

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

—MICHAEL LIND

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**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

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**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.

## Current Books

Their goal is to find the present-day descendants of the legendary Lovedu, a cooperative, peaceable tribe led by a rainmaking queen. The quest begins as “a good excuse for gallivanting,” Jones writes, but it becomes the book’s defining theme in an unexpected way as she finds herself struggling over gender roles with the supermacho Muggleton. In one recurrent battle, he is hell-bent on getting into and out of countries as fast as he can; Jones, who calls herself an “inspecteur du monde,” wants to go slowly enough to see what she terms “the real Africa.”

Jones is at her best when they do manage to slow down. Their traverse of the Sahara is unforgettable, and her description of Zaire’s infamous roads should give pause to anyone contemplating a similar trip. At one point, the mud is so thick that it takes them five days to drive a distance that two women with heavy loads cover on foot in two.

Thanks to Muggleton, however, most of Africa remains a blur outside the window of the speeding Rover. Jones doesn’t have time

to connect with many locals beyond immigration officials and customs agents, so she succumbs to generalizations: “In the United States, if you don’t like conditions, you try to change them. In Africa, you accept”—a statement that would surprise those who fought to make Africa more than just a collection of colonies. Likening her view of the continent to an astronaut’s view of Earth, Jones is reduced to providing capsule histories of each country she passes through. She relies so heavily on John Reader’s *Africa: A Biography of the Continent* (1998) and other sources that she could have written much of her own book without leaving home.

Jones eventually dumps Muggleton and finds more congenial traveling companions. But, suffering from a sort of Stockholm syndrome, she presses on with Muggletonian haste. By book’s end, she has found the Lovedu but lost the spirit that animated the search in the first place.

—REBECCA A. CLAY

## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

### DOGS:

#### *A Startling New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior, and Evolution.*

By Raymond Coppinger and Lorna Coppinger. Scribner. 352 pp. \$26

Even with dogs, there is a backlash. Elizabeth Marshall Thomas wrote a brilliant book, *The Hidden Life of Dogs* (1996), a masterpiece of observation, description, and empathy. It inspired many readers, and was followed by other books in a similar vein, including Marjorie Garber’s thorough study *Dog Love* (1997), Caroline Knapp’s beautifully written *Pack of Two* (1998), and Thomas’s own follow-up, *The Social Life of Dogs* (2000). So it was inevitable, I suppose, that Stephen Budiansky would write the bad-tempered *The Truth about Dogs* (2000), faulting the earlier books for being sentimental. I have never understood what is so terrible about being sentimental, for which read *emotional*, when one feels passionate about a topic.

The Coppingers—he is a professor of biology at Hampshire College and the author of

*Fishing Dogs* (1996); she is the author of *The World of Sled Dogs* (1977)—are scientific but not disputatious. Their bibliography lists only specialized works, with nothing for the general reader. Theirs is not an easy book to read, understand, or love, but it is plainly the work of two people who know a hell of a lot, and anybody interested in dogs ought to read it.

A chapter on sled dogs illustrates the book’s strengths and weaknesses. When the distance to be covered exceeds 10 miles, the Coppingers point out, modern racing sled dogs are the fastest animals in the world. In the annual Iditarod Trail Race in Alaska, teams average 125 miles a day for nearly nine days—which is the equivalent of running five marathons a day for nine days. Why do the dogs do it? The Coppingers argue that the reward is intrinsic in the performance—it just feels good. Fair enough, but they say almost nothing about the relationship between dog and driver, or about the costs of the sport, such as the selective culling (i.e., killing off puppies) required to get the perfect sled dog.