

## The New York Times - Lens



Two men at a side entrance to the Trump Taj Mahal Casino, located between Virginia Avenue and Pennsylvania Avenue. Mike Osborne

# Pass Go, Take Pictures

By Eric Nagourney Nov. 5, 2014

Illinois Avenue is the place to go if you want cash for gold — though be advised that the street is now known as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. If your marriage is on the rocks, head over to Pacific Avenue, where A.C. Dolls, a “premier gentleman’s club,” advertises divorce parties. And on Virginia Avenue, there is yet another casino.

The names of the streets sound so familiar — even comforting — to anyone who has ever set up a Monopoly board. But by the time [Mike Osborne](#) was through photographing, it was all beginning to seem a bit like Bedford Falls if George Bailey had never been born.

In 2012, Mr. Osborne, a Washington-based photographer, set out to chronicle the streets of Atlantic City, N.J., which lent their names to one of the most successful board games ever made.

“I hadn’t played the game in 20 years,” he said, “but I could still tell you where every property is on the board.”

Of course, there’s Monopoly’s Atlantic City, and then there’s the real thing.

Sure, when he roamed the city, Mr. Osborne found Park Place and Boardwalk and many of the other familiar locales. But his Electric Company is little like the one depicted by a happy-looking bulb on the board — it is a graffiti-scarred building with its sign coming down. Mr. Osborne labels one picture “Free Parking,” but there seemed to be no takers when he photographed the lot. And there is a jail (though no longer in the city itself), but from the looks of it, there is no kindly looking officer inside wagging his finger at the inmates.

Mr. Osborne got the idea for the project after reading [“The Search for Marvin Gardens,”](#) a 1972 New Yorker article by John McPhee about the game and the city in which it is set. By the time Mr. Osborne got there, the city had boomed and begun to bust, with some of the casinos that brought the tourists back heading for bankruptcy.

In a way, that brings things full circle. Monopoly may seem to revel in capitalism, but it grew out of the Landlord’s Game, which an actress named Elizabeth Magie Phillips dreamed up in 1903. Her goal was to teach players about the inequities of the property system, a lesson many Atlantic City residents have learned all too well in real life.

Casinos figure often in Mr. Osborne’s photographs, but only their exteriors.

“I never made any effort to go into the casinos to photograph,” he said. “I assumed that that would just be impossible there. And I wasn’t so interested to do that. I’m dealing mostly with the streets, which are an entirely neglected part of the city.”