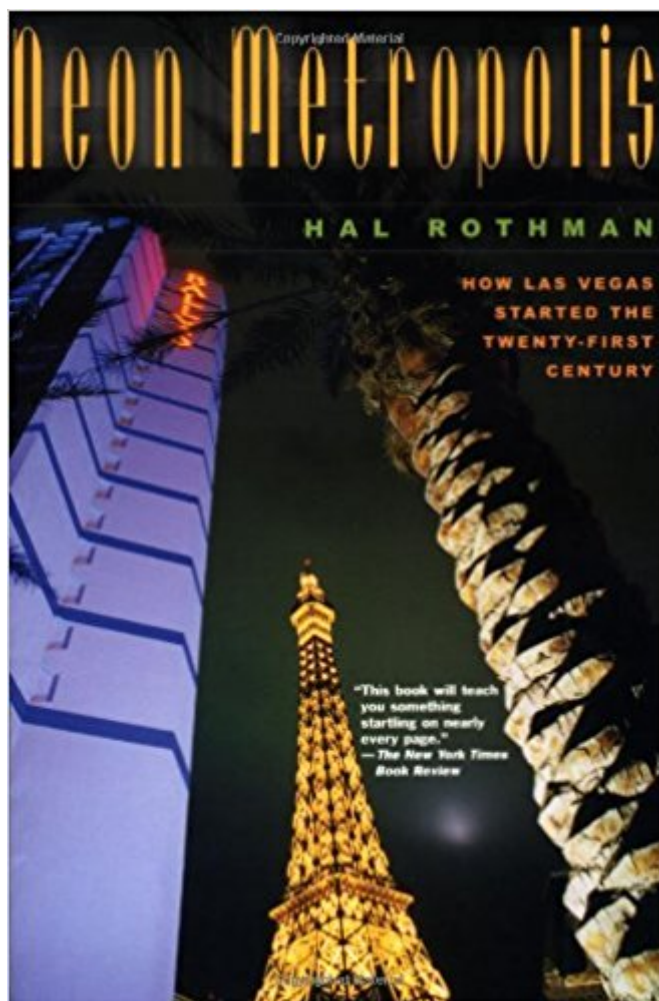


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# Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started The Twenty-First Century



## Synopsis

First published in 2003. Routledge is an imprint of Taylor & Francis, an informa company.

## Book Information

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Routledge; 1 edition (April 20, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0415926130

ISBN-13: 978-0415926133

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.4 out of 5 stars 18 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #276,634 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #219 in [Books > Business & Money > Industries > Service](#) #256 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Architecture > Urban & Land Use Planning](#) #302 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > City Planning & Urban Development](#)

## Customer Reviews

In this thoughtful study, Rothman (history, Univ. of Nevada, Las Vegas) provides a detailed history of a uniquely American city. The subject of urban planning and design is enriched by Rothman's focus on the social history of the city, including its architecture, economics, government, labor issues, transportation, environmental policy, and immigration situation. Rothman argues that Las Vegas survives by responding to whatever source of prosperity is available, whether it is the U.S. military or the gaming industry. In Las Vegas's malleability, he sees the future of all U.S. cities, along with attendant issues of social isolation and environmental abuse. His empathetic exploration of working-class Latino lives is especially rewarding. Recommended for academic and public library collections emphasizing urban studies, American history, and the Latino experience. Paula R. Dempsey, DePaul Univ. Lib., Chicago  
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Rothman, a professor of history at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and a frequent commentator on the local culture, presents a thorough study of Las Vegas, a city with about as quirky a history as any in the U.S. Though Las Vegas was once just a whistle-stop on the L.A. railroad, loose regulations on adult pleasures and a lock on water access brought in Mob "shoebox

money" to finance this paradise of vice in the desert. It was never a secret that Vegas was a syndicate-run town, and throughout the 1950s and 1960s, as city and state authorities looked the other way, the money poured in, but it always remained tainted. Then Howard Hughes bought half the town, and legislation opened up to allow free corporate access. The mobsters were practically run out of town, opening the way for the theme-park-like atmosphere that pervades today. Rothman gets inside the psyche of the Vegas mystique, where luxury is affordable to all, everyone is a star, and entertainment is king like nowhere else. David Siegfried Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Rothman here lives in and is a fan of Vegas. So while his book is dry and analytical and has a scientific approach, his personal bias still shines through. If it's meant to be academic and analytical, lose the bias. If it's meant to be nostalgic or subjective, don't bore me with so many dry analytical details. His thesis that Vegas is a prototype for the 21st century city is highly amusing and inaccurate. Worst book I was forced to read for my history of US cities course. Other historic cities books were much more entertaining.

I like the way Rothman writes. I also recognize that this is one man's view of how Las Vegas became what it is. I think anyone asking what happened to unions should read this book.

Book was never used in class and purchased for no reason. I read a couple chapters but never got into the whole book.

The late Dr. Rothman provided an interesting account of the rapid rise of Las Vegas. But viewed from a post-boom lens, many of the books' flaws stand out. Dr. Rothman was overly optimistic--the original thesis argued that Las Vegas was the new, service oriented Detroit. A mecca for good jobs for folks with only a high school education. In post-boom Las Vegas, where unemployment is currently among the WORST of the nations' large metropolitan areas, the thesis is taking on water. Gaming alone could not sustain the boom. Rather, Vegas built a false boom, based on massive real estate speculation. Gaming still provides some good paying jobs with a high school diploma, but the gaming industry cannot support long term growth. International competition from Macau and Singapore have catastrophically reduced high roller cash from Asia. Back home, more Americans are finally paying down two decades of accumulated credit card debt. Visitors still come to Vegas, but they gamble less, forcing resorts into rate cutting wars on room rates, entering into a dangerous

downward cash flow spiral. The fundamental flaw of Dr. Rothman's book was the failure to see that the boom of the last ten years was supported by real estate speculation, not gaming. Gaming could only grow so large. It's maxed out. Now, Vegas must compete in a 21st century economy where education DOES matter, and where investment in educational infrastructure is key. Nevada now languishes while the East Coast cities, with far greater educational resources, prosper. Further, Vegas suffers from a very low tax base. Gaming was allowed to pull all the weight. It cannot do that any longer...the endlessly growing revenues have flat lined. Raising taxes in a city whose populace was used to paying virtually none, is proving all but impossible, and the city languishes. Las Vegas enters the 21st century with poor educational infrastructure, a libertarian no-tax attitude making real long-term investment all but impossible, and a poorly educated workforce unequipped to handle the demands of new, 21st century industries. Ironically, Las Vegas may indeed be the "next Detroit" but in ways Dr. Rothman never envisioned.

Rothman does a nice job pointing out what has proven to be the very effective economic engine of the modern American service industry. When organized labor meets the lucrative tourist industry, wages for folks with a high school education can indeed be quite solid. For those here that doubt the role of organized, unionized labor, simply compare the economy of southern Nevada to southern Louisiana. While New Orleans has a strong gaming industry, wages are bad, and poverty profoundly rampant. On this point, Professor Rothman is correct: Las Vegas, with its robust mix of service economy and unionization, could point the way to the future. Professor Rothman does, however, tend to gloss over the nagging social ills inherent with the gaming industry. In particular, Nevada has spectacular suicide and divorce rates, sky-high spousal abuse and very, very high teenage dropout rates (comparable to inner city neighborhoods in east coast cities). He also misses the biggest problem of all: chronic gambling addiction among many casino workers and the wholesale, even arrogant, failure of the gaming industry to address the problem. It is somewhat ironic that Rothman, who does indeed have a background in environmental history, ignores many of Las Vegas' environmental issues. The vast sprawl of Las Vegas may well NOT be sustainable in an age of skyrocketing oil prices; a large percentage of Las Vegas visitors still arrive by car from Southern California, relying on an increasingly clogged 4 lane interstate (I-15). The city itself relies on just one pipeline to bring gasoline to the valley from southern California and local fuel prices are threatening to reach dangerously historic highs this year. Rothman is also blithely unconcerned about water. Climate Change is predicted to make the US southwest far drier than it is today. Indeed, the region is currently suffering under a years-long drought that has taken reservoirs to

insidiously low levels. Both Lake Meade, just an hour's drive south of the city, and Lake Powell, between central Arizona and central Utah, are at dangerous, historically low levels. Despite extremely strict residential water usage restrictions in southern Nevada, lack of water could well derail growth in the Las Vegas metropolitan area within the next decade, particularly if the current drought persists. Rothman's anecdotes often miss serious underlying sociological issues. Sure, you can find stories of community in virtually any city or neighborhood, but Rothman's often cutesy anecdotes miss the big picture. The state suffers an intense brain drain. Many of its young residents leave state to attend college and if they receive a master's degree or higher, very few will ever return. The city is profoundly transient, and the exaggerated suburban sprawl of the new "instant city" variety has its drawbacks. The average tenure of home ownership is very brief in Las Vegas: even residents who live their entire lives in the city tend to move once or twice to flee declining neighborhoods. Shiny new (but rapidly and poorly constructed) suburban tracts fall from middle to working class and even into crime-ridden lower working class neighborhoods in 25 years or less. Rings of impoverished, aging inner suburbs are causing grief for city planners as the middle class flees a growing core of decaying housing for newer digs in the outer sprawl. In eastern cities, historic buildings and brownstones in the inner core drew a new generation of college educated adults willing to restore and rediscover neighborhoods. Cookie-cutter, cinder block nightmare neighborhoods, thrown together by careless contractors in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s are less easily renovated or rediscovered. Finally, Rothman misses the macro-economic taxation issues. Because Nevada relies almost solely on the gaming and sales taxes to run the state, the state is extremely vulnerable should a real recession hit. Rothman, ultimately, misses as much as he hits. The groundbreaking sociological study of the modern gaming town, sadly, remains to be written.

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