

A New Monopoly Game Celebrates Women, but What About the One Behind the Original? (Published 2019)

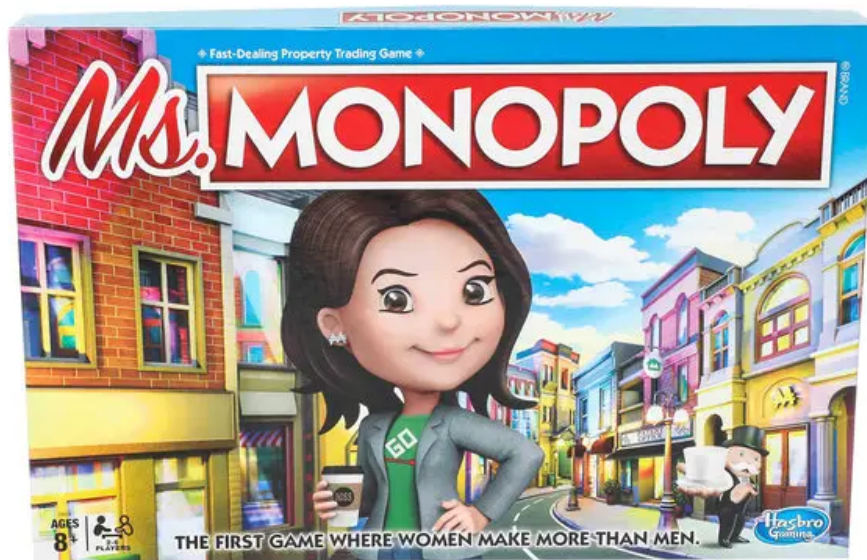
The New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/12/us/ms-monopoly-lizzie-magic.html>) · by Niraj Chokshi · September 12, 2019

A New Monopoly Game Celebrates Women, but What About the One Behind the Original?

Hasbro's Ms. Monopoly will pay women more than men and celebrate female inventors, but it makes only brief reference to the feminist whose board game is credited with inspiring it all.

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Credit...Hasbro



(<https://www.nytimes.com/by/niraj-chokshi>)

By

Sept. 12, 2019

There's a new version of Monopoly coming, one that celebrates women by paying female players more than men.

The game, Ms. Monopoly, is the first to feature a new character — an advocate for investing in female entrepreneurs — on its cover, according to a news release (<https://newsroom.hasbro.com/news-releases/news-release-details/hasbro-introduces-ms-monopoly-first-game-franchise-celebrates>) this week from Hasbro, the entertainment giant that owns the game.

Ms. Monopoly celebrates female inventors, but one was conspicuously missing from the announcement: Elizabeth Magie, a progressive and feminist whose role in developing Monopoly itself has long been diminished.

“I think if Hasbro was serious about women’s empowerment, they could start by admitting that a woman invented the game,” said Mary Pilon, a former reporter for The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, and the author of “The Monopolists (<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/the-monopolists-9781608199631/>),” a 2015 history of the board game.

Lizzie Magie with versions of Monopoly Boards and of The Landlord’s Game.

Monopoly’s invention is often credited (<https://newsroom.hasbro.com/news-releases/news-release-details/monopoly-introduces-round-game-board-75th-anniversary>) to Charles Darrow, who sold the game to Parker Brothers in 1935, but Ms. Pilon and others argue that he and Hasbro owe it all to Magie, who is acknowledged, briefly, inside the box of the new Ms. Monopoly.

In 1904, Magie, also known as Lizzie, received a patent for an invention, The Landlord’s Game. Like modern Monopoly, players in the game roll dice to advance along a path composed of 40 spaces around a square board, according to the patent ([https://pdfpiw.uspto.gov/.piw?](https://pdfpiw.uspto.gov/.piw?PageNum=0&docid=00748626&IDKey=673B7F29CA99%0D%0A&HomeUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fpatft.uspto.gov%2Fnetacgi%2Fnph-Parser%3FSect1%3DPTO1%2526Sect2%3DHITOFF%2526d%3DPALL%2526p%3D1%2526u%3D%25252Fnethtml%25252FPTO%25252Fsrchnum.htm%2526r%3D1%2526f%3DG%2526l%3D50%2526s1%3D0748%2C626)

<https://pdfpiw.uspto.gov/.piw?PageNum=0&docid=00748626&IDKey=673B7F29CA99%0D%0A&HomeUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fpatft.uspto.gov%2Fnetacgi%2Fnph-Parser%3FSect1%3DPTO1%2526Sect2%3DHITOFF%2526d%3DPALL%2526p%3D1%2526u%3D%25252Fnethtml%25252FPTO%25252Fsrchnum.htm%2526r%3D1%2526f%3DG%2526l%3D50%2526s1%3D0748%2C626>

PN.%2526OS%3DPN%2F0748%2C626%2526RS%3DPN%2F0748%2C626). They purchase property along the way and there are utilities, railroads and a bank. A corner square instructs players to “go to jail,” and a trip around the board earns each \$100.

Lizzie Magie’s patent for her board game, The Landlord’s Game.

The goal was to amass wealth. The game’s purpose, however, was political. Magie’s views were shaped by Henry George, a popular progressive who argued for a single land tax to keep the wealthy few from monopolizing resources, according to the book. The game was designed to make the case for reform.

“It is a practical demonstration of the present system of land-grabbing with all its usual outcomes and consequences,” Magie wrote in *The Single Tax Review*, a journal dedicated to the idea (<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433022371367&view=1up&seq=434>).

Magie was something of a feminist and progressive pioneer, according to the book. By the early 1900s, she owned a home of her own in Washington, D.C., worked as a stenographer and acted and wrote in her spare time. In addition to inventing several games, Magie was also an amateur engineer and held a patent on a tool to more easily pass paper through typewriter rollers.

In 1906, she made headlines around the world when she put herself up for sale as a “young woman American slave” in an effort to raise awareness about gender inequality. The stunt landed Magie a meeting with the writer Upton Sinclair and a temporary newspaper job. And as Magie gained fame, so, too, did her game.

“It kind of goes viral in the way things did in 1904, which is to say more slowly and kind of all over, but it becomes a favorite game among left-wing intellectuals,” Ms. Pilon said. There is evidence of versions played at Columbia, Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania, she said.

A 1939 version of *The Landlord’s Game*, which was first patented decades earlier. Credit...The Strong, Rochester, N.Y.

Ms. Pilon traced the game’s slow path to a Quaker community in Atlantic City, where homemade copies were created with the property names replaced by local landmarks, such as Pennsylvania Avenue, Virginia Avenue, Ventnor Avenue and Boardwalk. Eventually, Darrow was introduced to the game by a man who attended a Quaker school with his wife.

Darrow developed Monopoly, making changes and tweaks, and began to market it locally and pitched it to Milton Bradley and Parker Brothers. Both rejected it at first, but as the game grew in popularity, Parker Brothers had a change of heart and purchased it in 1935.

The company then set out to neutralize any threats to its new game. It secured a patent on Monopoly, and bought up similar board games or sued their makers. George Parker, the company's founder, visited Magie and persuaded her to sell the patent for The Landlord's Game in exchange for \$500 and a promise to publish it and two other games of her design.

None of the games took off, and when Magie died in 1948, her obituary made no mention of her role in the development of Monopoly, according to the book.

Credit...Hasbro

In a statement and in the box of Ms. Monopoly, Hasbro acknowledges Magie, but stops short of giving her credit for the game.

“The Monopoly game as we know it was invented by Charles Darrow, who sold his idea to Parker Brothers in 1935,” the company said in the statement.

“However, there have been a number of popular property trading games throughout history. In fact, Elizabeth Magie — a writer, inventor, and feminist — was one of the pioneers of land-grabbing games.”

Since 1935, nearly 1,000 different versions of Monopoly — including limited editions based on movies like “Star Wars” — have been created, according to Hasbro, which now owns Parker Brothers. Monopoly and six other franchises, including Magic: The Gathering and Nerf, generated \$2.45 billion in revenue for Hasbro last year, which was the best on record for Monopoly, the company said in its 2018 annual report (<https://investor.hasbro.com/static-files/cee88521-71dc-4b58-89bd-7adb7bb04b84>).

[The New York Times \(https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/12/us/ms-monopoly-lizzie-magie.html\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/12/us/ms-monopoly-lizzie-magie.html) · by Niraj Chokshi · September 12, 2019