

one agrees with Tonelson or not, *Race to the Bottom* is a timely book.

—MICHAEL LIND

**THE MONEY AND THE POWER:
*The Making of Las Vegas and Its
Hold on America, 1947–2000.***

By Sally Denton and Roger Morris.
Knopf. 479 pp. \$26.95

It takes effort to make Las Vegas boring, but Denton and Morris have produced an opus so dense and tedious that it sinks like a second-rate mobster in concrete shoes. God forbid they should dress up their Latinate compound sentences with a few colorful anecdotes, or assemble an original history of the place from primary sources. Instead, they rehash tales told a hundred times—Meyer Lansky, Benny Binion,



Estes Kefauver, Kirk Kerkorian, Steve Wynn—and they lace each story with moralizing about corruption in high places.

Power is not a new topic for the husband-and-wife team. Denton is the author of *The Bluegrass Conspiracy: An Inside Story of Power, Greed, Drugs, and Murder* (1990); Morris's books include *Partners in Power: The Clintons and Their America* (1996). Here they argue that the "shadow capital" of Vegas had a hand in, among other things, the Kennedy assassination, the Bay of Pigs, Watergate, and Iran-contra. And they blame Vegas's dirty money and dirty politics for creating "an end-of-century America whose economy was dominated by a corporate oligarchy controlling much of government finance and business."

Denton and Morris have written not a history

of Vegas but a history of organized crime, which for most of the past 50 years operated out of Vegas simply because the juice went further there. What's really needed is a history of Vegas after 1986, when the last truly wired mob enforcer, Anthony "The Ant" Spilotro, was found buried in an Illinois wheat field, and the corporate wolves, led by Steve Wynn, moved in. But the authors devote just one slender chapter to Vegas in the '90s, choosing instead to dwell on dead Italian dons and the weasels who worked for Howard Hughes.

Denton and Morris have a grim view of gambling itself, calling it the only industry that produces nothing of lasting value. Couldn't the same be said of Coca-Cola or, for that matter, 90 percent of movies? And they're revolted by the influence peddling that has made Nevada into a greedy corporate fiefdom with "kept men" occupying almost all major political offices. That's certainly a sad thing for Nevada—and perhaps for Mississippi and other states that have embraced the hydra of legalized gambling—but it's an old story in America, and better told by Ed Reid and Ovid Demaris in *The Green Felt Jungle* (1963).

Although there are occasional flashes of insight here, notably in the portraits of weak men who begin with high ideals and are beaten down by the enormity of Vegas's single-minded hunger for lucre (crusading *Las Vegas Sun* publisher Hank Greenspun, Senator Paul Laxalt), the dots don't connect. Las Vegas remains an island through which the money passes on its way somewhere else. The most you can say is that, thanks to the city's laissez-faire attitude, we know where the bad guys' clubhouse is.

—JOE BOB BRIGGS

**LOOKING FOR LOVEDU:
*Days and Nights in Africa.***

By Ann Jones. Knopf. 268 pp. \$25

Journalist Jones and Kevin Muggleton, a photographer she has just met, hatch an impromptu plan to drive the length of Africa. The result is an epic road trip from Tangier to Cape Town—and a look at what happens when a middle-aged New Yorker and a Briton half her age and twice her size spend too much time in a Land Rover that's disintegrating almost as fast as their friendship.