

AlbertMohler.com

Gambling Fever — Now Just Entertainment?

Friday, October 28, 2005

Jonathan V. Last of *The Weekly Standard* writes of the incredible expansion of gambling in American culture — and suggests that gambling is becoming just another form of entertainment [See "[Losers' Poker](#)," posted October 28, 2005].

According to Last: Over the past 50 years, gambling has gone from sin to vice to guilty pleasure and has come, finally, to be simply another point of interest on the entertainment map. Today America has 445 commercial casinos and 411 Indian casinos acting as beacons to the lucky. In 1993, 11.6 million Americans visited commercial casinos; in 2004, 54.1 million—26 percent of all gaming-aged adults—hit the tables and slots. In 1993, commercial casinos had \$11.2 billion in gross gambling revenue; by 2004 that number had risen to \$27 billion. But even this staggering figure—last year Hollywood grossed only \$10.2 billion at the box office and \$25.95 billion from home video—is just one piece of the gaming pie. Throw in the Indian casinos, state lotteries and horse tracks and you get a gross total of \$72.87 billion—before you count Internet gaming.

As gambling has spread, whatever taboos were left about it have fallen away. In a recent survey, 81 percent of Americans said that gambling was an acceptable activity, with 21 percent saying that in the past 10 years gaming has become more acceptable to them.

The extent to which gambling infiltrates nearly every aspect of American culture is hard to fathom—we are so pious and easily scandalized on other culture-war fronts—but easy to measure: Gambling is everywhere. Its sheer ubiquity has made wagering seem banal, a normal part of middle-class life—something that only a prude would object to. But is it really? Isn't there more at stake in the loss of this taboo than the pleasure of risking a little money on chance? Taken in all its forms, the American betting habit looks like a mild form of social pathology. It is certainly one of those nodal points in culture where commerce has trumped settled custom—and maybe even conscience.

That last point is really important. A nation's conscience does not shift overnight. This represents a lowering of moral expectation, a marginalizing of obligations, and a rejection of thrift.

Was anyone even concerned that Harriet Miers had been chairperson of the Texas Lottery Commission? These days, service in that kind of position is a resume-builder.

Last's verdict: *America has placed its wager with legalized gaming and, after careful study, decided to double down.*

[See also my commentary, "[A Losing Bet -- Why Christians Should Avoid Lottery Fever](#)," posted October 18, 2005.]

Content Copyright © 2002-2010, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

