

# Ghetto Ghetto

## Game review

David Gaynes

1970

GHETTO...the white suburban mind conjures up visions of...

GHETTO is now a game, a "simu-life" game made by Western Publishing Company. For the outrageous price of \$23.00, those affluent liberals that wish to "understand" ghetto life can do so in the comfort, privacy, and safety of their own home or school.

As game designer Dove Toll writes in the accompanying instruction book, GHETTO is designed to "produce citizens whose traditional good will is reinforced by sympathetic understanding of the social forces that underlie and sustain these (ghetto) patterns of life."

How sweet.

GHETTO comes packaged in a nice brown box with a chic negative drop-out photograph of slum housing on the cover. Within are the game-materials:

- A. 1 GHETTO playing area
- B. 10 profile folders
- C. 1 pad of record sheets
- D. 1 record sheet reorder form
- E. 50 work chance cards
- F. 50 Hustling chance cards
- G. 10 victim cards
- H. 1 spinner card
- I. 4 neighborhood Conditions Markers
- J. Hour chips-12 each of 10 colors
- K. Pair of dice
- L. Coordinators Manual

All that's needed, as the manual says, is a space to play and 10 (ten!) people... ("as few as seven may have an enjoyable game."). This is just one of the complications involved.

It seems that, in the patently absurd and futile effort to simulate the many contingencies and factors which are present in "ghetto life" (or any real life) they have inevitably complicated the game to the point where many people will be totally discouraged from trying to play.

That's not such a bad thing.

Those that do play, in the hopes that they will "understand why poor people act the way they do..." have fallen prey to the liberal fuck-up thinking that good intentions (or anything else) can replace knowledge. If you'll pardon a highly apropos quote from Chairman Mao, "All genuine knowledge originates in direct experience."

The fatal flaw of this game is simply the flaw of all vicarious experience...nothing is equatable with real life. This isn't to say that knowledge or experience is not communicable, but at the very least the "teacher" involved in any transaction of knowledge must have the credentials of firsthand experience.

Which is to say that Dove Toll, game-designer, and Western Publishing Company, Inc., ain't got no business foisting their jive-ass liberal assumptions about ghetto life on people that don't know a ghetto from a garbage-can and leading these people to believe that they will after they "simu-learn" what it's like to live in one.

The playing procedure itself is similar to many other board games in that each player attempts to amass the greatest possible number of points at the end of a given number of rounds of play. As the game starts, each player assumes an identity which becomes the basis for his or her playing.

There are ten possible profiles, one for each player. Some of the players will be black, some white, and some Latin...married, single, and separated, anywhere from no children to six, and on the basis of family responsibility, each player is given from four to twelve "hour-chips."

Example: Wayne, a twenty-year old hustler, white and single, gets twelve hour chips to spend each round because his freedom from family responsibilities gives him that much hypothetical time each day to use as he wishes.

Liza, on the other hand, only gets four hour chips because her responsibilities as a mother of five children with no husband ties her to the house for most of the day.

Each round, players get to invest their hour chips in hustling, school, work, or relaxation and recreation. Each investment has a certain yield in points which is effected by the chance cards the players draw on each investment—hustlers sometimes get busted, or hit the big-time, students may get scholarships, or be expelled from school, etc.

Players also have a chance to take collective action against hustlers (every hustler rips-off another player) poor community facilities, bad housing, public safety, and other matters.

The game itself is, as we said, fantastically involved (the instruction booklet alone runs 18 pages) so any attempt to give a comprehensive explanation of the game is prohibited by lack of space, and the fact that any such explanation is irrelevant to the conclusion that was reached about the game, the irrevocable conclusion that "GHETTO", the game, is bullshit.

The basic contradictions created by the method, medium, and market are too heavy to get around.

The difference between picking up a chance card that says "go to jail" and going to jail is the very difference between the real and the unreal.

No one can "imagine" six crying children, or real rats, or cock-roaches or hunger or racism or self-hatred or revolutionary determination or heroin addiction or trigger-happy pigs and punk-ass lying politicians and sights and sounds and smells and feelings, and all the things that happen to make "poor people act the way they do" like it says there in the game-book.

There is a message in the game: go to school, get a good job, don't mess with the man, save yr money & keep a tight asshole & things will be alright... by 'n by. But whereas those who would play the game can buy that message, shit, have bought it wholehog with every beat of their honky hearts, the oppressed people are tired of that shit.

Tired of killing their funk with chemicals and brainwashing and ass-kissing and jivin' and shuckin' all the way to the tee-vee store. As a people, they know that they can move on the source of their problems—that part which the game never deals with: the power-structure that's making the game and running the changes.

I've got to check myself there—my preaching about other people's lives is no more valid than anyone else's. But what I can say is what I must say—human decency (as opposed to liberal concern) demands that those interested in people and their struggles must learn from those people and their struggles.

There's a real ghetto right here in Detroit, here for the checking with no \$23.00 price of admission.

Do it, but don't forget to heed the signs in the air, in the eyes of the brothers and sisters on the block, that say: Caution: People in Struggle Visitors not Welcome!

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