

# Casino Connection

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## Race Relations

*The Moulin Rouge was the first 'neighborhood' casino that welcomed all people*

by **David G. Schwartz**



Few Las Vegas casinos are as historic as the Moulin Rouge. Though it's located off the Strip on Bonanza Road, it's broken ground in several ways. When it opened in 1955 it was, in some ways, the first "neighborhood" casino (though the Showboat could make a similar claim), as a large, modern casino resort located away from the Strip and Downtown.

It was also the first racially-integrated casino in Las Vegas. While other hotels maintained segregationist Jim Crow policies, the Moulin Rouge allowed anyone, no matter what their color or creed, to stay at the hotel and gamble. Because of this, perhaps, it was an immediate hit, and attracted more than its fair share of celebrities and standouts. Boxer Joe Louis was a shareholder, and greeter, and it quickly became the favorite spot for local and visiting musicians to hang out after their shows had finished.

The Moulin Rouge had the misfortune of opening during the 1955 boom that quickly went bust; like many other casinos that opened that year, including the Riviera and Dunes, it struggled financially. Eventually, the casino closed, and, though it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992, became a shell of its former self.

Though a fire in 2003 gutted the complex, leaving little more than its famous sign intact, several groups have proposed rebuilding the casino, including an internet casino company in recent months. Should a new Moulin Rouge rise from the ashes of the old one, it will be a vindication for one of the most storied addresses in Las Vegas history.

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