

BOOK REVIEW

MONOPOLY IS A CAPITALIST PLOT

A Hegemonic View of Games as Instruments of Economic Indoctrination

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Students of political economy have failed to examine an important element of the socialization process—the games children play. While it may or may not have been true that “Wars were won or lost on the playing fields of Eton,” it is clear that the games children play can provide insight into the motivational underpinnings of a society and its economy. We shall focus on one quintessentially American game which has become a part of the American folk heritage—the game of *Monopoly*.¹ Since its invention in 1934 by an unemployed salesman/fixit-man, Americans have bought almost 80 million *Monopoly* sets, and it is a rare American who’s never played *Monopoly*.

What does *Monopoly* teach children?

1. In *Monopoly* no one does any work. All profits come as returns to capital or from frivolous amusements like beauty contests. Thus, the capitalist is glorified at the expense of the working man. Indeed, there are no working men (or women) to be found in *Monopoly*. (Buildings, for example, are erected by invisible minions of the bank.) Thus, *Monopoly* hides from view the exploitative face of capitalism.

2. Toddlers are encouraged to think that they can earn money without ever working for it and without the need to expropriate surplus value from the sweating backs of the toiling masses. *Monopoly* encourages the belief that a pitiful annual state dole of only \$200 is adequate to relieve social misery and turn anyone into a successful capitalist. *Monopoly* reinforces the myth that America is a land of equal opportunity.

3. *Monopoly* glorifies big business. Innocent youngsters are led to believe that monopolies are the only efficient forms of business enterprise.

4. *Monopoly* glorifies bankers. The Bank in *Monopoly* plays a beneficent role, doling out \$200 remittances, declaring bank dividends, bank errors in your favor, and so on. The banker in *Monopoly* is the soul of honesty and integrity, a disinterested partner to all transactions. *Monopoly* bankers, unlike real bankers, never foreclose on a mortgage. Furthermore, *Monopoly* encourages an identification of the Bank with government. It is the Bank which regulates all transactions, initially owns all property, and pays the \$200 dole to those fortunate enough to cross GO.

There is never any bank failure in *Monopoly*—if it runs out of money, the Bank simply prints more. In the context of the bank failures of the 1930s, this feature of the game can be seen as an insidious plot to restore credibility to those discredited bulwarks of the capitalist system. Moreover, *Monopoly* leaves children with the lasting impression that money is what the banks print and that it has no necessary relationship to the real productivity of the laboring masses. In *Monopoly* there is never a problem with inflation or unemployment. The *Monopoly* economy grows steadily at an average rate of \$34/player/roll (Ash and Bishop, 1972).

5. *Monopoly* reinforces the capitalist virtues of rapacity, selfishness, and greed. As the noted social critic, Shelly Berman, puts it: “the real attraction of playing *Monopoly* is the ‘thrill you get when you know you’ve wiped out a friend’” (Brady, 1973: 34).

6. Last, but not least, *Monopoly* fosters racism. The *Monopoly* board is chromatically segregated—a thinly disguised reference to racial and ethnic ghettos. (By omitting the colors black, brown, and white, the *Monopoly* board avoids the appearance of racism, while perpetuating the reality.) *Monopoly* encourages its immature players to think that greens stick together and so do blues, and so on. Sticking to your own kind is the only way to be safe. The player who trespasses on territory not his own color is subject to extortion or even extinction. One last point: several generations of *Monopoly* players have grown up thinking that busing was wrong. There are no buses in *Monopoly*—only trains. We do not believe it was coincidence that Atlantic City’s Short Line Bus Company was renamed the Short Line Railroad.

Not content with brainwashing American youngsters, the purveyors of *Monopoly* market it in 25 countries. To lull the suspicions of the masses, American place-names are replaced with native ones (e.g., in the British version, Marvin Gardens becomes Picadilly, while in the German edition it becomes elevated to Goethestrasse), but the capital-

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ist message remains the same. The game is, of course, banned in the Soviet Fatherland (Brady, 1974: 29).

NOTE

1. Monopoly[®] is a registered trademark, copyright by Parker Brothers Game Company, Salem, Massachusetts.

REFERENCES

- ASH, R. B. and R. L. BISHOP (1972) "Monopoly as a Markov process." *Mathematics Magazine* 4 (January): 26-29.
- BRADY, M. (1973) *The Monopoly Book*. New York: David McKay.