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The Peoples of Las Vegas: One City, Many Faces. *Jerry L. Simich and Thomas C.*

Wright, eds. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005. xvi + 325 pp., photographs, contributors, index.

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Over the past two decades, renewed scholarly attention has been given to urban spaces and cultures. The work of critical geographers and planners has often taken the lead in such inquiries, with anthropologists and other social scientists offering complementary descriptions and theorizations of local experiences. Key to anthropological research on urban spaces has been attention to transnational migration, economic globalization, and cultures of fear, which are increasingly aggravated by neoliberal policies and sensibilities. For better or worse, the contributors to *The Peoples of Las Vegas* sidestep these ongoing conversations and theoretical interests to offer a neatly segmented portrayal of the cultural diversity in this city.

The goal of the book, as outlined by the editors, is to represent the current cultural diversity within Las Vegas and to explain the process by which it has come about. To achieve this goal, each of the book's chapters is dedicated to a single ethnic group. The chapter titles, therefore, may strike anthropologists as being radically constraining and disturbingly essentializing: "The Mexicans," "The Jews," "The Poles," "The Chinese,"

and so on. That said, chapters divided in this way do serve to highlight the many different origins of the current population of Las Vegas and to encourage comparison of origin stories. Thus, whereas most groups arrived in the city to work on the railroad, which was completed in 1905, or to work on the construction of the Hoover Dam in the 1930s, some groups did not achieve a notable presence in the city until much later, such as many Filipinos who were granted special U.S. visas for serving in World War II or Salvadorans who fled the terror of the civil war in their country in the 1980s.

For more recent arrivals to Las Vegas seeking steady work, the city's need for cheap labor still presents the greatest draw. Instead of working on the construction of railroads or dams, however, low-income workers now engage in casino construction, restaurant and bar service, hotel and house cleaning, and landscaping. Las Vegas appears to offer a much more hospitable social and political climate for such workers than other major cities in the Southwest, such as Los Angeles and Phoenix. The editors give several reasons for this. First, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) personnel maintain a relatively low presence in the area, unlike nearby states, so workers who are illegal immigrants can live and work with greater security. (Note: this agency changed its name and mission with its absorption into the Department of Homeland Security in 2003, a fact not acknowledged or commented on by the editors.) Second, housing costs are lower in Las Vegas than in other major cities. Third, the city has a history of an active civil-rights movement, which started with the founding of the first racially integrated hotel-casino, the Moulin Rouge, in 1955. As a result, racial discrimination is perhaps less palpable in this city. Of course, much of the city's present diversity is hidden from tourists and locals by the nature of the service-sector employment of minority populations and by the

geography of strip malls and tract housing that offers very few visual cues of cultural diversity.

This book's editors and many of its contributors choose to look for signs of cultural diversity in food. Varied religious institutions, media, and billboards are noted, but cuisine stands out for these writers as a clear sign of the city's multiculturalism. The editors write, "Our taste for ethnic foods, formerly indulged only by travel to Los Angeles, led us to discoveries of once-scarce restaurants and markets catering to new arrivals in Las Vegas" (p. ix). In this vein, international food festivals come to stand as evidence of the true diversity of the city, helping to render visible the "veritable United Nations of people" (p. xii) living in the city and serving its presumably less "ethnic" tourists and residents.

Varied food choices may or may not be indicators of diversity. There is much more to culture than its referents. One way that this book could have come closer to documenting and explaining the cultures of Las Vegas would have been to let representatives of those groups speak for themselves, to relate their stories in their own voices. Unfortunately, this is something rarely afforded here.