

when the mob ran vegas

When the mob ran Vegas, it was a time marked by glitz, glamour, and organized crime's iron grip on one of the most famous entertainment capitals in the world. The period from the 1940s to the 1980s witnessed the rise of Las Vegas as a premier destination for gambling and entertainment, heavily influenced by mobsters who shaped both the city's infrastructure and its notorious reputation. This article delves into the intricate relationship between organized crime and the development of Las Vegas, highlighting key figures, events, and the eventual decline of mob influence in the city.

Origins of Las Vegas as a Gambling Hub

The story of Las Vegas begins in the early 20th century, but it wasn't until the 1930s that the city started to emerge as a gambling destination. Several factors contributed to this transformation:

- **Legalization of Gambling:** In 1931, the state of Nevada legalized gambling, seeking to stimulate the economy during the Great Depression. This move attracted various entrepreneurs and criminals alike.
- **Strategic Location:** Las Vegas is situated near major cities like Los Angeles and Phoenix, making it an ideal stopover for travelers.
- **Infrastructure Development:** The construction of the Hoover Dam in the 1930s brought an influx of workers and tourists to the area.

These early developments laid the foundation for what would become a playground for the mob.

The Mob's Entry into Las Vegas

The mob's involvement in Las Vegas began in the 1940s, when organized crime syndicates saw an opportunity to profit from the burgeoning gambling scene. Key players included:

- **Meyer Lansky:** Often considered the architect of the mob's operations in Vegas, Lansky helped establish connections with local politicians and law enforcement.
- **Bugsy Siegel:** A notorious mobster from New York, Siegel was instrumental in the development of the Flamingo Hotel, one of the first luxury casinos on the Strip.
- **The Chicago Outfit:** Led by figures like Sam Giancana and Tony Accardo, the Chicago mob played a significant role in the Vegas underworld.

The Flamingo Hotel: A Turning Point

The Flamingo Hotel, opened in 1946, marked a significant turning point in Las Vegas's history. Funded by mob money, it was one of the first resorts to offer a comprehensive gambling experience combined with luxury accommodations. However, the hotel faced numerous challenges:

- **Initial Financial Struggles:** The Flamingo lost money in its first few

months due to poor management and over-budgeting.

- Siegel's Demise: Bugsy Siegel was murdered in 1947, partly due to his inability to turn a profit for the mob. His death signaled the end of an era but paved the way for other mobsters to take control.

The success of the Flamingo ultimately established a template for future casinos, combining lavish entertainment with gambling.

Expansion of the Mob's Influence

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the mob expanded its influence over Las Vegas, with several key developments:

- The Rat Pack Era: The Rat Pack, led by Frank Sinatra, helped to popularize Las Vegas as a entertainment destination. Their connections to the mob further solidified the relationship between organized crime and the entertainment industry.
- Casino Acquisitions: The mob acquired several other casinos, including the Sands, the Riviera, and the Desert Inn. These establishments became central to mob operations, serving as fronts for illegal activities such as loan sharking and drug trafficking.
- Political Connections: Mobsters cultivated relationships with politicians and law enforcement, ensuring that their operations remained unchecked. This corruption was a significant factor in the mob's ability to operate openly.

The Casino Landscape in the 1960s

By the 1960s, Las Vegas had transformed into a bustling metropolis, with casinos dominating the landscape. Some notable features included:

1. Gambling Addiction: The proliferation of casinos led to an increase in gambling addiction, with many individuals losing their life savings.
2. Tourism Boom: Las Vegas became a major tourist destination, attracting visitors from across the country and around the world.
3. Cultural Impact: The unique blend of entertainment, nightlife, and gambling created a distinct cultural identity for the city, often romanticized in films and music.

The Decline of Mob Power in Las Vegas

Despite the initial successes, the mob's grip on Las Vegas began to weaken in the 1970s and 1980s due to several factors:

- Increased Law Enforcement Scrutiny: The federal government began cracking down on organized crime, with the FBI launching investigations into mob activities in Las Vegas.
- Corporate Takeover: As the gaming industry became more lucrative, legitimate business interests began to invest in casinos. Corporate entities took over many mob-controlled establishments, leading to a decline in mob influence.
- Public Awareness: As media coverage of organized crime increased, the public became more aware of the mob's involvement in Las Vegas, leading to a

push for reform.

Key Events in the Decline

Several key events marked the decline of mob influence:

1. The 1971 Federal Wiretap: The FBI's use of wiretaps to gather evidence against mobsters led to several high-profile arrests.
2. The Stardust Casino Scandal: The FBI's investigation into the Stardust Casino revealed extensive mob involvement, leading to increased scrutiny of other casinos.
3. The Formation of the Gaming Control Board: Established in 1955, the Nevada Gaming Control Board began enforcing stricter regulations on casino licensing and operations.

The Legacy of the Mob in Las Vegas

Today, while the mob no longer runs Las Vegas, its influence can still be felt in various aspects of the city:

- Cultural References: The mob's legacy is immortalized in films like "Casino" and "Goodfellas," which portray the glamorous yet dangerous lifestyle of organized crime.
- Tourism Attractions: Many casinos pay homage to the mob era through themed attractions, tours, and exhibits.
- Historical Recognition: The Mob Museum in Las Vegas offers insights into the city's history and the role organized crime played in shaping its identity.

Conclusion

The era when the mob ran Vegas was a complex tapestry of crime, glamour, and entertainment. While the mob's influence has significantly diminished, its legacy continues to shape the city of Las Vegas. The transformation of Las Vegas from a mob-controlled gambling haven to a corporate-run entertainment capital serves as a fascinating chapter in American history, illustrating the interplay between organized crime and legitimate business. As visitors flock to Las Vegas today, they may be unaware of the city's storied past, but the echoes of the mob's reign are forever woven into the fabric of this iconic destination.

Frequently Asked Questions

What years did the mob primarily control Las Vegas?

The mob primarily controlled Las Vegas from the 1940s through the 1970s.

Which mobsters were most influential in the development of Las Vegas?

Notable mobsters include Benjamin 'Bugsy' Siegel, Meyer Lansky, and Frank 'Lefty' Rosenthal.

How did the mob influence the casino industry in Las Vegas?

The mob invested heavily in casinos, helped establish key properties, and utilized them for money laundering and various illegal activities.

What led to the decline of mob control in Las Vegas?

Increased law enforcement scrutiny, the rise of corporate gaming, and the legalization of gambling in other states contributed to the decline of mob control.

What are some iconic casinos associated with mob history?

Iconic casinos include the Flamingo, the Stardust, and the Sands, all of which had connections to organized crime figures.

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