the country gathering provisions of funds and ammunition to wipe out the illegal gambling operations within their jurisdictions. This, of course, engendered a large migration to Las Vegas of expert casino owners, managers, and workers in hope of gaining control of the casinos run by the 'mob'.

In an eight year period between 1951 and 1958, 11 major hotel-casinos opened in Las Vegas, nine on the strip and two on Fremont Street, all but one generally believed to be financed with 'underworld' cash.

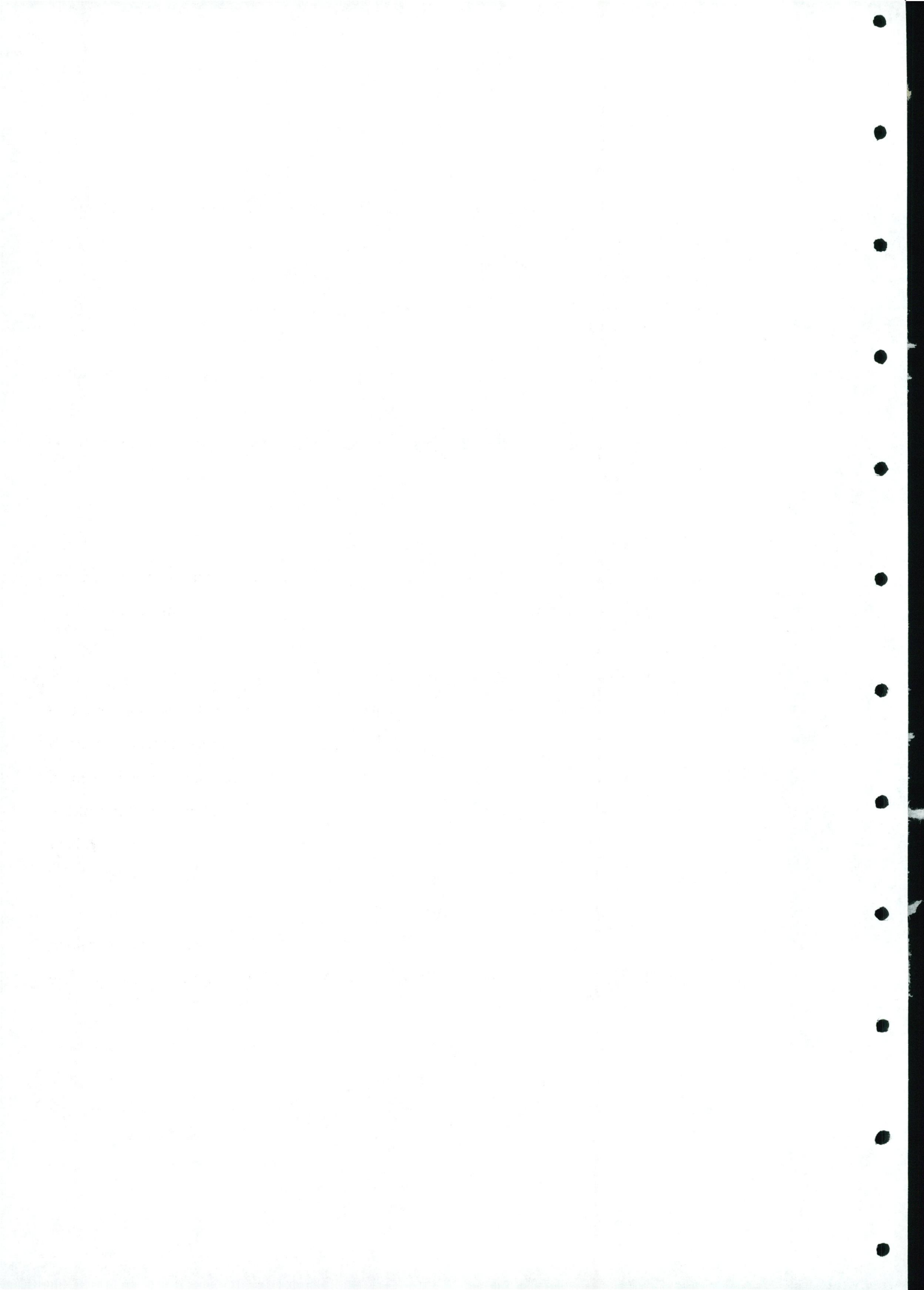
Even so, during this period, Las Vegas was attracting gamblers, tourists, migrators, movie stars, soldiers, prostitutes, petty crooks and artists.

Between 1955 and 1960, the city's population jumped from 45,000 to 65,000 - a 44% jump (Deke Castleman, Nevada Handbook, pg 320-322).

Therefore Vegas promoted itself as a sanitary outlaw town - where you could act like a gangster, yet never feel in any kind of danger. It offered its customers clean vice.

This is evident in OCEANS ELEVEN (Warner Pathe, 1960, USA).

OCEANS ELEVEN is about eleven men drawn together from war times, all of whom need money for various reasons, so they plan to rob 5 casinos in one night. It is a typical





example of a recent trend in the Hollywood entertainment film, in that its story-line is padded out with numerous guest stars and several undistinguished songs.

The first third of the film tends to drag on due to characterisation but when the raid begins both situations and dialogue improve considerably. This middle section owes much to the colour photography which turns Vegas into a verifiable hell. He also achieves some excellent decoration effects in the casino sequence (Monthly Film Bulletin, No 321, Vol 27, Oct 1960).

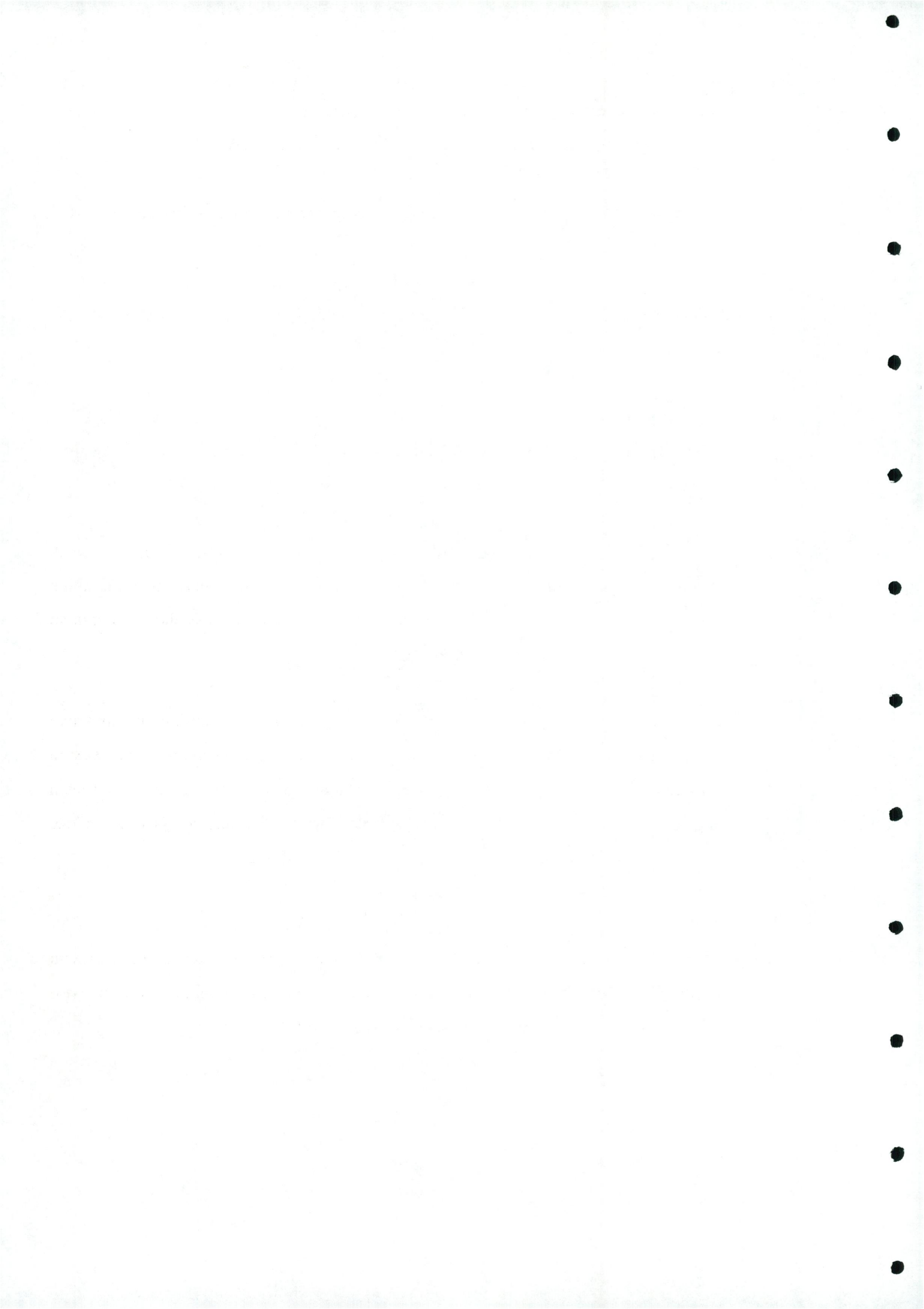
The film starred Frank Sinatra, as a lead gangster over his rat pack (Dino, Sammy, Joey and the rest). Though it's a story about professional criminals, the image of Vegas could hardly be more hygienic: the city is clean and safe, the casinos are well-run and bright, the stage shows breezy good fun. Yet the movie is corrupt.

The movie's centre is Sinatra, who in the 1940s had worshipped Siegal - bragging about how many people he had killed, arguing whether he had prepared to shoot them or cut them up, trying to cultivate the gangsters air of danger.

His own aura of violence helped make him Vegas' reigning star during its first two decades. Playing Danny Ocean or crooning about the small hours of the morning, Sinatra was the city's perfect icon on account of his undeniable talent, and because it seemed inseparable from vice. Wreathed in cigarette smoke, his life was an endless vision of the good life - booze, broads and buddies entertained by his wisecracks (Sight and Sound, Nov '93, Vol 6 (11)).

While OCEANS ELEVEN was being filmed, Frank Sinatra's prize guest was Senator John Kennedy who flew in from an election trail to pal around in Vegas with the 'rat pack'. He was elected President the year the film was released in 1960.





Now, it was not only Hollywood talent (Sinatra) that was affiliated with Vegas but also the people of America (The White House) and that is why films on Vegas sold.

*"Vegas - a luxurious desert resort destination for adults only"* - Bugsey Siegal.

It was Hollywood's fascination with these Mafia run organisations that encouraged Hollywood in making a gangster movie such as OCEANS ELEVEN. This era of film viewed Vegas as a male dominated city.

Following OCEANS ELEVEN a new 'hip' era was arriving. The era of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll - the sixties.

In 1963, Nevada was hit with the book, "THE SHOCKING DOCUMENTED TRUTH ABOUT LAS VEGAS" by author Vogliotti. The truth had been revealed about Vegas, and it was this era that the officials tried to make Vegas a mob-ridden city. To destroy it's image of a Vegas run by gangsters. At this time, Nevada was welcoming corporate respectability.

It was the Nevada Corporate Gambling Acts of 1967 and 1969, which allowed publicly traded corporations to acquire gambling licenses without the need for every stockholder to be individually licensed. MGM, Hilton and Holiday Inn quickly secured financing from legitimate sources to build their own hotels. Best of all for Las Vegas, the 'Diatribes' ended, and the mob story passed out of the spotlight.

The film of the next generation which was to enhance the reputation of Vegas was VIVA LAS VEGAS! (Dir: Roy Rowland, 1960, USA). When Elvis Presley first emerged he was originally the most radical figure in American life. His records brought black music into the white mainstream. His looks and dancing started a sexual revolution. His youthful charm mocked the notion that age brings authority.



Sinatra resented him as he had taken over his connection with Vegas. The image of Sinatra as a much loved gangster had been taken over by a younger, fun-loving musician and actor.

In the mid 1950s Elvis first played in Vegas and was a big success. A decade later he returned to the city to star as a racing driver called Lucky Jackson in VIVA LAS VEGAS!

Elvis brought youth to Vegas as well as rock 'n' roll and fun. Vegas was no longer a man's hiding place but a place for everyone to enjoy. Elvis' co-star in VIVA LAS VEGAS! Was Ann-Margaret, then billed as the female Elvis.

The two characters in the film were having a passionate affair at the time - life was racier than art! They spend the whole film swimming, water-skiing, riding horses and dancing. A Vegas without booze, commercial sex or gambling on slots. Vegas was more like a country club than a wide-open city run by mobsters.

This movie gave Vegas a whole new 'face lift' and Elvis was associated with this. It was now a romantic place, where young couples went to get married, also to see their idol Elvis, and to sunbathe in a wonderful multi-million dollar resort for a reasonable price.

By the end of the 1960s, Elvis had become the city's greatest attraction - the King!

The 1960s Vegas, promoted it's scenic areas such as the surrounding Lake Med, the Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam and the Colorado River for water sports eg. fishing, skiing, horse-riding. This era developed the building of over thirty golf courses in Las Vegas.

As Vegas was targeted at a young generation it needed to promote new activities other than gambling (fig 2, 3). Vegas now offered more to the consumer.

However, as the years past, Elvis lost the sexual energy of his youth becoming an overweight lounge-singer, Vegas paralleled this and lost it's hipness becoming a pleasure





dome aimed at lower-middle class people. This was the 1970s. Vegas had lost it's style. The respectable bright suits that lived in the casinos now attracted gaudy Bermuda's and runners. People had lost respect for the 'King' and the exotically lit casino rooms with plush carpets.

It was in 1976, the Audit Division of the Gaming Control Board also uncovered a major skimming operation by the mob that amounted to a full 20% of slot revenues discovered missing from the Stardust. And, in 1979, four men were convicted in Detroit of concealing hidden mob ownership in the Aladdin (situated on the Strip), which had been funded with £37 million of teamster's money. This was the last glimpse of the 'old Vegas'.

In the early 1980s, the emergence of Atlantic City as the East Coast's casino centre, along with the deep recession of the early Reagan years, considerably reduced visitor volume and gambling revenues in Vegas. The terrible fire at the MGM Grand (now Bally's) left 84 dead and nearly 700 injured; it closed from November 1980 to July 1981. Another fire at the Las Vegas Hilton in February 1981 took eight lives (Nevada Hand Book, Deke).

Yet it was only in the late 1980s, at most two decades after VIVA LAS VEGAS! <sup>A</sup> That Elvis became a 1990s kitsch icon. This helped the recovery of the economy and triggered off what is Las Vegas' biggest boom yet.

*"Americans love Elvis not despite his tackiness, commercialism and spiritual bloat but because of them, they feel the same way about Vegas"*

(Monthly Film Bulletin, Review, V. 27, No 321, October 1996)

It only seems natural that <sup>to</sup> ~~HONNYMOON~~ IN VEGAS (Dir: Larry Pierce, 1992, USA) would reach it's climax with an entire nouvre of Elvis impersonators parachuting from an aeroplane into the city. Far from being mocking, Elvis is portrayed as an American giant made all the more popular by his extravagance.





#### Section 4: Vegas - The American Dream?

Hollywood  
Male  
Fantasy

The 'old Vegas' had died. Films released in the 1990s were about luck, love and adventure. Yet all Vegas films have something in common, Hollywood heroes have always been prodigiously male. It started in OCEANS ELEVEN. Sinatra and the other mobsters treated women like playthings, Frank either worshipped them or slapped them around.

In Ann-Margaret's first scene in VIVA LAS VEGAS!, we get an over the top close up of her bum, the sway of her buttocks as she walks across the parking lot.

In the 1990s films, HONEYMOON IN VEGAS and INDECENT PROPOSAL (Dir: Adrian Lyne, 1993, USA), both husbands in these films end up renting their wives to strangers for the night. Women are somehow brought under male control.

LEAVING LAS VEGAS (Dir: Mike Figgis, 1996, USA) is about a drunk who meets a gang-raped hooker. She falls in love with the drunk, who evidently loves alcohol more than her.

In CASINO (Dir: <sup>Scorsese</sup> Martin Christo, 1996, USA), Ginger (actress Sharon Stone) plays the wife of Ace (Robert DeNiro) a casino manager for the mob. Ginger before she met Ace was a strong-willed, successful woman. By the end of the film due to male domination (Ace) in her life she has resorted to drugs and is on the edge of a nervous breakdown.

I think he's responsible for the emotional breakdown you get when she goes down to the restaurant and she says "I'm Mrs Rothstein". It's how he treats her, he won't let her go. I think they could have had a chance if it wasn't for the city they were in and what they were doing in it.

(Martin Christo, Director of Casino, describing the relationship between Ace and Ginger) ref.



Relationships in Vegas don't seem to work out. This city of dreams which attracted all these characters is also a city of nightmares.

Las Vegas turns out to be a disaster for those who try to realise their dreams, which is all about money, power and men. Their greed for capitalism bring in Lacamiln's notion that desire can never be satisfied.

*Jacques Lacan?*

Still, the American Dream is all about winning. The losers in Vegas always come out looking like winners. Danny Ocean (Sinatra) even though all his money goes up in flames in OCEANS ELEVEN he still had a good time. Elvis in VIVA LAS VEGAS! Was lucky in love. The couples in HONNYMOON IN VEGAS and INDECENT PROPOSAL realise that they truly loved each other and will never separate again, and Sera, the hooker in LEAVING LAS VEGAS may be alone, but she's been redeemed by the glamour of a true romance - despite everything, she's secretly a winner. So maybe Vegas is not such a bad place after all for romance, it's a place where the customary rules don't apply.

### **Section 5: Las Vegas Today**

A lot of the old casinos have been torn down to rebuild new, cleaner Vegas, that caters for the whole family. It now has something to offer everyone. Vegas had to look to a new target audience - Baby Boomers - happy to gamble, but prepared to pay extra for a place that would also amuse their kids. Today Vegas offers amusement parks, pools, Wet 'n' Wild fun centres, including numerous amounts of roller coasters and every hotel has some sort of video arcade. The Youth Hotel is a 'hotel in a hotel' - it can accommodate 120 children. It has 5 indoor playgrounds plus girls and boys dormitories. Nearly every hotel has something to offer for kids. Even in their design, the hotels are closer in style to Disneyland than sin city. Of course it's still easy to gamble or find a hooker (people distribute flyers on the street) but the whole Vegas reputation has changed.





Vegas now feels as impersonal and cold as the electronic games that increasingly dominate the casinos. Gone is romance, like the Hollywood studios which became heavily corporatised in roughly the same period. No longer is it symbolised by man - Bugsey, Elvis serenades, but the sound of whirring slots, the new Vegas has the sinister aspect of a city without faces or emotions.

(Bugsey Siegal, THE NEON EMPIRE, ~~Dir: Larry Pierce, 1989, USA~~)

For the first time in history, Vegas gave working class people enough disposable income to support the replica of the great European casinos. It is now affordable with cheap food (\$2.99 buffets and \$1.99 steak dinners) fuelling gambling sprees and ideal for families.

It was no surprise when Hollywood released VEGAS VACATION (~~Dir: Steven Kennler, 1997, USA~~ <sup>Stephen Kessler</sup>). This was the latest film set in Las Vegas. It's all about the '90s family spending quality time together in a fun location. Hollywood has now accepted Vegas as a family resort area.

VEGAS VACATION and CASINO were the latest films made in Las Vegas. The two films show great contrast between the 'old' Vegas and the new.

CASINO is based on a true story. It illustrates a glittering, festering latter-day Babylon surrounded by desert, in which appearance is everything and nothing is what it seems. It portrays how the 'old' casino was run by the mob and looks at it as a business venture, like a supermarket, people spending money in exchange of entertainment. It shows the politicians being bought off and the back alley muscle.

*You'll probably see a film in 15 years exposing what they're doing now, what we show in this film is the end of the old way and how it ended. They got too full of pride, they wanted more, if you're gambling you want more.*

(~~Martin Scorsese, Director of CASINO~~) 





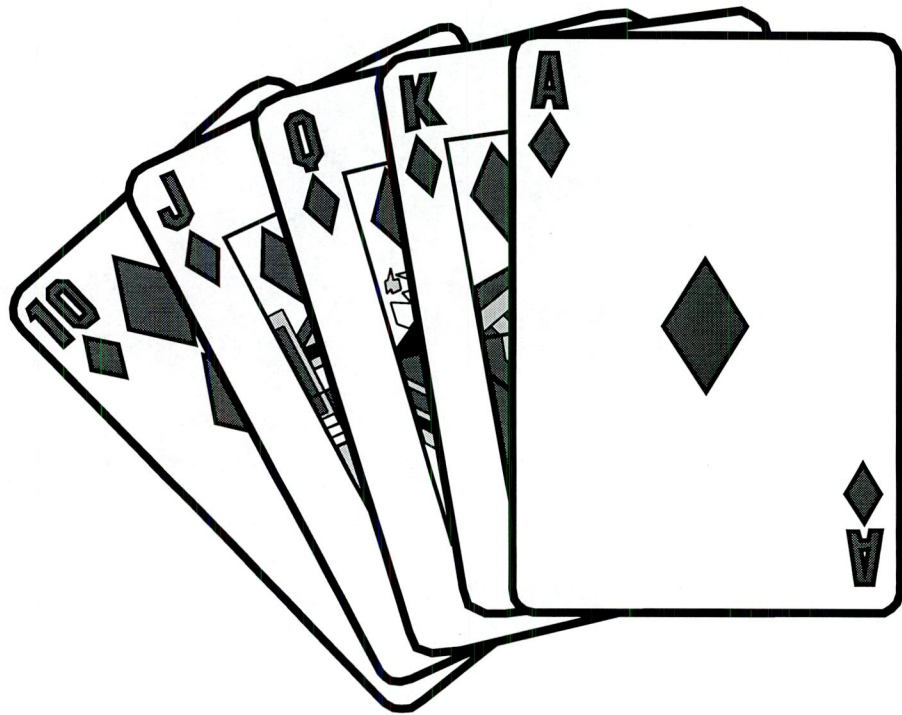
This film was Hollywood's final farewell to the old times in Vegas, and an invitation to the new - VEGAS VACATION. Vegas is now a city built for the new generation of Babyboomers.

Similarly, the architecture has also had to change to accommodate the 30 million visitors that come to Las Vegas each year. In my next chapter, I will look at how the design of Las Vegas has changed over the past generations.



CHAPTER 2:

POSTMODERNISM IN LAS VEGAS





## Section 1: The Origin of the Sign

*“One thing they seem to have forgotten in architecture schools is that this century we discovered electricity.”*

Jean Nouvel, Las Vegas, Architecture in Context by Anderto Frances.

Las Vegas, wouldn't be any different from any other states, but the desert creates a reality barrier separating you from any other civilisations.

In the past 20 years with the arrival of the great gaming corporations, the desert and Las Vegas has just become a venue for television fantasies and electronical 'spectaculars'. Las Vegas is the only city in the world in which it's signs are more famous than the buildings they promote.

In the 1960s, what was unique about Vegas' architecture was that it was 'car orientated architecture'

(Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenor, Learning From Las Vegas, 1977).

The only way you could get from one business to another was by car and this required a whole new approach to architecture. Tax rates allowed the average American to afford cars. Therefore the buildings and signs were structured around automobiles. To get motorists to stop the signs had to be big and bright (fig 4).

The first large sign to be put on the strip was the Al Ranchio Vegas sign. It was located on the LA Highway (Route 91). The sign was a large arrow promoting the shows the hotel produced at that time. The sign was so bright in contrast to the desert that it produced an intense light. It was too bright, it blinded the motorist so it had to be removed.

Years later, the sign was put back up again and because of the competing lights it no longer seemed so bright. That was the first so called 'light spectacular' (Millar, 1986, pg 14).





The Young Electric Sign Company in Vegas instigated an aura of competitiveness between the casino owners. Each casino wanted to have a more elaborate, larger sign than the one before. The more lights and the bigger the signs the more people got excited. It began to increase a larger audience which increased the gambling community of Las Vegas.

In 1949, the Pioneer Club on Fremont Street, had the first moving sign. It was a 60 feet long cowboy called Vic. It moved both it's arms to direct people into the casino, it was also given a voice. It said 'Howdy Partner' every 30 seconds, until they got tired of it and made him stop. 'Vic' has become Vegas' most enduring imagery and was also the inspiration for the Vegas Vickie, the sexy cowgirl across the street (fig 5, 6).

The height of neon signs was in the early 1960s. The colour, the size and the animation of the sign attracted critics and observers from all over the world.

The first critic to write about Las Vegas was Tom Wolfe '*out here in the desert American architecture was developing a whole new art form*'. He described it as "*Boomerang*", "*Modern*", "*Flash Gordon*", "*Ming-Alert*" and "*Spiral*".

To describe the unique and creative extravaganza that Las Vegas has become is credited with identifying the look of the city (Millar, 1986, pg 17).

The comment says  
late show!

Las Vegas has a unique skyline. It is not made up of buildings like New York or trees like Massachussetts but it comprises of neon signs. One can look at Vegas a mile away on Route 91 and see no buildings or trees, only huge signs, towering, revolving and soaring in shape.

Very few architects have looked seriously at Las Vegas. The only people that have done this are Robert Venturie and Denise Scott Brown who in the late 1960s took a studio of Yale students to Las Vegas to study and examine the architecture (Margaret Crowford, Institute of Architecture, Open University video, Virtually Las Vegas 1996).



The Venturies went to Las Vegas to learn about the architecture of communication designed to grab the attention of passing motorists.

The signs in Las Vegas use mixed media words, pictures and sculptures to persuade and inform. The casinos' signs are their form of advertisement. The sign informed you what the casino had to offer and the bright lights and shows would persuade you to enter.

“Words and symbols may be used in space for commercial persuasion eg. The Strip is virtually all signs”

(Robert Venturie, Open University video 1994, Virtually Las Vegas).

( A sign is contradictory for day and night, the same sign works as a black silhouette against the sun during the day and at night it is a source of light. It revolves by day and becomes a play of lights at night. It contains scales which can be viewed close up and at a distance (fig 7).

This is a form of communication that remains popular in Vegas today. Because of the scale and brightness of the signs they inflect towards the highway ever more than the buildings. The signs are more sculptural and pictorial in scale than the building it depicts (fig 8).

Since the 1960s neon has become rarer. Other technologies particularly use of Incandescent Lights which produce moving sequences (fig 9). On the other hand, these pictures are held together rigorously like frames on paintings, in a way the old neon seemed looser “the tubes which were light, seemed to have a broader and more intimate relationship with the environment than the frame” (Denise Scott Brown, Virtually Las Vegas, video, 1996).

The major change that has occurred over the past 20 years, is the conversion of Vegas from a ‘Strip’ which is meant to be seen from cars to a pedestrian orientated environment.





In the early 1980s, pathways were built along Route 66. Land slots between hotels were filled making it more compact, this increased traffic on the Strip, so it was easier to walk.

Also Fremont Street was a prime example of how successful it was to pedestrianise an area. While the Strip was meant to be seen from the automobile Fremont Street was always preferred as all the casinos were closer together, it was more accessible by foot becoming more popular than the Strip. A hotel/ casino on the Strip in the early 1960s had large distances between the buildings, therefore casino patrons were compelled to drive from casino to casino (fig 10).

Architects mock the architecture of Las Vegas through the manner in which the signs have become the buildings. Nearly all the hotels/ casinos are covered in neon signs so that it is impossible to view the actual building properly (fig 11).

It was during the 1960s when Robert Venturie went behind the Stardust Hotel (which boasts the longest sign in Vegas) discovered a building which was little more than a 'slab of concrete', he used the term 'decorated shed' to describe what he saw.

The buildings' quality had not come from the formal or spacial significance but from the decoration on it ie. Signs. The forms of the buildings are visible but still remain secondary to the signs and visual impact. Even by day the signs take first preference (fig 12).

With the pedestrainisation of 'the Strip' a lot of hotels were demolished and rebuilt to bring Vegas in to a new era, an era that was to cater for the family and to accommodate a new form of architecture which can be viewed from the footpath. For this change to occur Las Vegas realised how powerful an entertainment device is, to transform reality into fantasy land.





## Section 2: Themed architecture

*“If it weren't for Disney and his incredible perception of Disneyland, that is a parallel story telling reality, Las Vegas would not be doing what it is today”*

(Jon Jerde, Architect of Treasure Island Hotel/ Casino).

Hotels were not situated directly on the footpaths, the neon signs of the 60s were too high for people to read, therefore, the attraction to the hotel/ casino had to be the frontage of the hotel to captivate the passers by. Because this era was aimed at the family the architecture had to be directed towards children as well as adults.

Today, stories are acted outside themed hotels every night. The most elaborate is Treasure Island. Pirates sink ‘the British galleon’ every 90 minutes, a mimic ship built for the purpose of recreating on an artificial sea - a fantasy (fig 13).

*“We try to create entertainment and fantasy alternative for people's vacation and recreational buck, if Disney stands for fantasy and imagination then Las Vegas is an adult fantasy and recreation place”*

(Steve Wynn, Casino Owner).

However the way you deliver it to an adult is not the way you deliver it to children. It is almost like a Disney part III combined with gambling. However Vegas takes Disney a step further (Charles Jencks, Architecture Critic). The Las Vegas architecture does connect with Disneyland, but in Disney it's pure cinematography, it surrounds you, it's possible to walk around it. In Vegas, cinematography is only a front, it is only a surface of a hotel/ casino. You are seeing the ‘unreal’ in a ‘real’ environment and you are combining the two. For example, in Vegas across and beside the major themed resorts, you can see Kodak Film Centre, Gas stations and supermarkets. Whereas in Disney you only see the real when you leave.



Architecture in Vegas has adopted the psychological strategy of advertising of instant persuasion and buildings have turned into image products. Frederic Jameson uses the notion of 'contrived depthlessness' to describe the contemporary cultural condition and '*it's fixation with appearances, surfaces and instant impacts that have no sustaining power over time*' (Juhani Pallasmaa, *Architecture of the Senses*, pg 19-21).

Architecture has become an art of the printed image, turning architecture into stage sets. Increasing the sense of unreality and alienation. Vegas is a perfect model of this, with its ploy of illusions eg. Volcanoes, Treasure Island, New York, New York etc.

The imaginary world is supposed to be what makes the operation successful. It is meant to be an infantile world, in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the 'real' world, and to conceal the fact that real childishness is everywhere, particularly those adults who go there to act the child in order to foster illusions of their real childishness (Jean Baudrillard, *Post-modern Narratives*, pg 153-154).

Vegas, however, is an adult Disneyworld. Disneyworld takes the present day fairy tales for children and makes them into reality. Whereas Vegas takes the fairy tales and stories that adults would remember from their childhood and makes them 'real'. It is easily described by using Jameson's description and example of nostalgia. He described one of the most important cultural experiences of the generations that grew up from the 1930s to the 1950s was the Saturday afternoon serial of Buck Rogers. This was all about alien villains, true American heroes, heroines in distress etc. In the 1970s to 1980s, Star Wars was the next great TV series. The generation that watched Buck Rogers would look at Star Wars and be reminded of all the old series, where as the people who never saw Buck Rogers (the younger generation) accepted the adventures of Star Wars as an original and nothing else. Star Wars has reinvented Buck Rogers in the form of Pastiche creating a nostalgic desire to return to the older period. This series is a historical or nostalgic film. (Jameson, *Post-modern Narratives*, pg 167-170).





This form of pastiche is what Vegas is doing. It is reinventing the old through it's architecture creating nostalgia. For example, one of the most recent hotels to be built on the Strip is New York, New York in 1997 (fig 14). Children or even adults who have never been to New York can look at this hotel, at it's sheer size, and the bright 'stage set' architecture it displays. Whereas anyone who has ever been to New York, looks at this hotel and thinks back of when they were last there, what has changed, does it look like the real thing etc.. creating nostalgia.

When Steve Wynn was designing The Mirage built in 1989, as well as creating tension and confusion amongst it's audience as you are not supposed to see a volcano in the middle of the desert. The Mirage was taken from the film SOUTH PACIFIC, the island Balihi. Younger generations wouldn't have seen this film but adults would be able to associate the Mirage with it. The Mirage moves 150 gallons of water a minute. This set up the tension of the 'unreal' surrounded in the 'real' environment. This exterior cost US\$30 million. Steve Wynn wanted to create an environment to stay on for over 24 hours.

The architecture of Vegas is for everyone, it represents both adults and children, both can appreciate it's fictional elements. These themed attractions stopped pedestrians in their tracks so that they engage in the public spectacular and are lured inside the casinos by what had originally been inside the lounges and showrooms (theatricals, musicians etc) outside on to the public boulevard.

### **Section 3: Postmodernism in Las Vegas**

*Mirage to Yisbe*  
This new 3-dimensional type of architecture of the 1980s which combines film with architecture creating a new medium that is themed architecture is a form of postmodernism. "Postmodernism is when the real is no longer what it used to be and nostalgia assumes it's full meaning" (Jameson).





The situation of all these hotels built beside each other on the Strip breaks all natural barriers, creating a new accessible art.

*“Post-modernity, in what ever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the ‘lack of reality’ of reality, together with the invention of other realities” (Lyotard, JF, 1984, pg 146).*

Caesar’s Palace built in 1966 is based on the architecture of great Roman empires. A statue of Apollo fronts the \$2.5 million, domed world of Caesar, which houses a miniature Roman city presented in ‘simulated’ holography and laser-power sound. This hotel demonstrates the contrasts within Las Vegas. It confuses the spectator to see all this different type of architecture placed in the desert. Like Jeff Koon’s big kitten sculpture, you don’t expect to see this type of creativity placed in the middle of a city, yet a child can take pleasure in it’s sculpture, an adult would be confused to why it’s placed there. Despite that, to some, Las Vegas may appear tacky with it’s buildings mocking the grandeur of old Rome, Egypt and Camelot, yet it achieves popularity due to the sheer extravagance of it’s bad taste. There is something universal about taking pleasure in kitsch.

However, all these hotels/ resorts have been seen in some form or other before. Vegas is an imitation of other styles - pastiche, that actually mocks the original eg. Caesar’s Palace mocks the initial Roman empires. Thus insinuating that the actual styles of the great modernists can be mocked, this appeals to the public (fig 15). Andy Warhol, produced a print of the Campbell’s Soup can - people identified with it. It was being shown in a different context - in art galleries rather than supermarkets. Just like ‘The Mirage’, Treasure Island, New York New York, Caesar’s Palace - people are seeing them imitated and placed in the desert.

In Vegas the grand truth is being challenged and ‘anything goes’, according to Lyotard.



But, the architecture is a retreat from creativity by borrowing its sources from other material ie. other architecture, Disney, film and history.

Due to the success of themed architecture on the Strip, Fremont Street had lost its popularity. So in 1996, casino owners built a steel roof over the entire street. It was 90 feet high, complete with 2 million incandescent light bulbs and controlled by 121 computers to create a controlled digital light spectacular (fig 16).

Fremont Street is now viewed as a single entity rather than individual shop fronts. Fremont Street could now compete with the Strip.

#### **Section 4: The Casino and Gambling**

Although the appearance of the Strip and Fremont Street has been restyled over the past 30 years, the layout inside the hotels/ casinos is still more or less the same. The casino is what Robert Venturie called a 'duck'. A church is a 'duck'. Churches are always designed in the shape of a cross. It has always been this shape and will probably never change. People are able to recognise a church due to this. A casino is also in the form of a 'duck', in that it is always a large rectangular room. The casino has never been a separate room you can go into or out of. It is simply in the public space.

The 'duck' is the special building that is a symbol; the decorated shed is the conventional shelter that applies symbols - casinos can be both and most of them are eg. New York New York, The Luxor. The Luxor takes the form of a pyramid, with additional signs along the pathway directing the way in (fig 17).

Architects who study what is called the 'program' of the casinos are always amazed by the similarity in design they are to prisons. The essential property of a casino is its surveillance at all times. Everything you do in a casino is monitored, particularly the workers, those who play with money.





*"A casino is nothing but a sophisticated organisation of surveillance. If you look up at the ceiling, two-way mirrors have been replaced with cameras"* (Jack Binnion, Owner of Binnion's Horseshow, Virtually Las Vegas, 1996, video).

But what is gambling?

It is a manufactured thrill that makes the adrenaline flow - a feeling of anticipation, the bigger the bet, the more interest, the bigger the risk, the more you feel good when you win. The casino is designed to try and make you gamble.

Vegas has been described as a *'big slab concrete warehouse filled with as many cash points, like an assembly line to pick as many people's pockets in as short of period of time as possible'* (Davis, Virtually Las Vegas Video, 1996).

The psychology of gambling is never to have any windows so people don't know whether it's day or night. When they start to see the sun rise they feel they have to go home. Never have any clocks. Oxygen is pumped into the casinos to keep people awake. The gambling room is always very dark. The combination of darkness and enclosure of the gambling room makes for privacy, protection, concentration and control. The labyrinth of slots and card games under the low ceiling never connects with the outside light or outside space. This disorientates the visitor in space and time. Time is meaningless as is money.

The casino is just one big room with no exit signs. As the hotel rooms are at the rear of the hotel, you can never go directly to your room - you always have to go through the casino. The size of the room and the amount of games makes it a giant maze.

The difference between casinos in the 60s and the 90s is that today we are seeing the conversion of the casino, the shopping mall and the hotel to create a 24 hour environment. Gambling, dining, banqueting rooms, night-clubs and auditoriums all in the one building eg. Caesar's Palace. You enter Caesar's Palace on one of three people-movers on the





sidewalks to the casino. Once inside, you are directed to Caesar's Forum, a \$100 million, 240,000-square foot enclosed mall. It is one of the top 3 shopping malls in the country. Las Vegas' answer to Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills. The mall itself is also a visual sensual extravaganza, the sun sets every 10 minutes. It draws you in like an extra or a stage set. This is not to entertain you but to disorientate the visitor. It plays with your sense of time as it's always twilight - you have no idea whether it's day or night outside. It always stays the same time in Vegas. The more unreality they build here the more people they can attract to gamble. If you are not thinking of your responsibilities back home, you keep playing. Caesar's Palace is noted for it's showmanship rather than it's architecture.

The casino is a form of hyperspace. Instead of making your journey from A to B clear, casinos make your excursion as complicated as possible. You must navigate your way through a low-lit, low ceilinged gaming room before joining the world outside. The outside of the casino is easier to follow. There is a big neon sign directing you how to get in but none showing you how to get out - nothing is as it seems.

Caesar's Palace is a typical example of one of many post-modern buildings in Vegas - the transformation of reality into images and the fragmentation of time.

Jameson has described the Bonaventure Hotel in LA as a '*full-blown post-modern building*'. The characteristics of the Bonaventure are almost the same as the structure at the casinos.

The Bonaventure Hotel has 3 entrances by way of elevated gardens on both sides of the hotel. These entryways admit you to the sixth floor, and even then you must walk down one flight of stairs to find the elevator, by which you access the lobby. You can't find the exit, you are lost inside as every part of the hotel looks the same and you never recognise the same people twice. Ironically, the building knows where you are even if you don't, as there are big surveillance cameras everywhere.



The outside of the hotel is covered in great reflective glass walls. The glass achieves a disassociation of the Bonadventure Hotel from it's neighbourhood as when you look through it you can only see distorted images.

The people-movers in the Bonadventure are similar to those at Caesar's Palace, reducing people in to objects, as once they are on them they don't know where they are being taken to, it's like they are being <sup>processed?</sup> possessed.

*"It seems to me that the escalators and elevators here, henceforth, replace movement but also and above all designate themselves as new reflective signs"* (Jameson, Post-modern Narratives, 1993).

The Bonadventure uses it's escalators to attract people in the hotels whereas Vegas has it's themed architecture and great neon signs. Yet the whole structure of both buildings is still to confuse the visitor. The womb to <sup>womb</sup> ~~term~~ surveillance characterises our culture, we are always looking in. Social, economic and cultural change is raised by postmodernism, which is another word for the description of a particular style which features the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order.

The Bonadventure Hotel is not expected to last another 5 years. Because of it's layout, people can't check in fast, the shops in the hotel are complaining of lack of business as people can't find them. Las Vegas on the other hand is a successful post-modern city. Gambling and entertainment are there to accommodate you while you are looking for your hotel room. Vegas' pastiche representation helps people to recognise the buildings more than they can the Bonadventure Hotel.

### **Section 5: The Future of Vegas**

The design of the Strip and Fremont Street have always been targeted at the middle-class American, consumer of Frank Sinatra and old movie images. What it has failed to do is





crack the thirty-something age group, because that is increasingly going to be where the market is.

The first hotel aimed at this market is the Hard Rock Café Casino/ Hotel, which opened in 1996. It was built to cater for the 18-48 years age group. The Hard Rock Café is based on the music of the next generation - Jimmy Hendrix, The Stones, Beatles, U2, Madonna all surround the casino walls in the Hard Rock Café rather than the traditional Wayne Newton, Sinatra or Elvis impersonators (fig 18).

This could be the next transformation of Las Vegas, the fixation of the next generations rock 'n' roll 'n' pop culture. Many artists such as singer/ songwriter Will Smith, Jimmy Ray, Puff Daddy have all had videos filmed in Vegas this year. The bright colours and 'spectaculars' of Vegas are attracting more bands every year to perform and the Hard Rock Café encourages this.

Vegas will continue to expand and accommodate it's market even if it does have to change it's architecture for the public demand. But can Vegas be allowed to grow this fast?

Las Vegas has the highest rate of water consumption in the country (therefore the world) even though they live in the driest spot on the continent: 375 gallons per person per day is used. If Las Vegas continues to grow at the rate it's growing at today, not only will it suck the Colorado River dry but experts expect a drought in Vegas somewhere between 2006 and 2014. With 80,000 rooms and 90% to 100% occupancy, Las Vegas will run out of water long before it runs out of the demand for customers.

The more resorts the greater demand there is for water. The city of Las Vegas is sinking gradually because the water table in which it's built is being rapidly depleted (Castleman, Nevada Handbook, 1993, pg 312-313).





But how is all the excitement of the Strip and Fremont Street affecting the surrounding areas of Clark County? In my next chapter, I will look at the social changes which have occurred around the residential areas of Las Vegas.



CHAPTER 3:

CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN LAS

VEGAS







## Section 1:

Vegas was built to be extraordinary. But to make such a city work requires tens of thousands of labourers, for whom it's a home not a fairy tale. The real Vegas has an aggressive hotel workers' union, high suicide rates and the biggest race riots between the Midwest and LA.

Vegas continues to develop as two different worlds: the suburban area and the Strip & Fremont Street. Few smaller streets rarely intercept the Strip so it is possible not to see the rest of the city (fig 19).

Ernest W Burgess of the University of Chicago has compiled a chart, based on the growth of Chicago. It is the most famous diagram in social science (Dovis, Urban Centre 1, 1994). I am going to use this chart to illustrate how the city of Vegas is occupied in terms of residents (fig 20).

Today, Las Vegas is divided into 3 concentric zones. The left side of this diagram portrays this. The first section I will look at is the inner city. This is the area situated just outside the Strip and Fremont Street, known as the 'core' according to the chart. There are so many people migrating to Vegas every year that the city structures need to grow. But the growth of housing facilities is too slow to meet the demand of people coming to the city. This is increasing the amount of people living in existing areas. People are being squashed into the same space. This area is filled with boarding houses and tenement streets mixed with the old industry of the Strip eg. Prostitution and drug zoned area. This shelters the new immigrant families and single male labourers as it is the cheapest place to live - where a large number of children are crowded into a small area. It remains the classic breeding ground of teenage street gangs (over 100 according to Las Vegas School District Intelligence). This inner ring remains the most dangerous part of the city. The second sector in the chart, is the second immigrant settlements - this contains the two flat area apartments - 50% of the population live here.



Driving down the back of Las Vegas one passes rows of walled backyards with no front doors or front porches, houses resemble prisons.

The majority of this community are living in fear. Purchasing of guns, home security systems, personal panic buttons, car alarms and cellular phones are not unknown to this sector. There is a demand for iron bars and gates for home protection - the houses resemble cages in a zoo.

The high surveillance systems that were always in the casinos are now being brought home. The Strip and Fremont Street are growing so fast that the residential areas can't keep up with this fast pace. Instead of rebuilding these areas they are just increasing the security around them.

*"The feeling of security by fences illuminates crime"* (Davis, Urban Control, 1994).

Las Vegas is the largest American community to have such a high proportion living behind gates and walls. The popularity of those fortified residential neighbourhoods intensifies the pervasive paranoia that characterises Las Vegas. This is the major change which has taken place between the 60s and the 90s - the building of security systems to cut off these areas from the rest of the city.

Vegas is growing so fast that 7% are forced to live in mobile homes while 6% are homeless (Nevada Handbook, 1998). Liquor stores and supermarkets are caged behind a counter, even hamburgers are exchanged for money through bullet-proof acrylic windows. Even the architecture of these shops are windowless concrete blocks with rough surfaces supposed to deter graffiti have spread across the street scope.

Even insurance companies insist on 'riot-proof bunkers' in the rebuilding of districts, creating fear. Schools are even more indistinguishable from jails. Just as their parents once





learned in the case of an atomic bomb attack, so students are taught to drop at a teacher's signal in case of a drive-by shooting - and stay there until they received the all-clear signal.

It was only 10 years ago that the Atomic Energy Commission stopped conducting its first above-ground nuclear test explosion, 70 miles north-west of Las Vegas.

The government refusing to make any public investment in the redemption of the underlying social conditions decided to pull out old investments in this area and build a new residential sector.

This is the third section of the diagram but it is also hoped to be the core of the next generation.

The government wanted to start again - to rebuild Clark County in the West of Vegas. LA did this also. The pressures of population changes and security fears encouraged this idea to build a whole new planned residential areas like Park LA Brea in LA.

Gerry Balm, one of the designers of Park LA Brea describes his community as mainly white middle class people living in a torn down, old industrial area rebuilt to make a home for over 10,000 people. Park LA Brea is situated 20 minutes from downtown LA and 20 minutes from the Santa Monica Ocean. The type of people that live here are all professionals such as actors, doctors, teachers etc.

Gardens are situated around the area to make it a nice place to live. It is separated from the rest of the city by a highway and view of trees surrounding it. The residents try to make it a crime-free area, by providing community newsletters, sports and a set of rules which had to be followed in order to live there. It is an ideal location for families as there are a lot of parks for kids to play in.

It is a place that is producing the 'all American dream' and people are willing to buy into it.





These housing areas are creating a whole new post-modern urban landscape. Park La Brea is trying to create the ideal place to live in.

*“What we build won’t be perfect but it will be a better place”* (Phil Rially, President of Park La Brea).

Park La Brea is a substitute of reality, it is a copy of something that never really existed before. For example the people in the neighbourhood must follow a certain set of rules - you are not allowed to fix your car on the road in case you get oil all over the place, making a dirty environment, or if you want to paint your house a different colour you must ask permission first (LA).

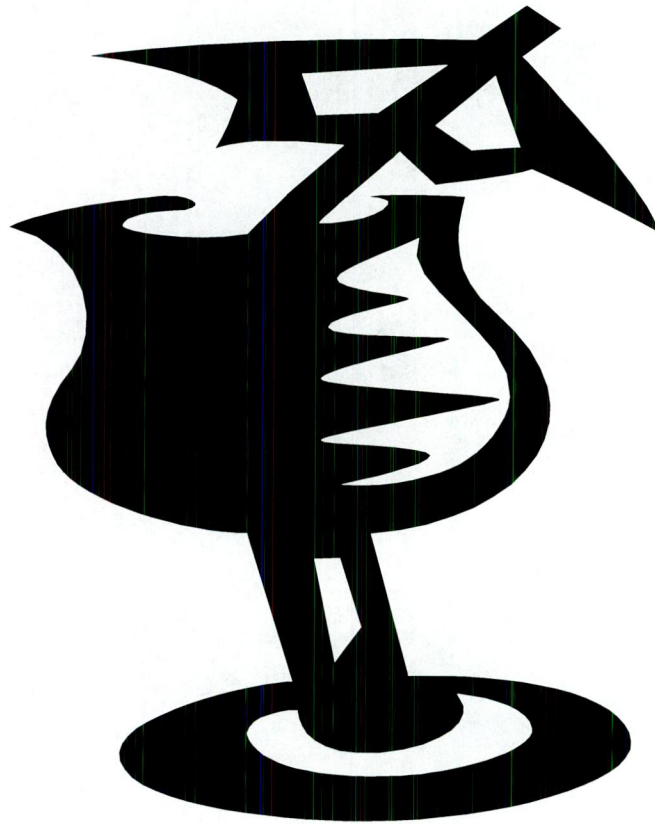
Vegas has also bought into this ‘American dream’ housing areas with golf courses and artificial lakes. Vegas has now become the most popular place for middle class elderly people in the United States to retire. In a very short period of time. This new type of community that people feel safe in are cut off from the rest of the old core. It is the start of a new era in residential planning in an attempt of making Vegas a clean, safe environment to live in.

Entrepreneurs have continued to reinvest in Las Vegas, because it’s a good investment. It works - they make money. Yet Vegas will continue to grow as two separate sectors instead of one big community.

If Vegas is to grow successfully then the safety of it’s people should be first priority. The low tax rates and big job markets will not be enough to satisfy the people of Vegas if fear has taken over their lives and homes.



# CHAPTER 4







## CONCLUSION:

The Strip in it's present transitional form is he most extraordinary urban-design phenomenon to come out of Las Vegas yet.

Las Vegas is solely directed at tourists and as a city this is where it's main income comes from. Las Vegas Boulevard South today is an utterly confounding mix of different themes, scales and types of development put together by a series of entrepreneurs.

The magic and the medium of the hotel/ casino themed architecture that are the economic lifeblood of Vegas are not architecture. Las Vegas is not a set of architectural sites, it has always been based on entertainment and showbusiness. The parts of the hotels that matter the most to the public often constitute on entertainment medium in themselves. However the sheer size and complexity of recent hotel/ casinos mean that architects are now gaining greater prominence.

Still, while The Strip is celebrated for it's brazen exhibitionism, the power of it's imagery has also acted to mask the human and experimental aspects of living and working in Vegas, and the impoverishment of urban design and daily life in the remainder of the city Las Vegas demonstrates more clearly than other US cities the nature of current American attitudes to urban design. The dominant factor determining building and city planning in Las Vegas is convenience. An individual building such as a large slab casino tower is simply the least extensive enclosure of space rather than investing money in the infrastructure of the surrounding city.

However, the Strip is now so densely developed that the resort district is having to extend it's reach. To meet a demand, bars, casinos catering to specific tastes, are springing up in



off-Strip locations too. The effect of this development is to reduce the historic distinction between the tourist-orientated, resort district and the city itself.

If this development continues, urban planning will have to be taken seriously in order to prevent Clark County into becoming a criminalised third world - all the ingenious security technology, present and future, will not safeguard the anxious middle class in obtaining their 'American dream'.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderto, Frances, Chase, John <sup>+ a</sup> Las Vegas, Architecture in Context, London, 1997
- Barr, Charles Cinema Scope, 'Before and After', G Mast and M Cohen, 1974 *— Film Theory + Criticism?*
- Barell, Babera A Legacy of Light, The History of Yesco, Paragon Press, 1995
- Berman, Marshall The Experience of Modernity, Modernism, Post-modernism, realism, Winchester School of Art, 1987
- Baudrillard, Jean For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, Telos Press, 1981
- Castleman, Deke Nevada Handbook, Moon Publications Inc, USA, 1993
- Davis, Mike Urban Control, open magazines pamphlet series, 1994
- Harrison, Charles, Wood, Paul Art in Theory 1900-1990, Blackwell, 1992
- Hess, Alan Viva Las Vegas, After Hours Architecture, San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 1993
- Huysen, Andreas After the Great Divide, Modernism, Mass Culture, Post-modernism (1987)
- Jameson, Frederic Post-modernism, Maisonneuve Press, 1989
- Lapidus, Morris Progressive Architecture, Oxford Press, 1970
- Lyotard, Jean-Francais The Postmodern Narratives, Manchester University Press, 1984





Miller, Chelsea H

Neon in Nevada, a Survey of Contemporary and  
Historic Neon Signs in Nevada, Carson City, Nevada  
Division of Historic, Preservation and Archaeology,  
September 1986

Pallasmaa, Juhani

Architecture of the Senses. The Eyes of the Skin,  
Academy Edition, 1996

Swan, Sheila/ Laufer, Peter

Neon Nevada, Reno, Las Vegas, University of Nevada  
Press, 1994

Venturi, Robert/ Brown, Denise  
Scott, Zanair, Steven

Learning from Las Vegas, Cambridge, (Second  
Edition, MIT Press, 1979

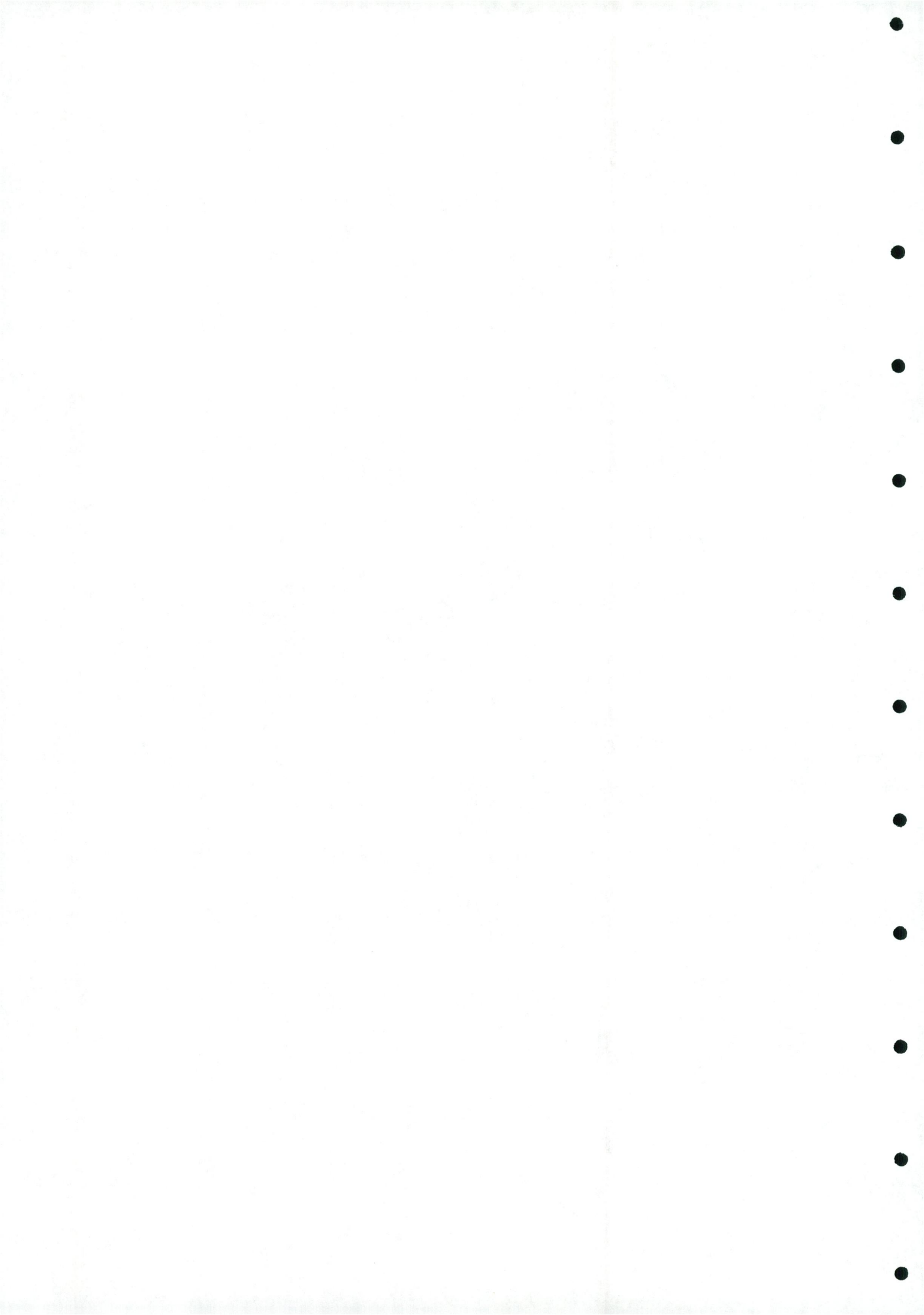
Warsaw

^ Film Theory and Criticism pg 467-471



Filmography  
VIDEOGRAPHY

BUGSEY	( <del>Dir.</del> Barry Levinson, USA, 1991)
CASINO	<i>Scorsese</i> ( <del>Dir.</del> Martin <del>Christo</del> , USA, 1996)
DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER	( <del>Dir.</del> Guy Hamilton, 1971)
<i>E</i> HONNYMOON IN VEGAS	( <del>Dir.</del> Larry Pierce, USA, 1992)
INDECENT PROPOSAL	( <del>Dir.</del> Adrian Lyne, USA, 1993)
LEAVING LAS VEGAS	( <del>Dir.</del> Mike Figgis, USA, 1996)
OCEAN'S <del>ELEVEN</del> II	<i>Lewis Milestone</i> ( <del>Dir.</del> Warner <del>Pathe</del> , USA, 1960)
PICTURING THE MODERN CITY	The BBC, Open University, 1994
THE NEON EMPIRE	( <del>Dir.</del> Larry Pierce, USA, 1989)
VIRTUALLY LAS VEGAS	Late Show Special, <u>Documentation</u> , BBC, 1994
VIVA LAS VEGAS! ( <i>aka love in Las Vegas</i> )	( <del>Dir.</del> Ray Rowland, USA, 1960) ? <i>George Sidney, 1963</i>



## ARTICLES

American Cinography, V 70, No 4, April 1989

Cinema Papers, No 88, May/June 1992, pg 55-56

Empire:                    No 36, June 1992, pg 8  
                                  No 37, July 1992, pg 64  
                                  No 45, March 1993, pg 41  
                                  No 48, 1993, pg 18-19

Film Quarterly, V 45, No 4, Summer 1992, pg 66

Premiere:                Vol 6, No 7, September 1992, pg 22, 23, 125-127  
                                  Vol 5, No 5, January 1992, pg 48-54

Screen International: No 819, September 1991, pg 94  
                                  No 403, April 1993, pg 7  
                                  No 849, March 1992, pg 28

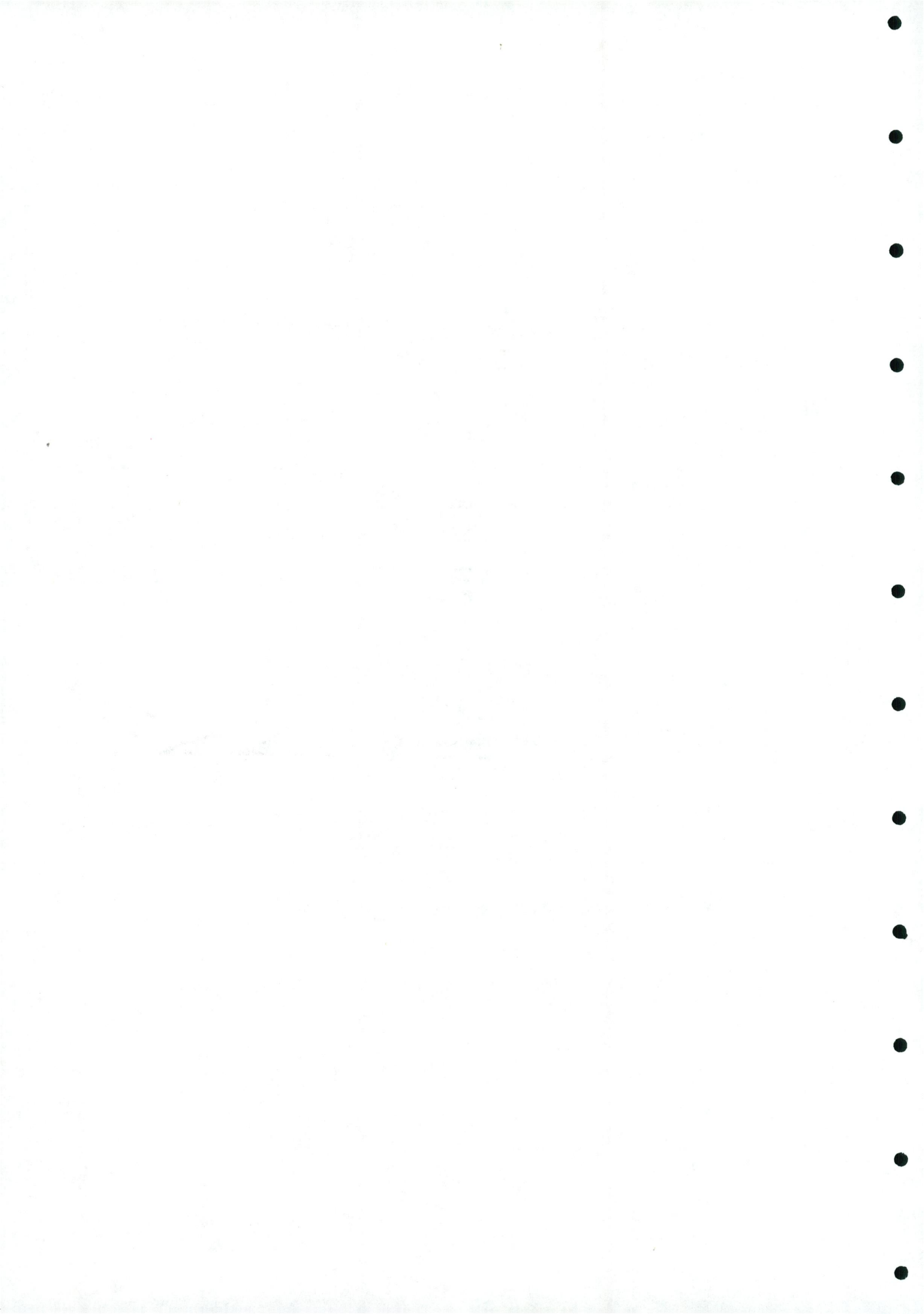
Sight and Sound        Vol 3, No 3, March 1993, pg 41  
                                  Vol 3, No 6, June 1993, pg 55-56  
                                  Vol 6, No 11, November 1993





## LIST OF PLATES

- Fig 1** Aerial view of Las Vegas
- Fig 2** Las Vegas Golf Course
- Fig 3** The Hoover Dam
- Fig 4** A typical neon Vegas sign
- Fig 5** Pioneer Club cowboy Vic (1951 design by Yesco)
- Fig 6** 'Vickie' - Fremont Street sign
- Fig 7** Sign that shows distance for close up and faraway
- Fig 8** Shows signs are most interesting than buildings
- Fig 9** An incadescent sign
- Fig 10** Fremont Street in 1993
- Fig 11** Hotels covered in signs
- Fig 12** Venturie's decorated shed illustration
- Fig 13** Treasure Island Hotel/ Casino
- Fig 14** New York New York Hotel/ Casino
- Fig 15** Image of Caesar's Palace
- Fig 16** Fremont Street 'light spectacular'
- Fig 17** The Luxor Hotel/ Casino
- Fig 18** The Hard Rock Café Hotel/ Casino
- Fig 19** Las Vegas streets
- Fig 20** The Burgess Chart



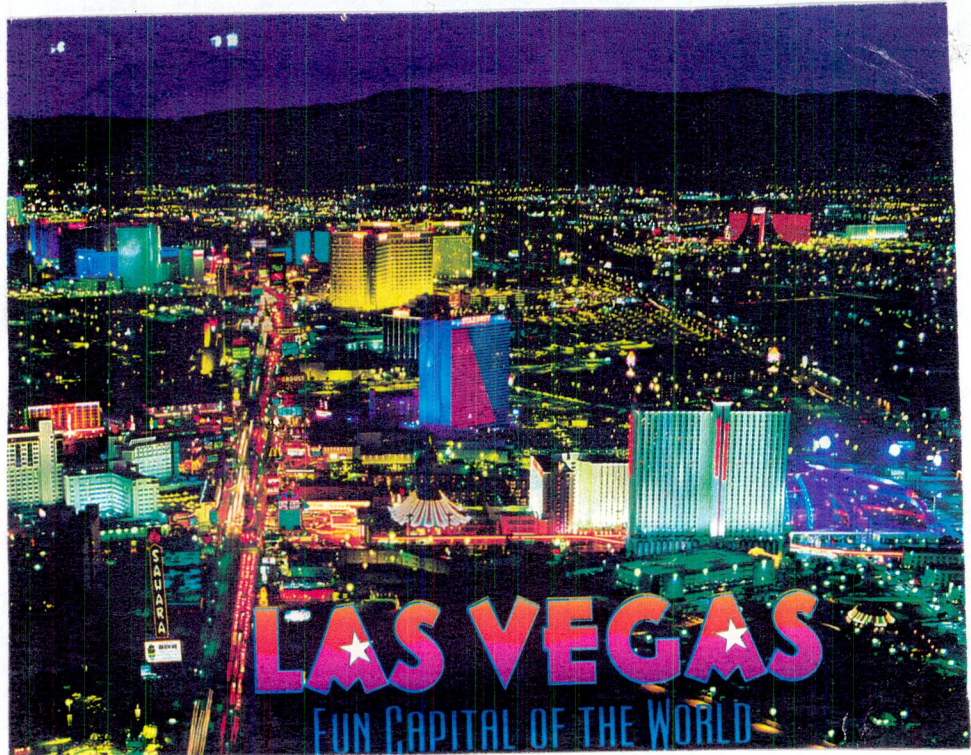
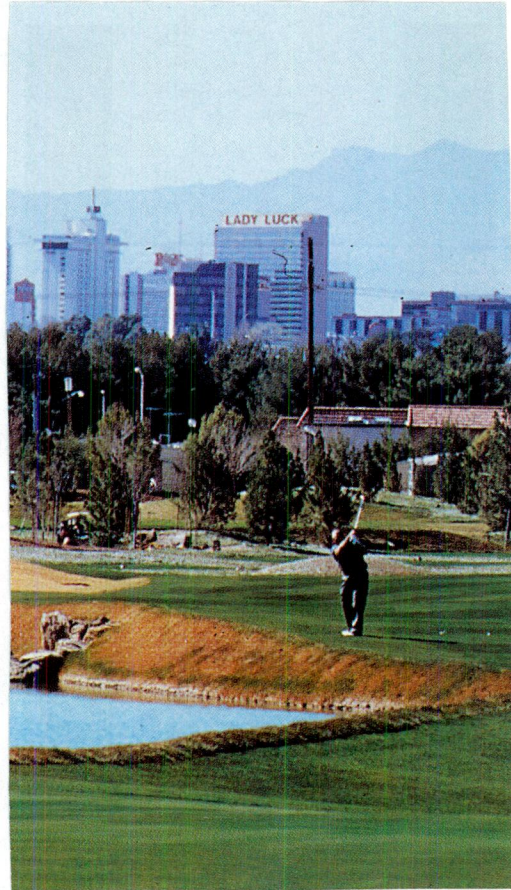


Fig 1: Aerial view of Las Vegas

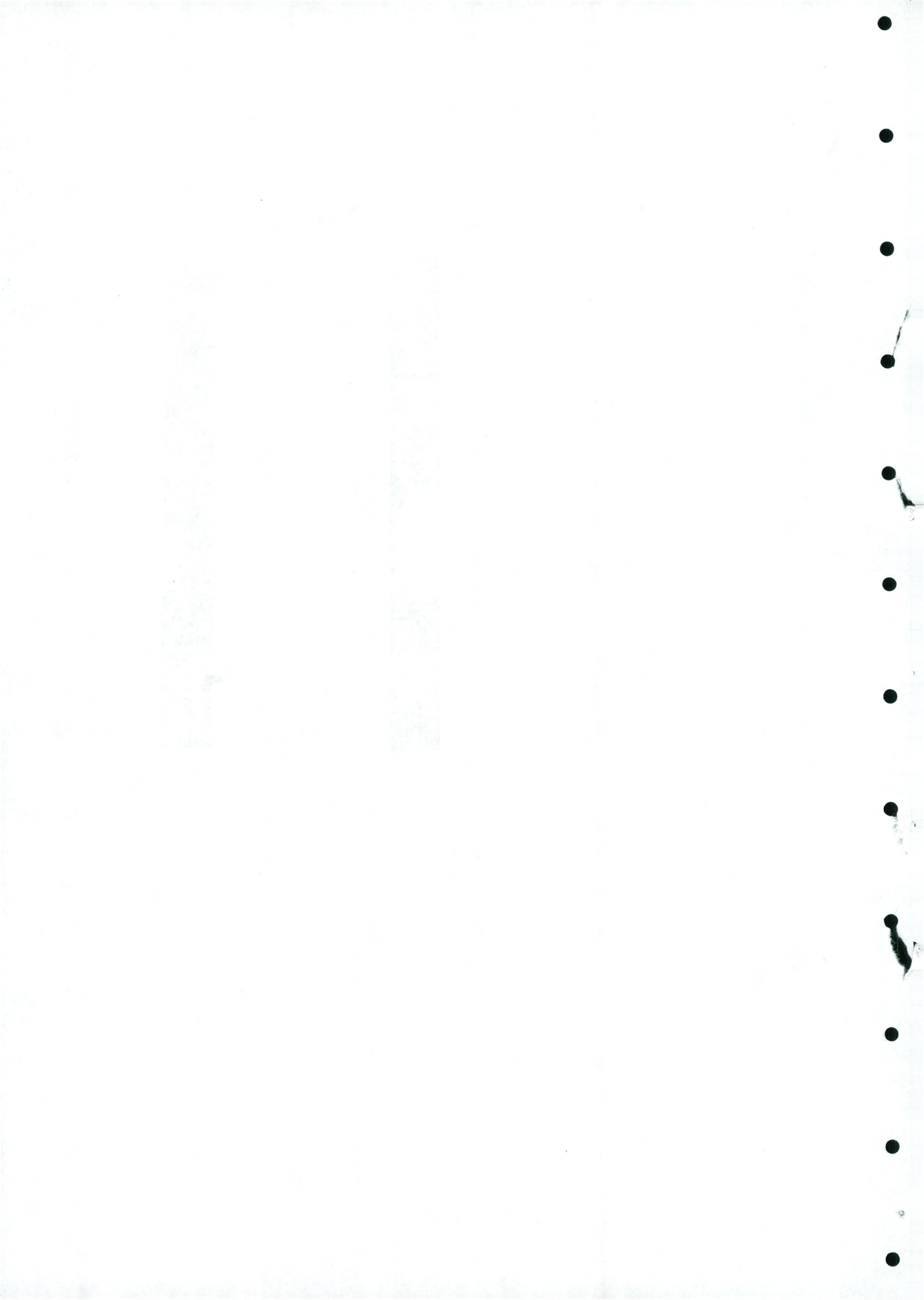




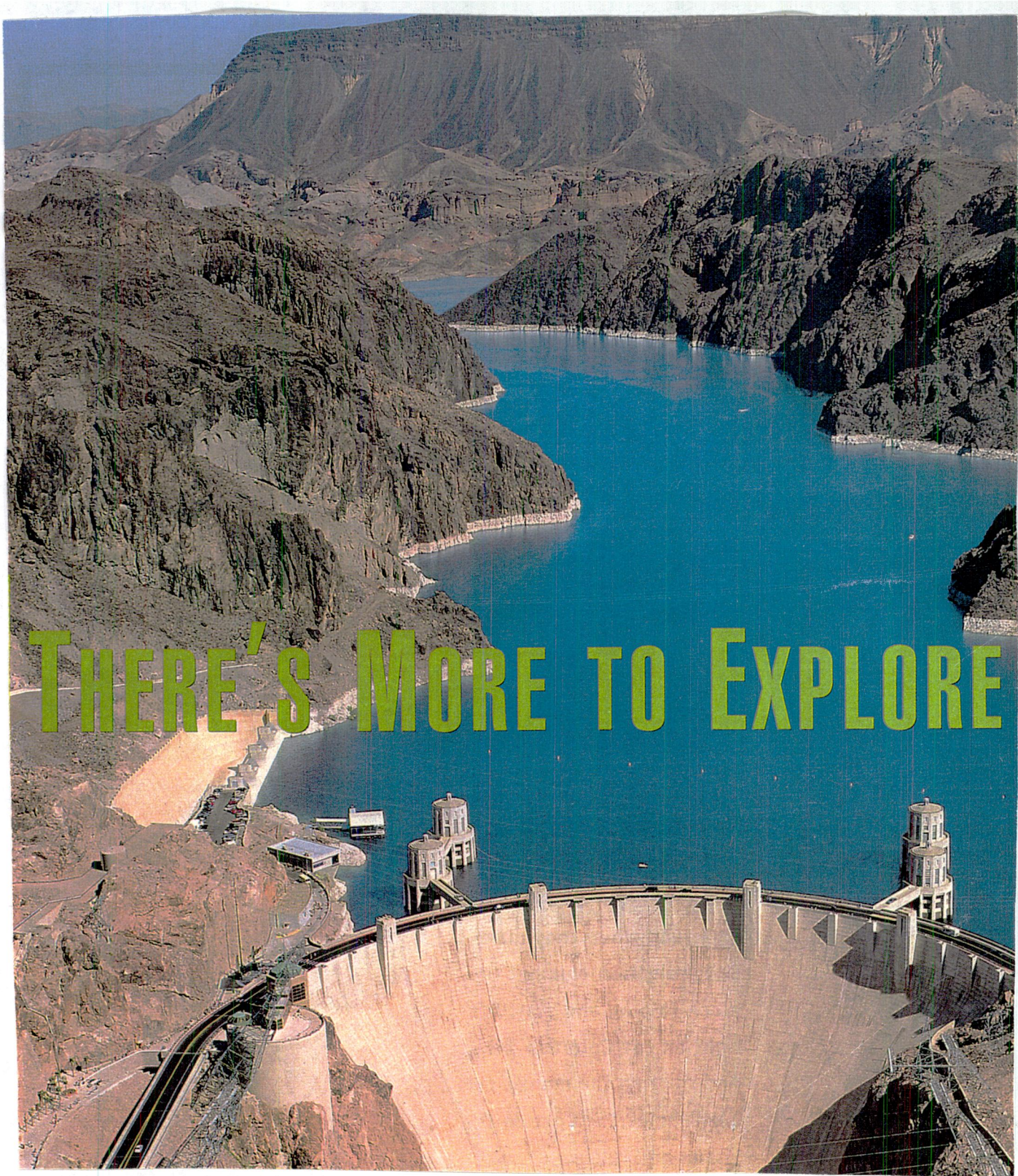


**Fig 2:** Las Vegas casinos have developed more recreational facilities as to attract more people to the desert eg. Golf courses built on hotel grounds





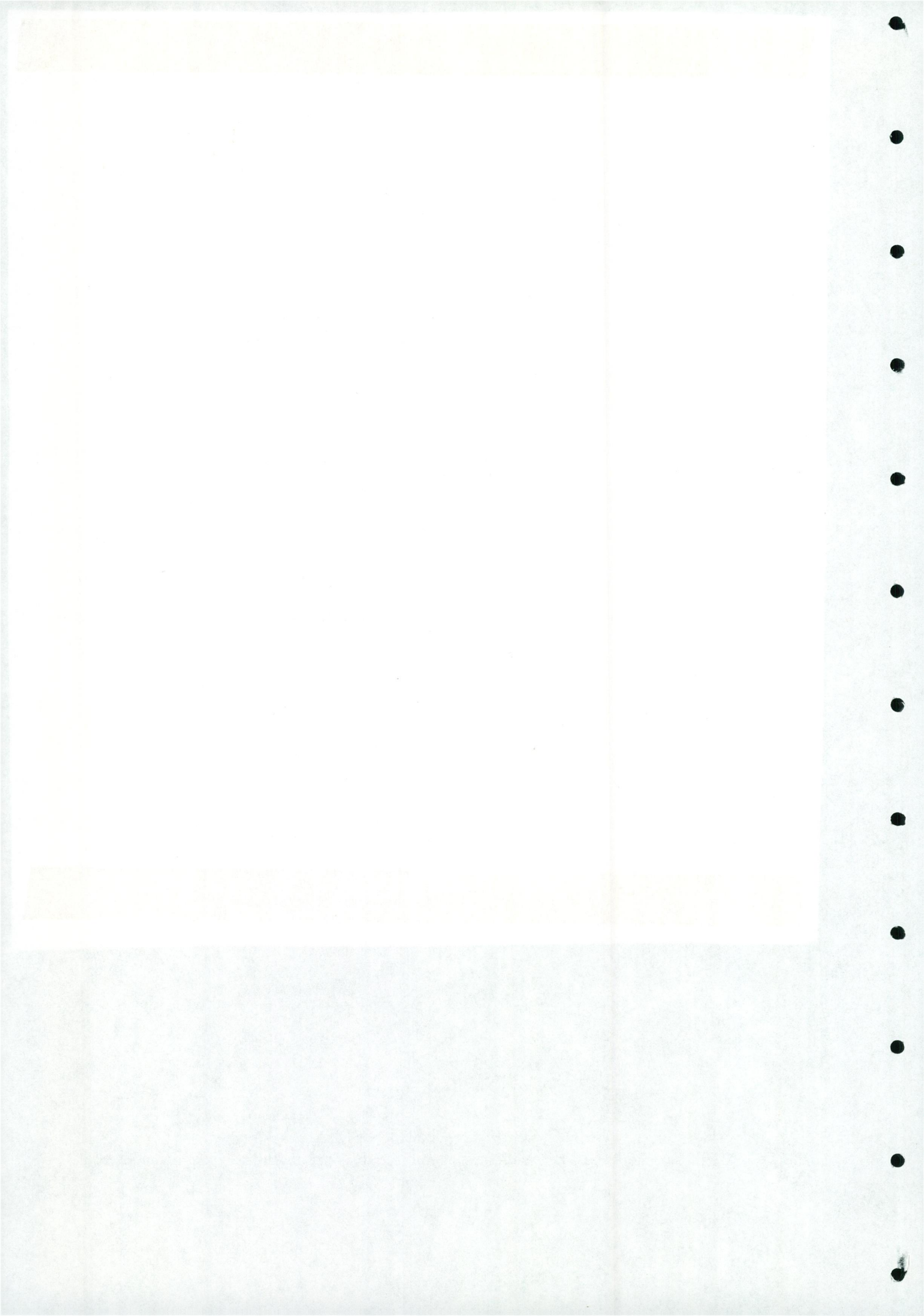




**Fig 3:** The Hoover Dam.

Casinos arrange tours here so tourists get to see the surrounding Nevada area and see it as a beauty spot.





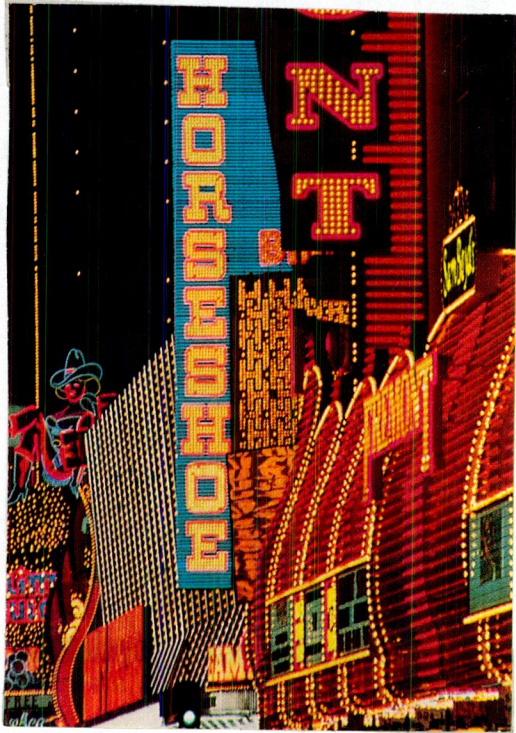
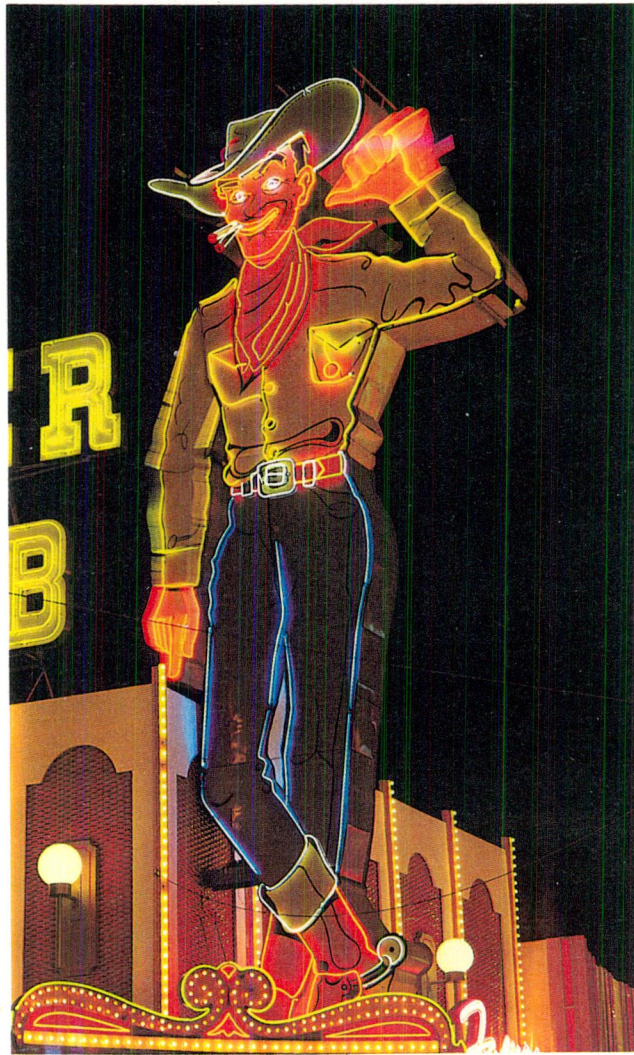


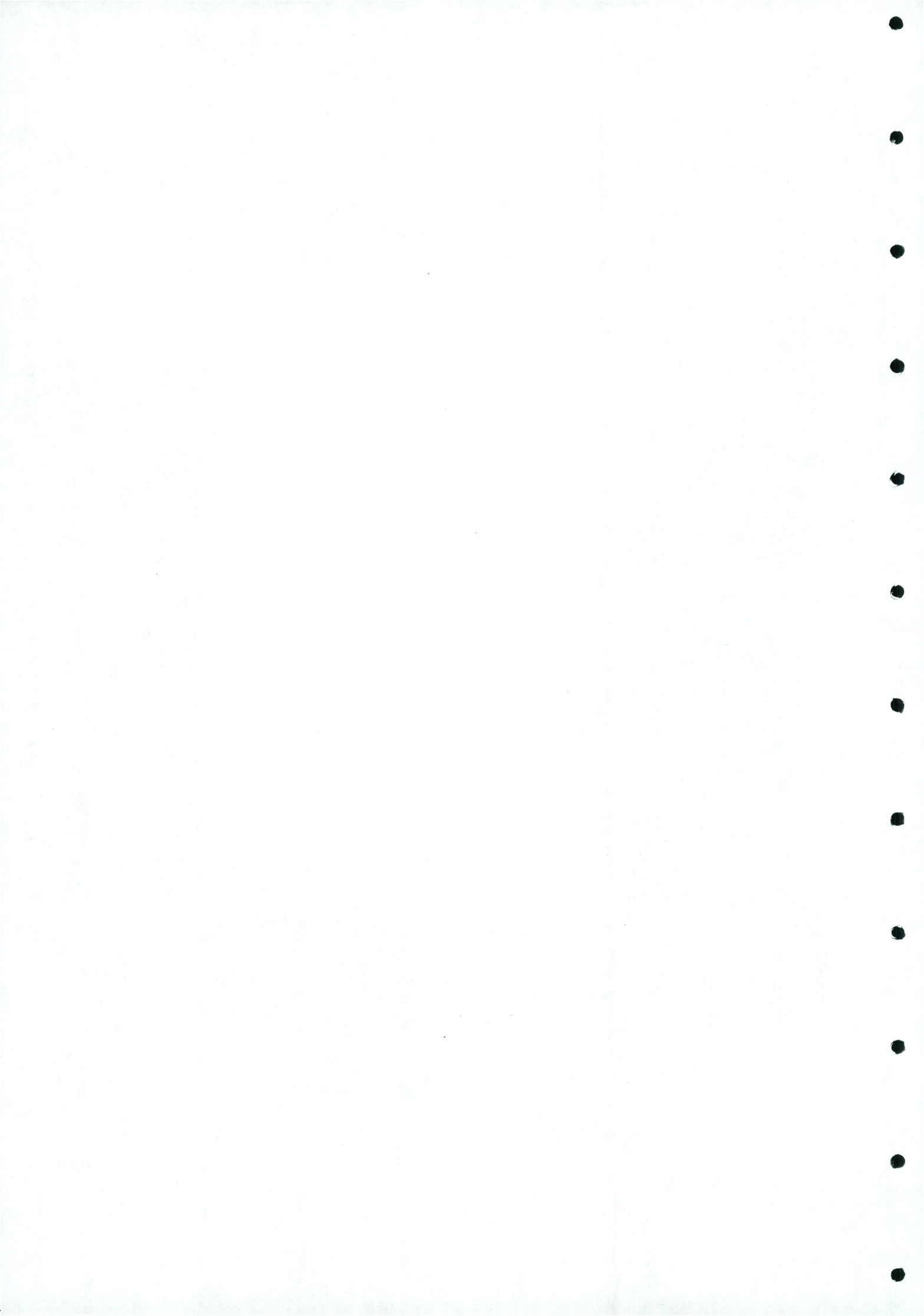
Fig 4: A typical neon Vegas sign.







**Fig 5:** The Pioneer Club Cowboy 'Vic'.  
This was the first moving and talking sign in Las Vegas - it marks the entrance onto Fremont Street (1951 design by Yesco).





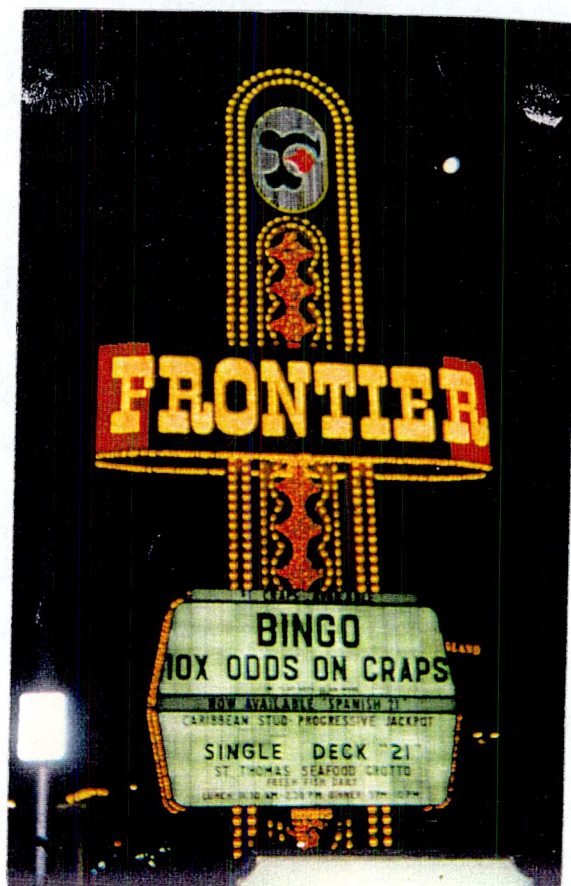


**Fig 6:** 'Vickie'.

This neon sign was influenced by the cowboy 'Vic' sign - also displayed on Fremont Street.







**Fig 7:** Signs, show scales for long distance and short distance scales.



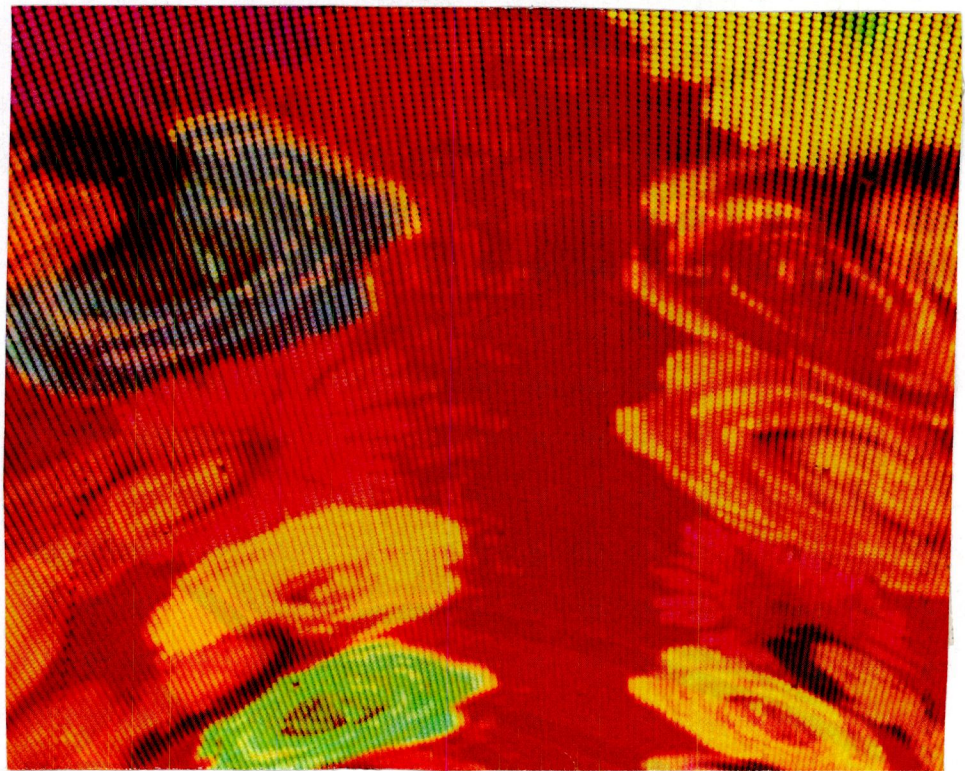




Fig 8: The signs are more interesting than the buildings they depict.







**Fig 9:** An incadescent sign allows moving pictures. Many hotels use incadescent light instead of neon.







**Fig 10:** Fremont Street in 1993.  
Before they put in the light spectacular.





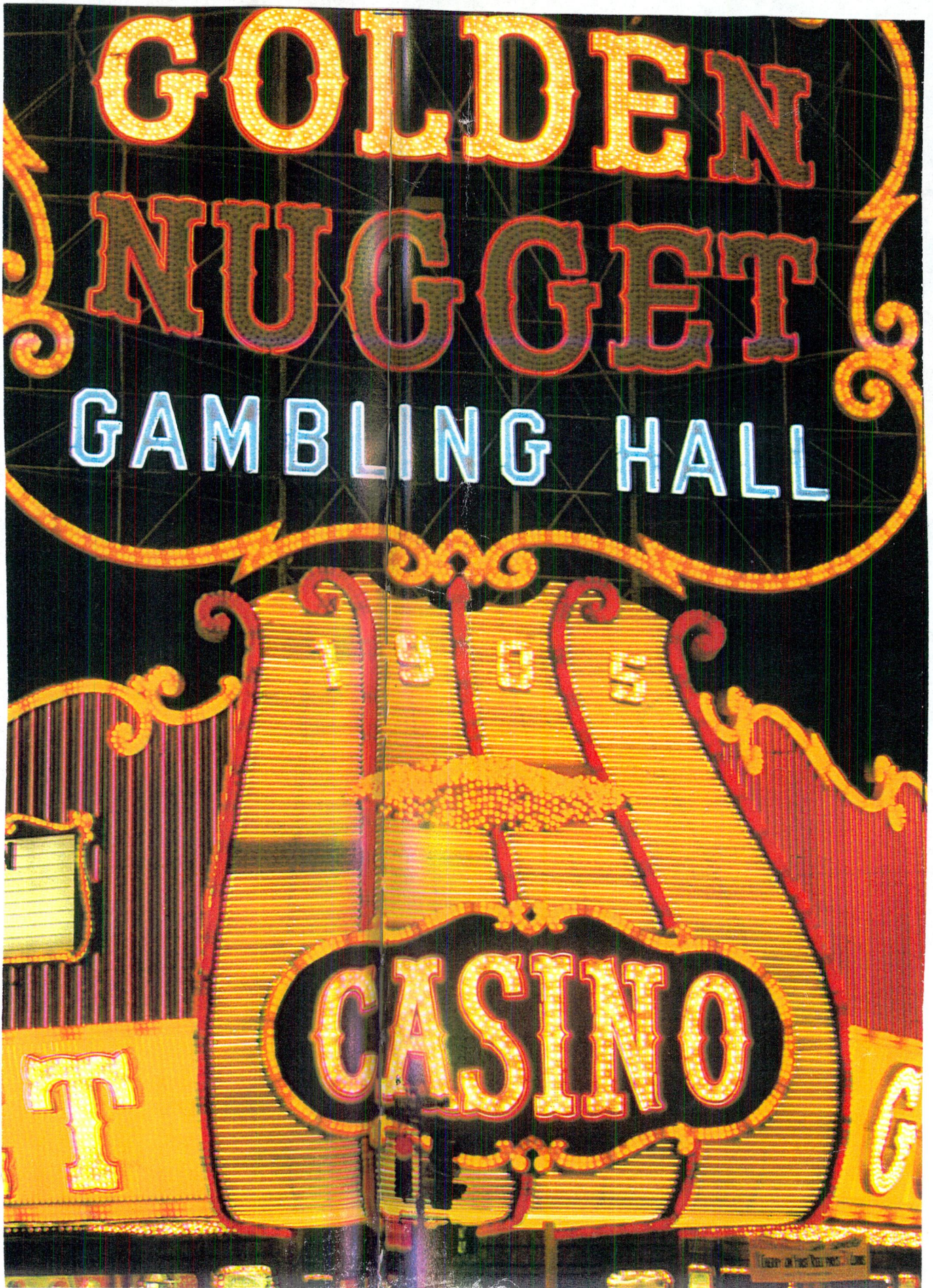


Fig 11: Hotels covered in signs.





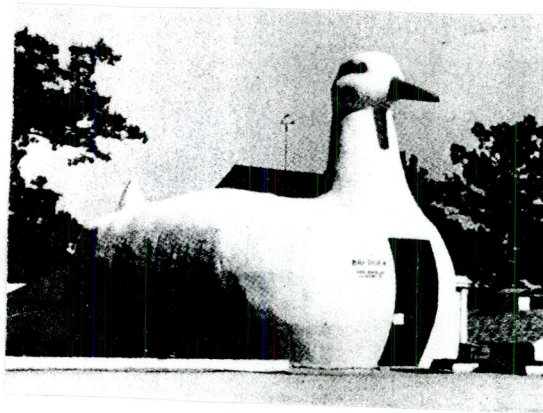
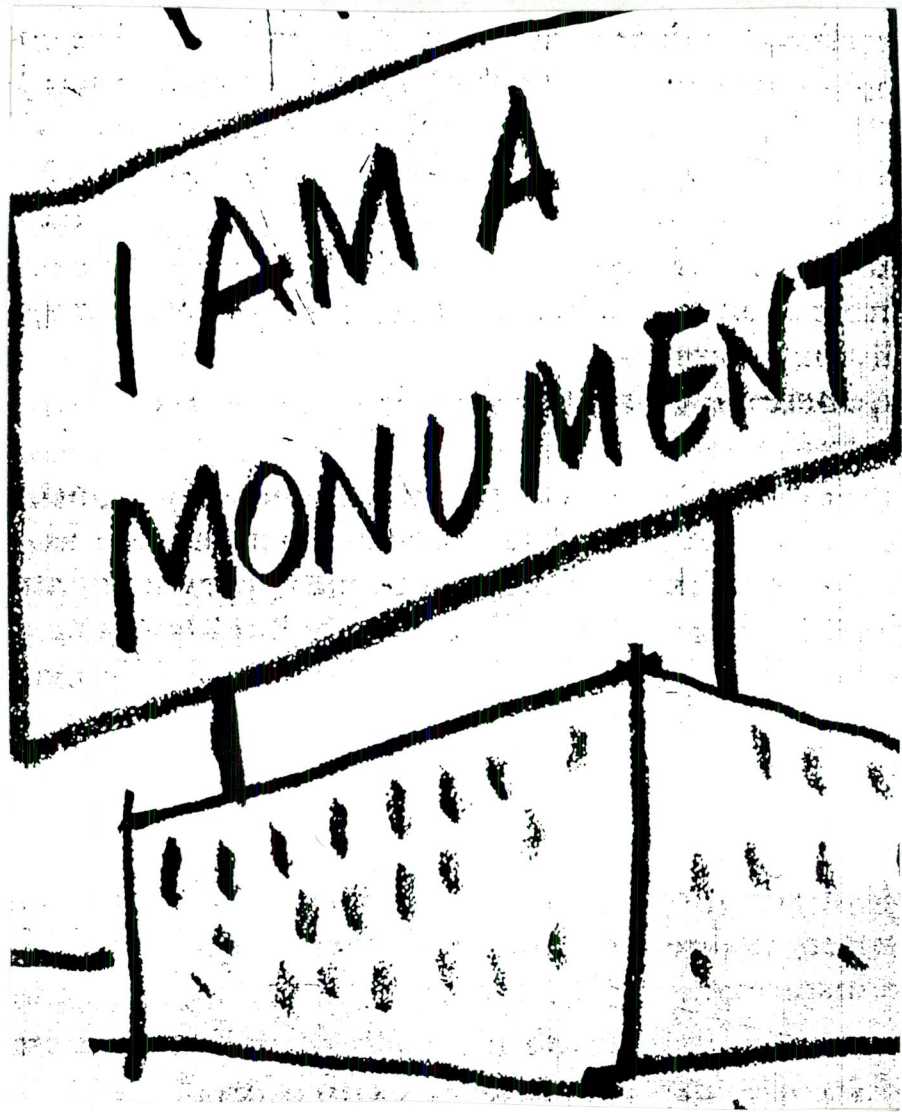


Fig 12: Verturie, Scott.  
Illustration of a 'decorated shed' and a 'duck'.

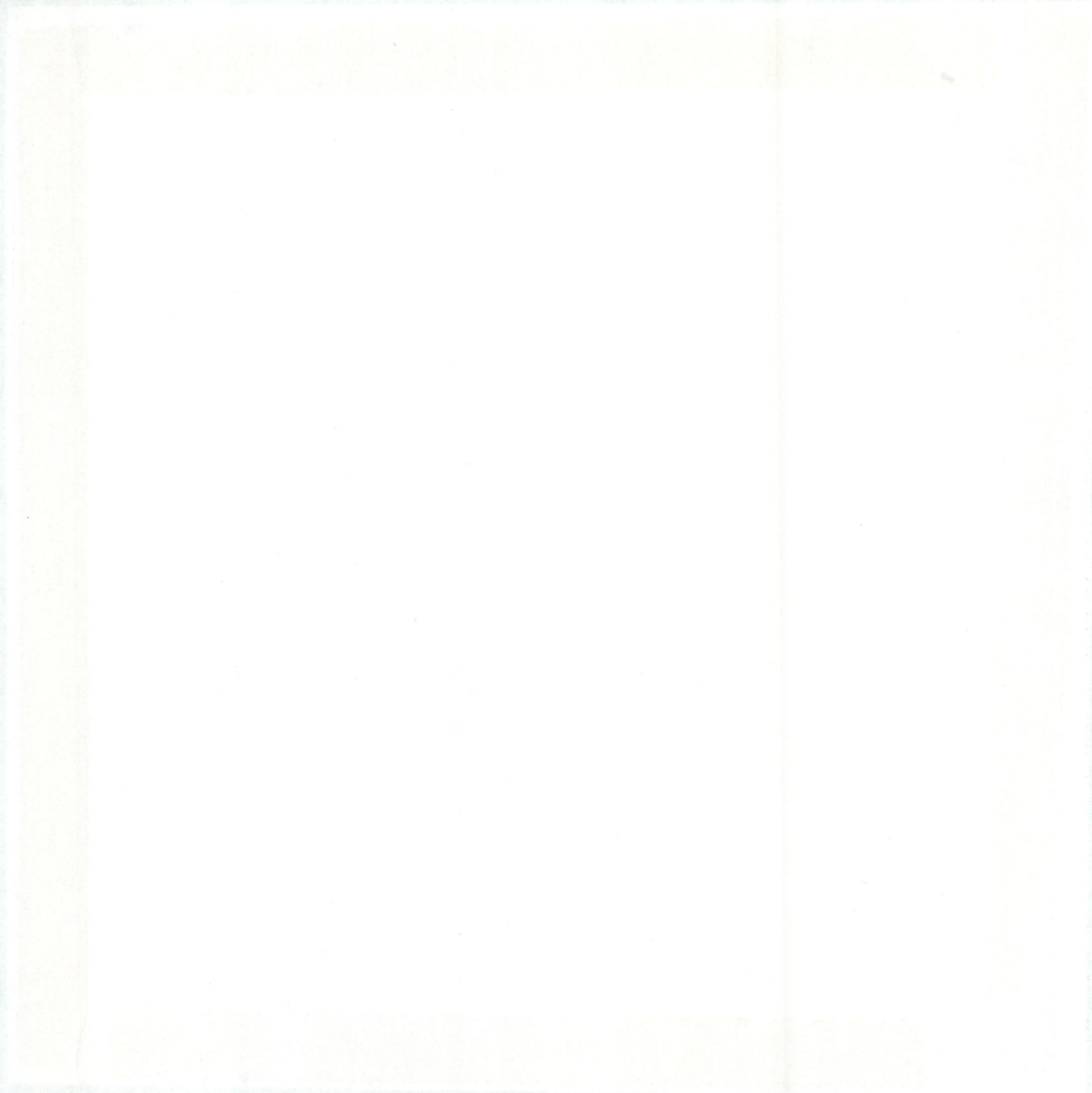






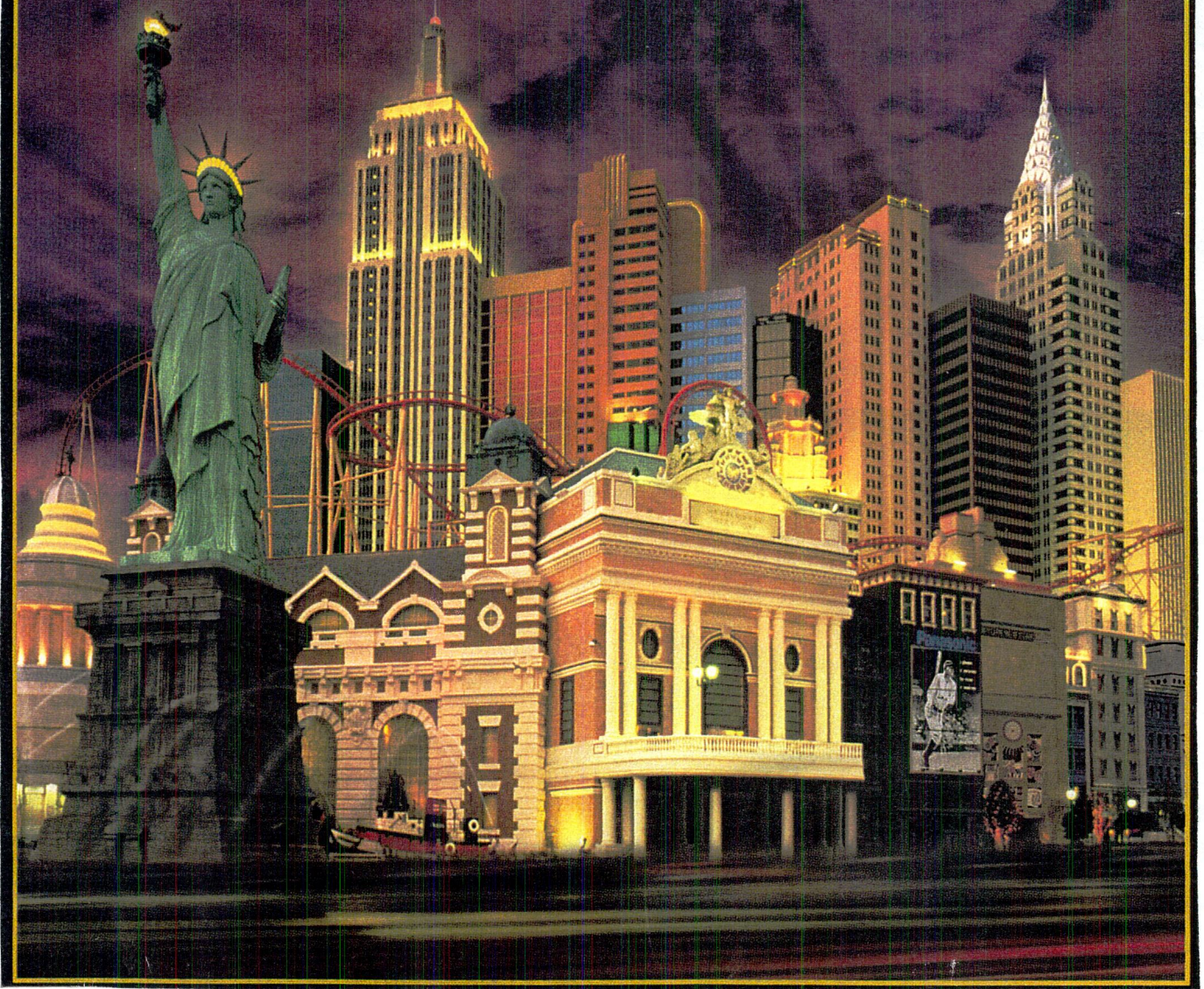
**Fig 13:** Treasure Island Hotel/ Casino.  
This is the most recent trend in Architecture on The Strip.







VISITING LAS VEGAS?  
WE'RE LOCATED JUST ABOVE  
YOUR EXPECTATIONS.

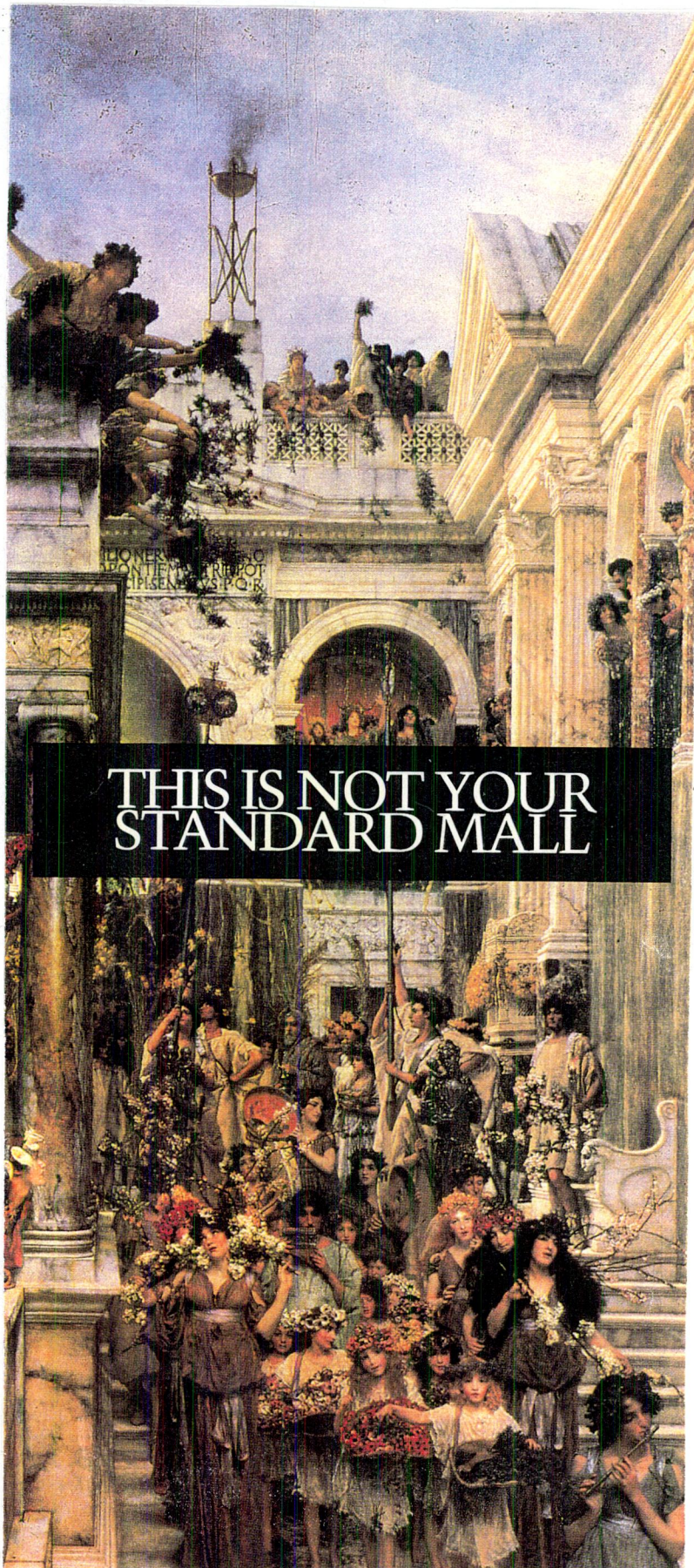


**Fig 14:** New York New York Hotel/ Casino.  
The hotel/ casino brings a scaled down but still imposing version of the Manhattan skyline, The Brooklyn Bridge, Lady Liberty and Central Park to The Strip.



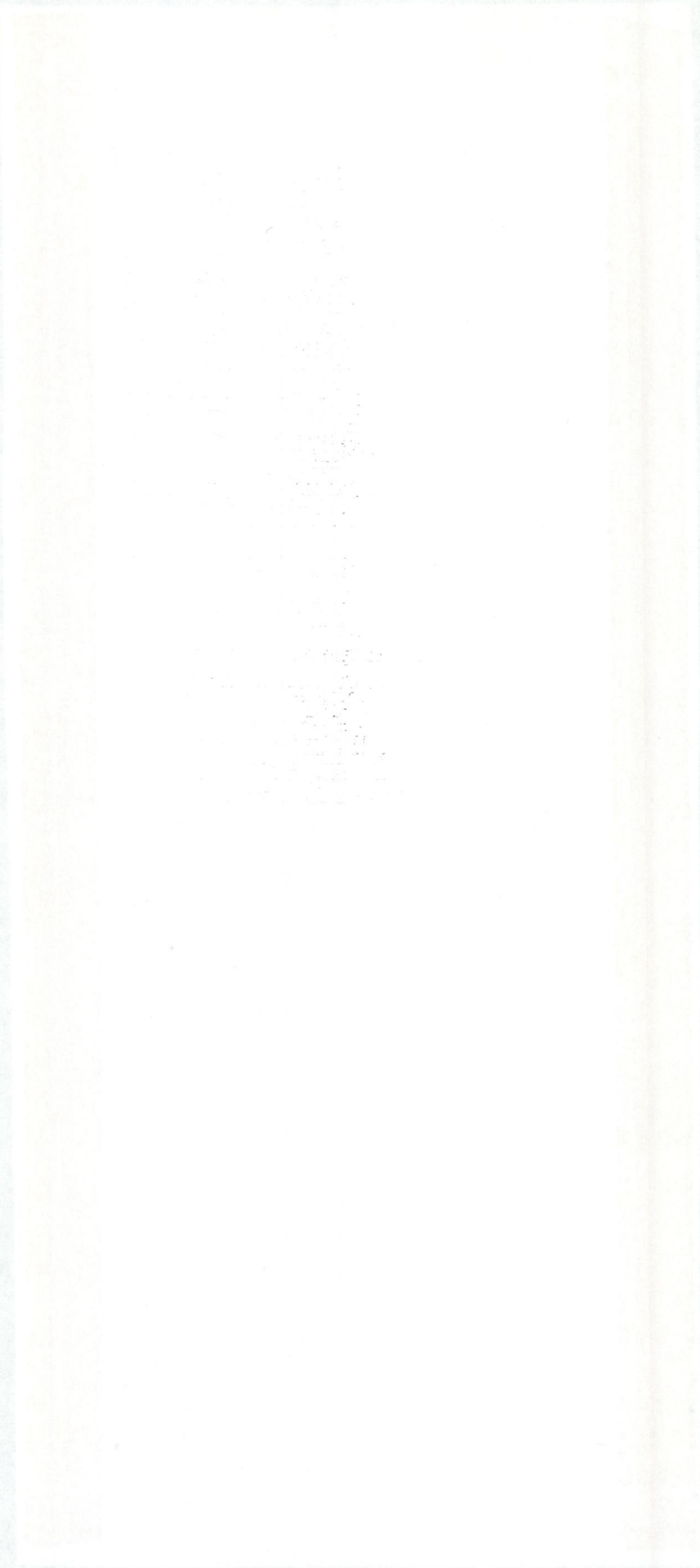






**Fig 15: Caesar's Palace.**  
This image is what Ceasar's Palace is based on.







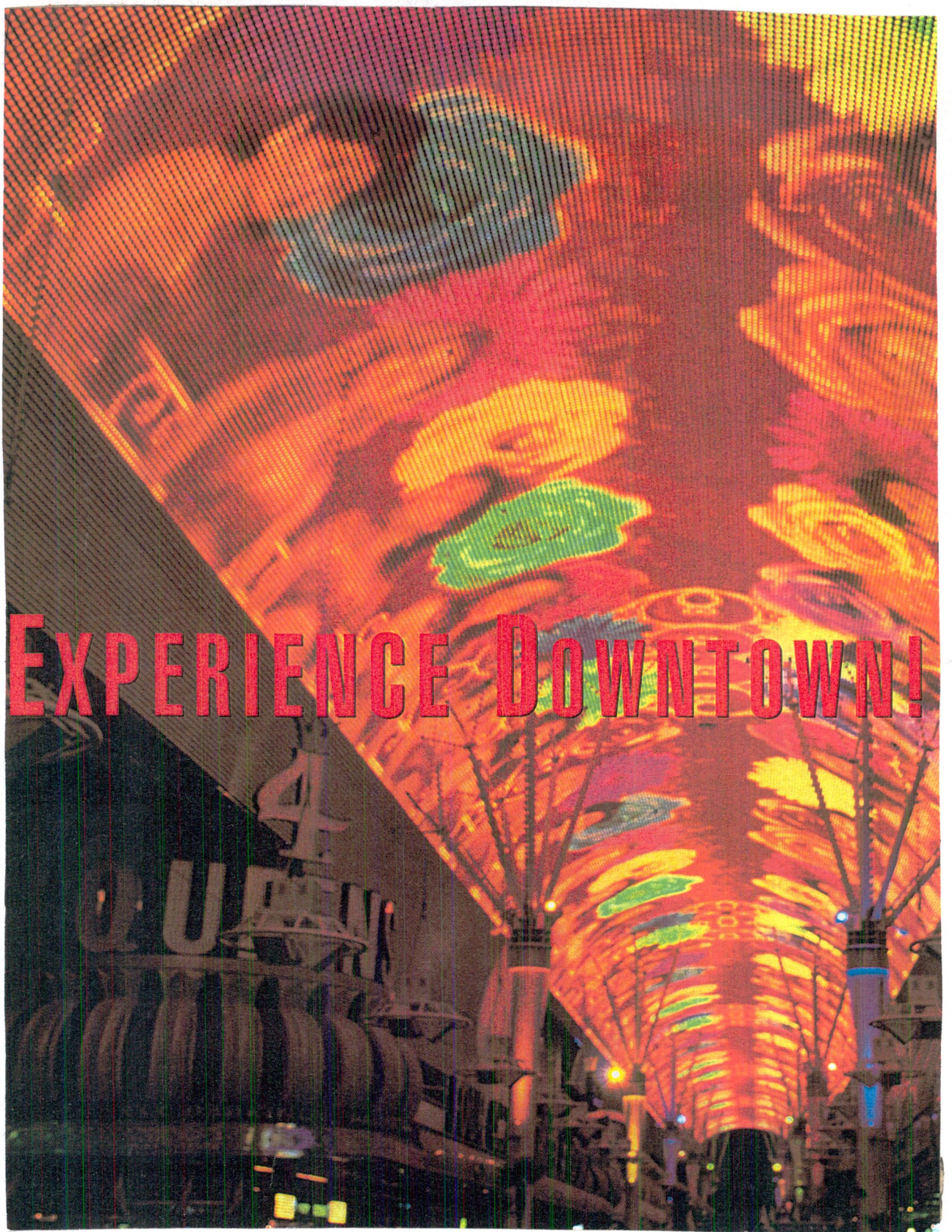
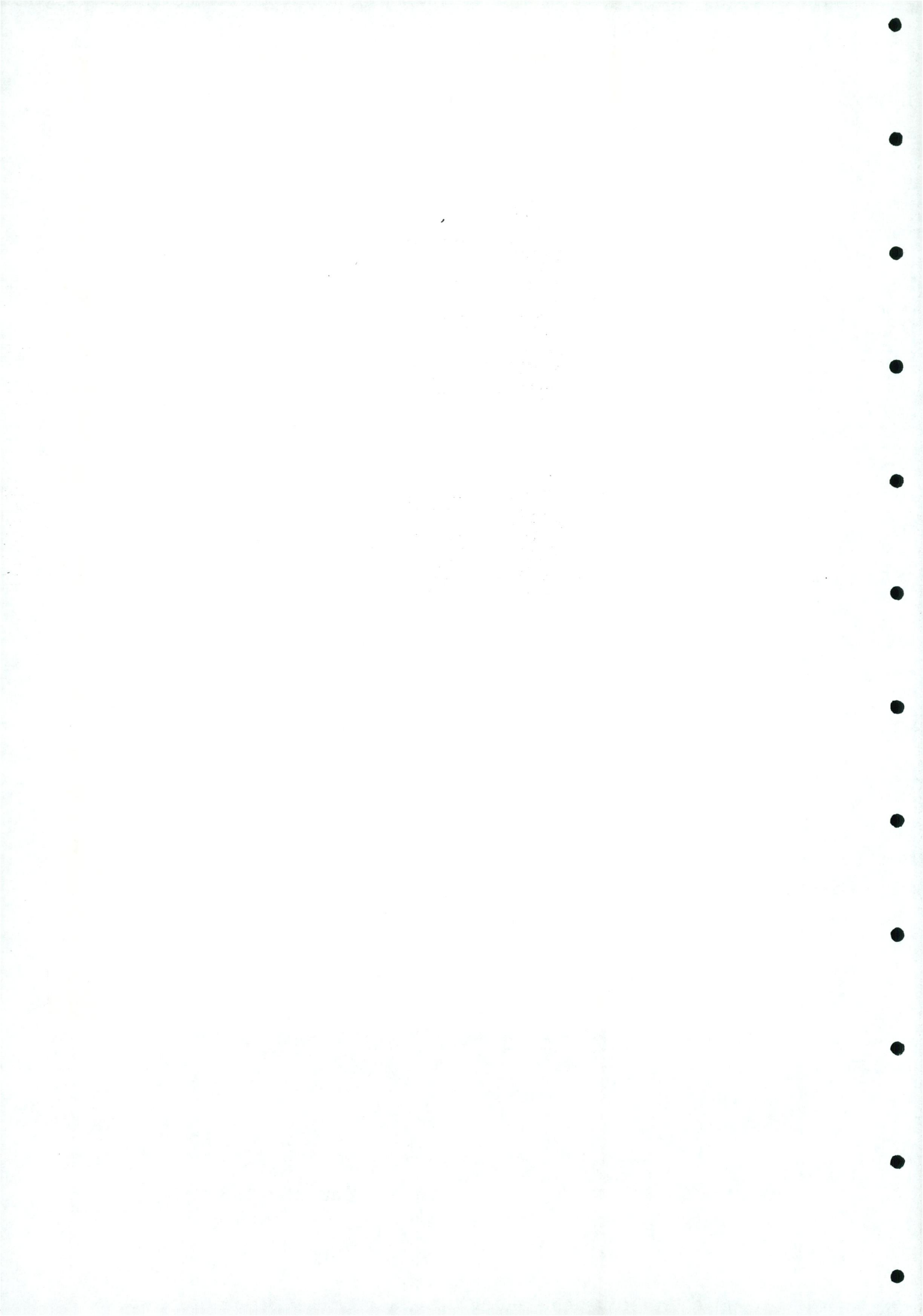
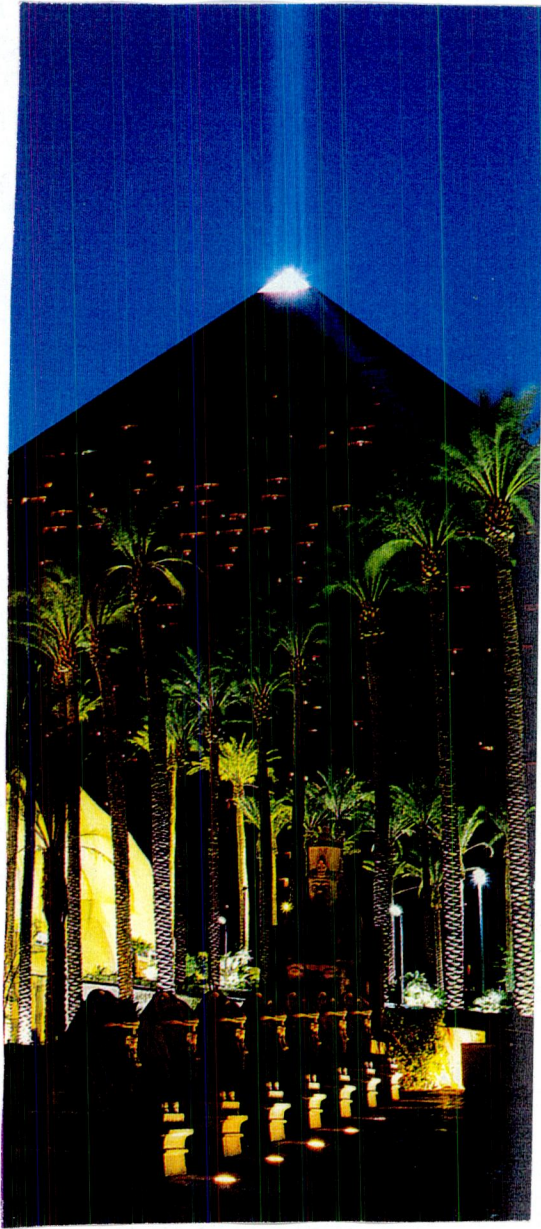


Fig 16: The Fremont Street 'light spectacular'.

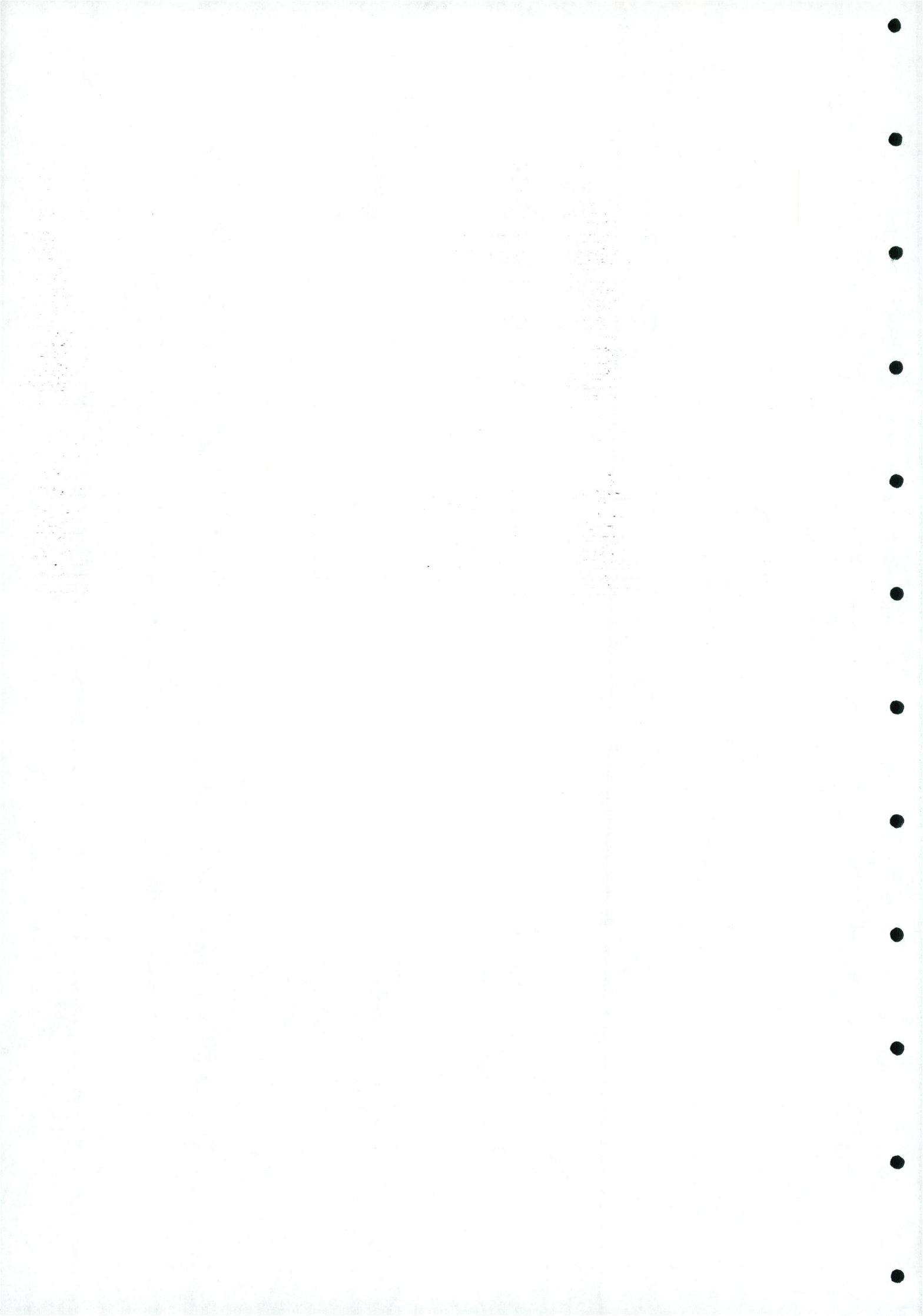




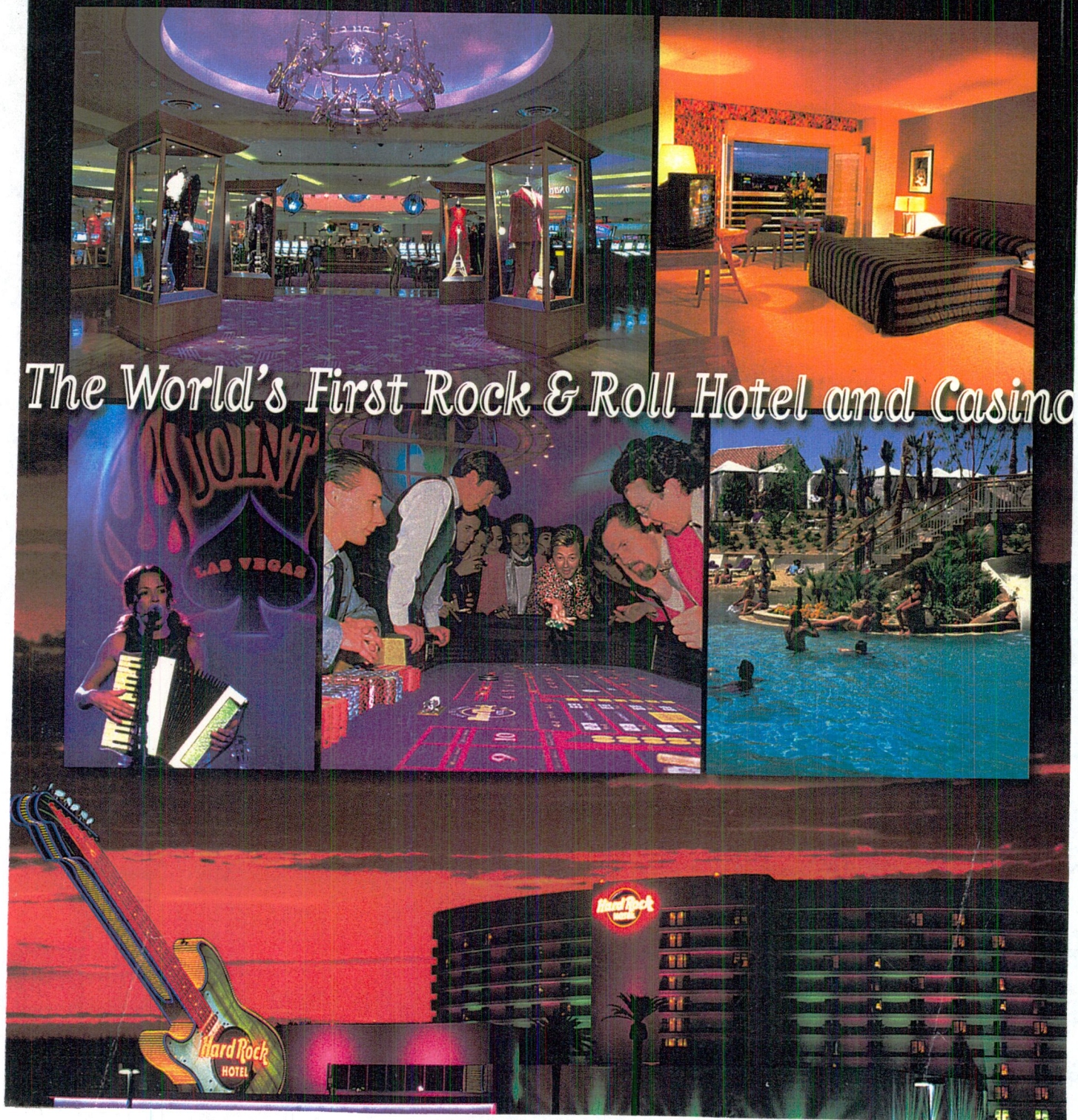




**Fig 17:** The Luxur - this is an example of a 'duck'.





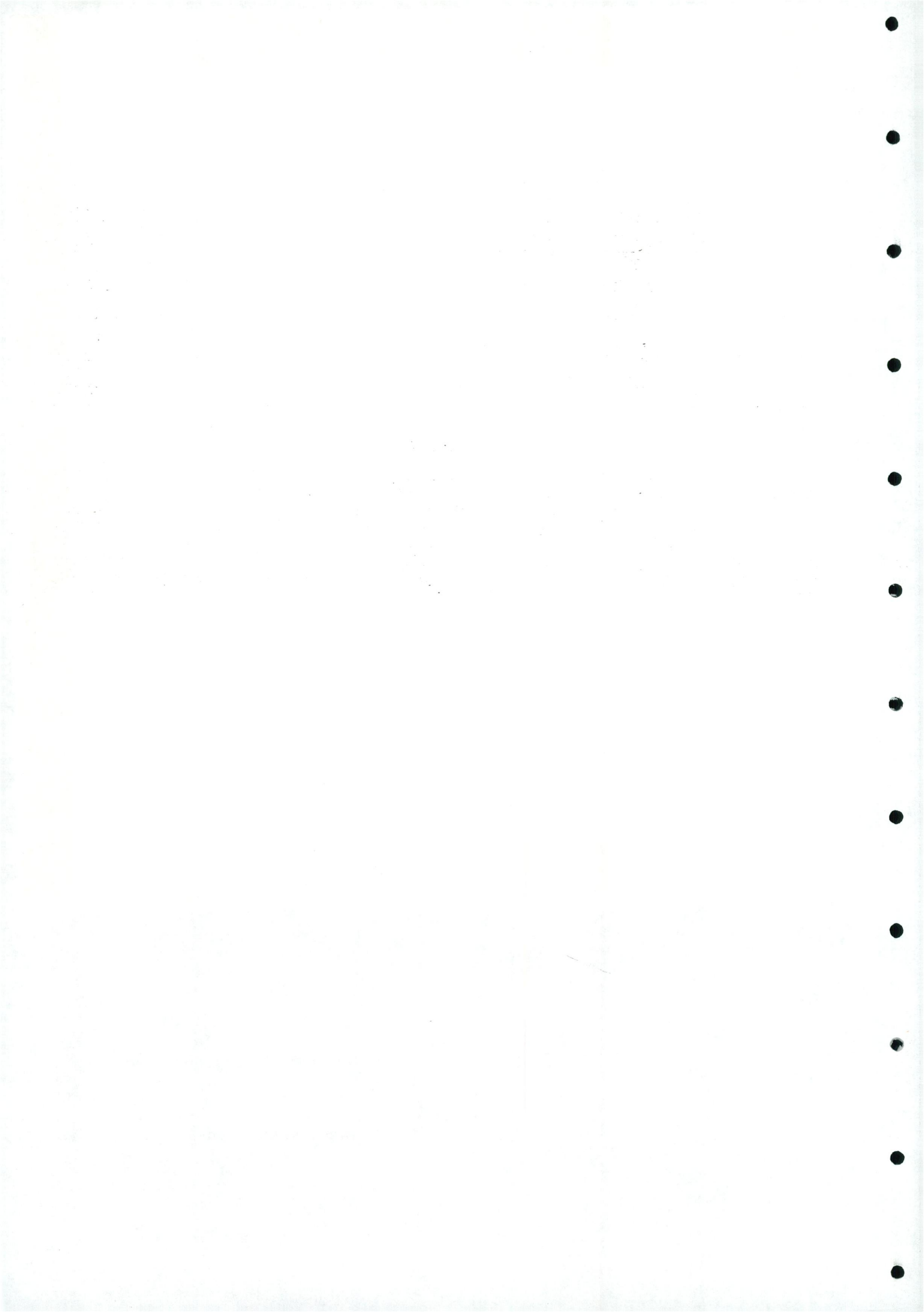


# The World's First Rock & Roll Hotel and Casino

**Fig 18:** The Hard Rock Café.

The start of a new generation. This was built to attract the thirty something age group.







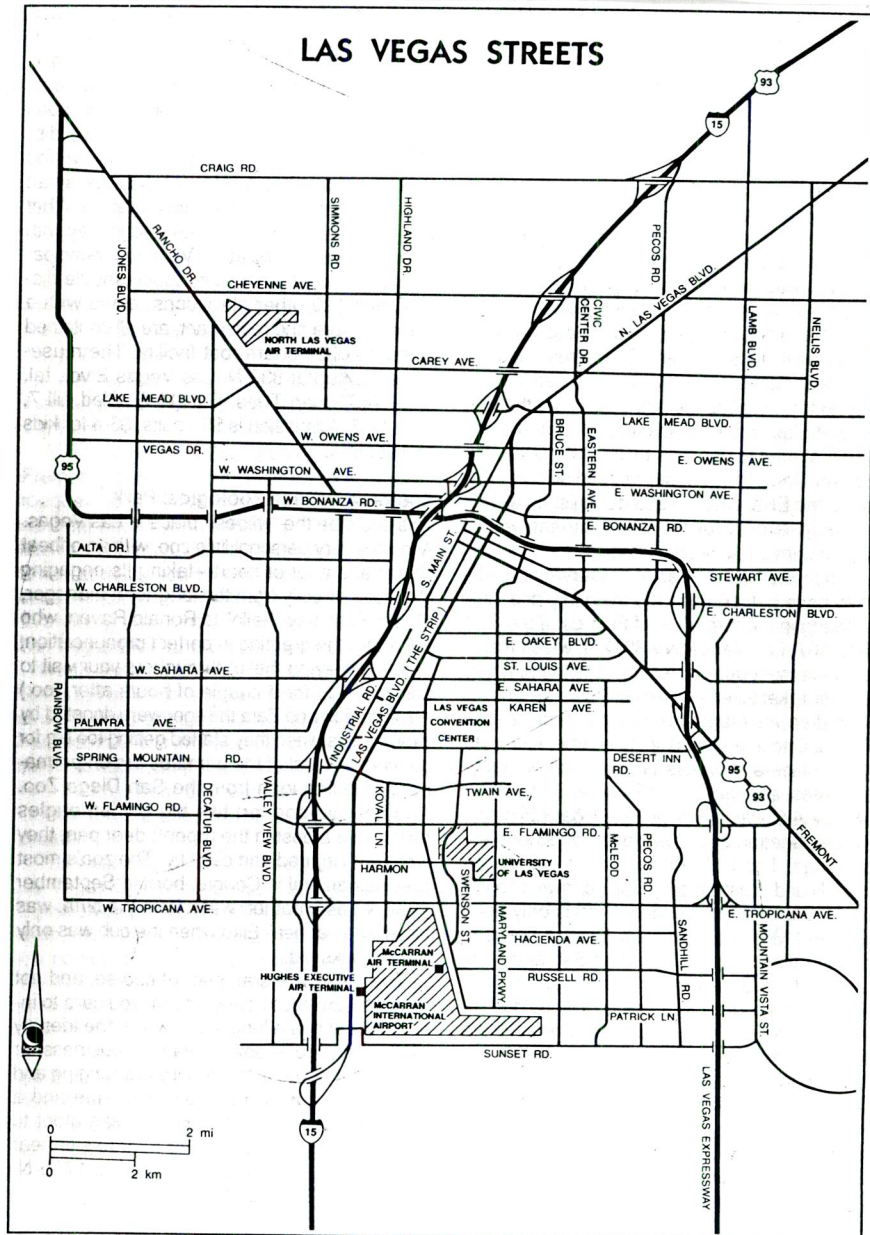
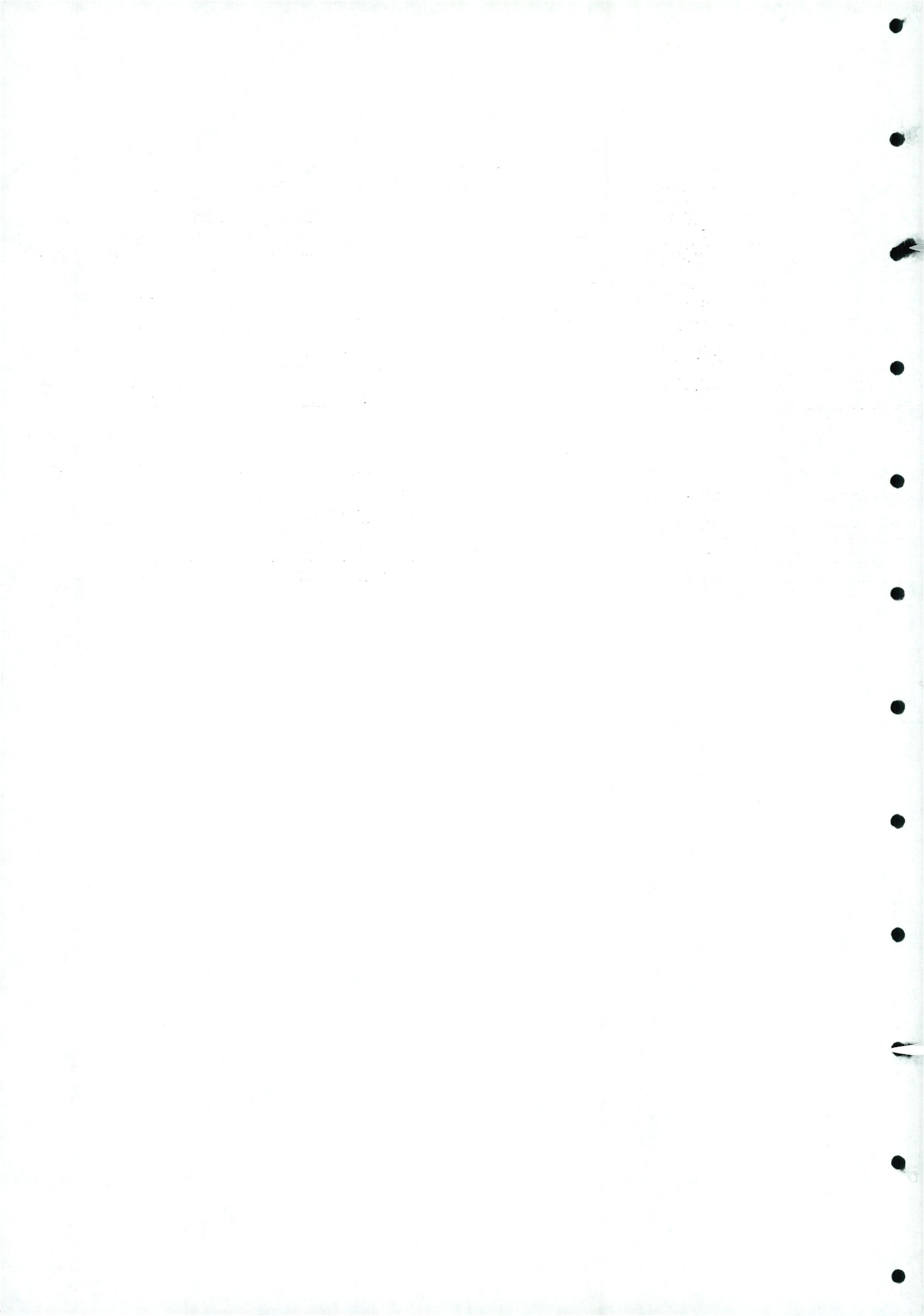


Fig 19: Las Vegas Street.



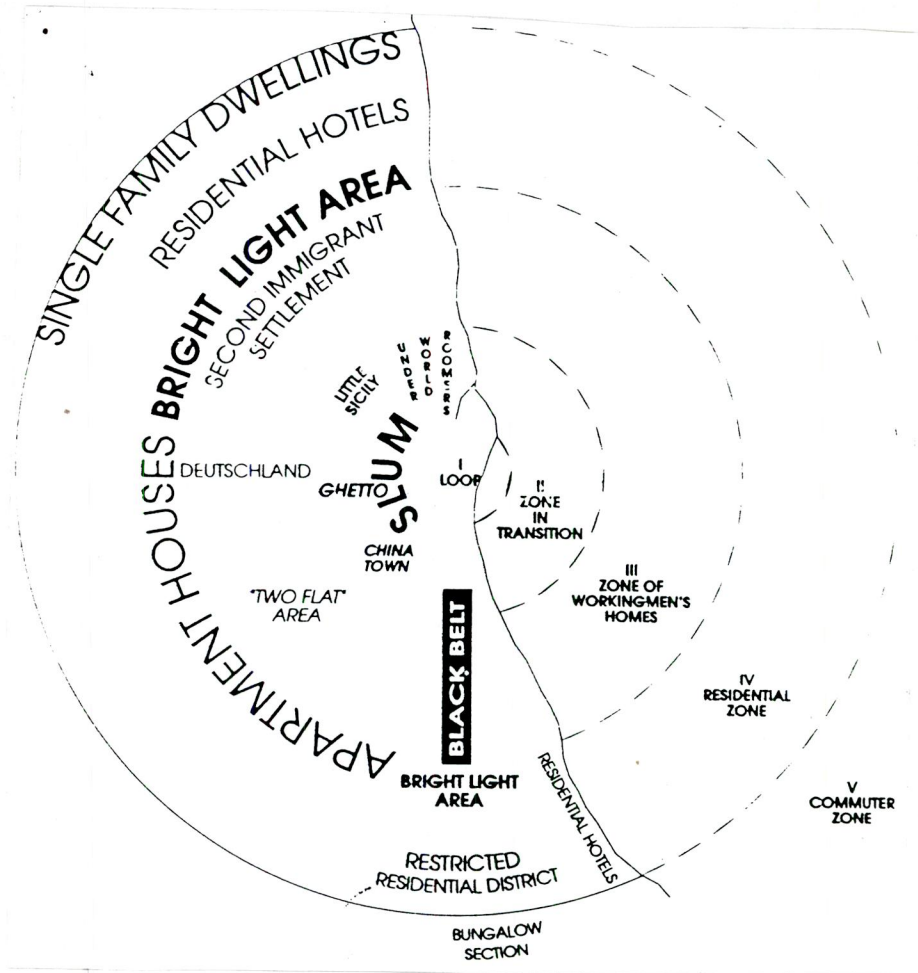


Fig 20: The Burgess Chart.

Faint, illegible text centered on the page, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side.