

Gaming Research Tip Sheets

.....quick start for studies, reports and papers

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Tip Sheet # 28: Gambling as Popular Culture

Everyday events. Anthropologists look at society's folkways and mores to study people being themselves in areas such as storytelling, arts and crafts, music, amusements, hobbies and games. What people do everyday is popular culture and that includes gambling.

Gaming folklore. Unscientific information on gaming abounds. Web sites can be found that explain: how to win big, developing a system, beating the house, becoming a professional gambler.

Typical books and videos may include: *Million Dollar Blackjack*, *Pai Gow Without Tears*, *Hold 'Em Poker for Advanced Players*, and *Power Baccarat*.

These materials may be studied for insight into myths and superstitions, popular perceptions, the thrill of risk taking, the role of hype and hope, the lure of big rewards for little effort.

Special library. The [Popular Culture Library of Bowling Green State University](#) collects exhaustive gaming materials. Though its holdings are not limited to gaming you can search their catalog for recent and older works. The advantage of finding gaming information with other popular materials may point up connections and impacts otherwise overlooked.

Since reputable gaming collections are scarce this Ohio university library makes an Eastern U.S. repository for those who

can't get to the UNLV library in Las Vegas.

Casino collectibles. Old slot machines may be collected as game room antiques or an art investment. Chips and gaming tokens are so popular that collectors' club have been formed.

The Internet auction site, e-Bay, is full of offers to buy, sell and trade casino knick-knacks, advertising gimmicks and even plastic hotel room keys. Several online gambling bookstores offer memorabilia as well.

Gaming museums. A museum directory will tell you where collections of gaming artifacts and special gaming exhibits are maintained, such as:

- gambling exhibits at the Clark County Museum in Henderson
- contents of the Kartause Gaming Museum in Austria
- a restored 19th century gambling salon in Saratoga Springs, New York
- the gaming history collection at the Tropicana Hotel in Las Vegas

Slot history. Take an online tour of the famous collection of slot machines at the [Liberty Belle Restaurant](#) in Reno, established in 1959 by descendants of the Fey family, early inventors of slot machines. See, *Slot Machines: A Pictorial History of the First 100 Years*, 4th edition, 1994 by Marshall Fey.

A virtual museum has been created by the [Gaming Studies Research Center](#) at the UNLV library. Online exhibits change from time to time but there you might see photos, documents and artifacts.

You might find answers to questions, such as: Where are the architectural drawings for Xanadu Casino that was never constructed? What is depicted in the 1997 painting, "Snake Eyes"? Who painted the famous poker-playing dogs?

Gambling in fiction. Novels and movies have explored the popular appeal of gambling.

A search of "Gambling – Fiction" in the UNLV catalog brings up nearly 400 hits.

Sample titles from the Gambling—Fiction search include:

---*Get Shorty*. Leonard, E., 1990.
---*Dice Angel*. Rouff, B., 2001.
---*The Old Curiosity Shop*. Dickens, C., 1880.
---*The Blackjack Hijack*. Einstein, C., 1976.
---*Casino Royale*. Fleming, I., 1953.
---*Play It As It Lays*. Didion, J., 1970.
---*Murder in Vegas*. Allen, S., 1991.
---*Mustang Sally*. Allen, E., 1992.
---*Temples in the Sand*. Bonar, L., 1981.
---*Fall of the Staircliffes: Prize Tale on Gambling*. Colbeck, A., 1892.

Suggested topics for research.

---gambling prevalence in illiterate societies
---authenticity of gambling scenes in 20th century novels
---gambling among miners in Virginia City, NV heyday
---the universal appeal of gambling to rich and poor, old and young
---gambling's rise from folk culture to a business enterprise
---gambling evidence from archeological digs

---gambling slang in song lyrics, political speeches, legal opinions
---psychological factors in Shirley Jackson's story, "The Lottery"

For more information

---*Las Vegas in Popular Culture*. Baldwin, E. E., 1997.

---*Cult Vegas: The Weirdest, the Wildest, the Swingin'est Town on Earth*. Weatherford, M., 2001.

---*Slot Machines On Parade*. Geddes, R. N., 1980.

---*The Gambling Games of the Chinese in America*. Culin, S., 1972.

---*Gambling Cultures: Studies in History & Interpretation*. McMillen, J., 1996.

---*Gambler Way: Indian Gaming, Mythology, History and Archaeology in North America*. Gabriel, K., 1996.