
Richard Biddle Teacher

Many of us grew up with the game of Monopoly. We internalized ideas about the fairness of land ownership and a "winner-take-all" view of life. This orientation comes from the 1935 rules. But in the original game, dating back to 1903, the creation of monopolies and bankrupting of others was only the first part of the game. At a certain point in the play, the players could elect to change the rules and make it a cooperative game, in which real estate was shared for the benefit of everyone. That simple difference provides a clue about how to solve the problem of poverty in reality. We need to change



that were created by the community would come back to the community rather than end up in one player's pocket. The original values were about the good of society and the possibility of a better way of life based on fairness.

The message of the earlier game is that the poor do not necessarily need to be with us; we can all be relatively affluent. The issue is sustainability and efficiency. There is no point in trying to dampen the best competitive spirits that people have. People all around the world are seeking better opportunities. We have set up some of the worst models to follow and pursue, based on the spirit of the later game, and that is tragic.

The game we play today is the story of how poverty is created. When you bankrupt your neighbor, what does he do? Does he go away? Does he go on to do other things? Those people survive on some level. Quite a few end up in jail, both in life and in the game. It is really an issue of wealth distribution. The game shows how land ownership and land development create monopolies that impoverish most people. It shows how land markets do not work for everybody. They only benefit a few. It also teaches people that power and luck are rewarded more than hard work. There are advantages to ruthlessness, concentrating power, seeking special interests politically through legislation. We see aspects of that in *Chance* and *Community Chest*.

By 1935, the car had become popular. America was the prime producer of oil until the 1950s. The game does not deal with this, but the car destroyed public transportation. In the original one, there was a "Slambang trolley." But by the 1930s, General Motors and Standard Oil were pulling the trolley cars off the American scene in favor of buses and the automobile. The net result was that we went from about 74,000 streetcars in 1917 to 17,000 in 1948. They destroyed a very viable transportation system. That story is not part of the game, although it is part of the game's history, in a sense. Originally, you got the sense of a walkable community.

The railroads were part of the original game. The railroads were given 100 million acres in order to crisscross the country with rail lines, and that provided an opportunity for the development of what Thomas Jefferson thought would be the land that would not be developed for the next 200 years. But all of a sudden, we were enclosing the commons, the lands that had not been owned up until about 1890. And the railroads sought special favors from government. They represent a force to be reckoned with—but they were never really reckoned with.