

BOOK REVIEW

THE CHOICE: The Issue of Black Survival in America by Samuel Yette.
G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1971. 318 pages. \$6.95.

IN A RECENT VOTER registration drive in California, the slogan that was used to encourage citizens to register stated "If you vote, the choice is yours; if you don't vote, the choice is theirs. Vote, or you have no choice." In essence, this phrase was a restatement of the fundamental principle of American democracy that those who govern will be responsive to the needs and wishes of the people, as they are expressed via the political process. Unfortunately, most Black Americans and many white Americans long ago realized that the present governmental-political process has proven itself to be incapable of meeting this ideal. That which started out as "Of the People, by the People, for the People" has been bastardized into "Of the Politician, by the Bureaucrat, for the Privileged."

In the past years many attempts have been made to analyze the complex interrelationships which comprise this governmental-political superstructure. Elaborate and detailed theories have been developed to explain its mechanisms and one has often received the impression that all of the ills in this country could be attributed to some nebulous superforce which operated beyond the realm of human control. All too frequently we have lost sight of the very simple facts that government is a process whereby certain men make decisions regarding the lives of other men; and that politics is the self-interest game of power which determines who these decision makers will be.

The Choice analyzes the American governmental-political superstructure based upon the *actions* of the men who are involved. It is a book which is unique in several respects. Instead of mere theoretical building blocks, Sam Yette provides his readers with a documented chronology of governmental activities for the past decade. His focal point is Black America, which makes it imperative that every Black American read it. His message is survival, which makes it imperative that every white American read it. Bit by bit, *The Choice* pieces together the fragments of a picture which most of us, either from naiveté or from fear, have been unwilling to accept. The reader is presented with hard and cold facts from the Congressional Record, Senate and House Committee Reports, presidential statements, legislative proposals, national news releases, administrative memoranda, and television and personal interviews. Many of the individual items cited may already be familiar; what is not familiar and so startling is the pattern of purpose and design which emerges as the individual items are added together. One slowly begins to feel that 1984 and the King Alfred Plan are not totally futuristic improbabilities.

Throughout the book, Sam Yette weaves together three important themes: the seldom discussed results of the Great Society's war on poverty, racism as manifested through both domestic and foreign policies, and a governmental "readiness" for some frightful thing which we all hope never happens. Starting in the early 1960's, the picture slowly unfolds. John Ken-

nedy was murdered under what are still mysterious circumstances just two months after he had ordered all federal agencies to begin studies on the problems of civil rights and poverty. The Great Society's war on poverty proved to be a multi-billion dollar bonanza to private entrepreneurs who undertook the development of "new" ways to train the poor to be "employable." Instead of soundly based training programs which would prepare the participants to take already existing jobs, OEO spawned a whole new educational-industrial complex which received billions of dollars for devising "employability training programs." The Job Corps, which had promised to rescue poor teenagers with training and jobs, sent 30% of all its graduates straight into the Army and Vietnam. The Department of Labor has since developed a supplemental plan for "family" Job Corps centers to be structured as "reservations" for the poor. The federal government has continued to hand out multi-million dollar defense contracts in flagrant violation of civil rights laws.

THE RESPONSES of the government to the health and hunger crises in this country have been as equally misdirected. A Public Health Service survey revealed that among the lowest quarter income brackets thirty-four percent of all pre-school children suffer from chronic anemia; goiter, a disease thought to be extinct in this country, is now endemic in certain states; growth retardation, often companion to permanent brain damage, is common; vitamin A deficiency afflicts thirty-three percent of the children under six. A report before the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs revealed that the infant mortality rate of the United States is higher than that of thirteen other countries; and the *nonwhite* infant mortality rate is almost twice that of whites; poor families have three times more disabling heart disease, seven times more visual impairment and five times more mental illness. *The Choice* outlines some of the responses which the government has made to these problems. The White House Conference on Food and Nutrition has stressed the necessity for birth control among the hungry as the best means of alleviating hunger. It has also attempted to propose mandatory abortions and sterilization for unwed mothers (Sam Yette details how this effort was blocked almost single-handedly by Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer), and in 1969, a member of the CIA was appointed as the director of New York City Health Services Administration.

At the same time that hunger is rated as one of the major problems in this country, *The Choice* exposes how millions of dollars are being spent annually for farm land to remain idle. In the "Rice Cup" states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and California, farmers are being paid not to grow certain basic food crops while receiving high price support guarantees to grow *rice*. These same states that have received millions in "welfare" for their rich farmers also contain most of those counties (425) that have deliberately chosen to be excluded from the Federal programs for food aid to the poor. The fact that these states do produce rice is significant. In the early 1960's the United States was not a leader among the world's rice growers, exporters, or consumers. At the close of the decade, however, it had become the number one rice exporter in the world, selling sixty-five percent of its crop to South Korea and South Vietnam. During this period of time, the "tactical defoliation" of Vietnam jungles and rice paddies was accompanied by a threefold rise in the production of American rice. In

essence, the American government is paying American farmers to grow rice to sell to South Vietnam to replace the crops that American soldiers destroyed, while paying these same farmers *not* to grow the food which is needed by hungry American citizens. This immorality is compounded by the fact that many of these subsidized "farmers" are members of the United States Congress. *The Choice* names them all.

And the documentation continues. The Head Start programs produced studies which "proved" the inferior learning capacities of young Black children. Daniel Moynihan, while working for the Department of Labor, prepared the report which "documented" the "deterioration" of the Black family structure. Dr. Arthur Jensen, of the University of California, announced that his research has shown Blacks to be genetically inferior to whites. HEW has proposed that psychological tests be administered to all children six to eight years old and that those who are found to be "criminally inclined" receive psychiatric treatment, or be remanded to rehabilitative camps. The Special House Subcommittee on Education unanimously consented to receive a report by Dr. Bruno Bettelheim which characterized student protestors and "militants" as guilt-ridden paranoids who should be excluded from the educational process. A Congressman on this same committee has proposed to submit a bill which will provide funds to pay for a resident psychiatrist on each college campus whose job will be to "put away" those students and teachers who participate in protest demonstrations. HEW appropriations to bring more Black students into white universities were killed by presidential veto, while Black colleges and universities throughout the nation are being forced by governmental pressures to enroll substantial numbers of white students (and conversely, fewer Black students) and to hire white administrators.

SICKNESS, HUNGER, unemployment, charges of genetic inferiority, psychiatric incarceration, war, educational deprivations, and sterilization are the indirect weapons that have been used. But that is just the tip of the iceberg; that which follows is even more ominous. The Pentagon just recently completed a new multi-million dollar computer complex to house its "civil disturbance" directorate and facilities. The Secret Service has computerized lists containing names and dossiers of all "activists," "malcontents," and "persistent seekers of redress." The Justice Department maintains a data bank which produces a weekly printout of national "tension points" on racial, class, and political issues, and the individuals and groups involved. The Army's Counter Intelligence Analysis Division in Alexandria, Virginia, has compiled huge files of microfilmed intelligence reports, clippings and other materials on civilian activities (an order *was* issued for the destruction of this particular file system). The 1970 census contained a "random sample" questionnaire which required the respondent, under penalty of law, to disclose such facts as how his house is heated, his capacity for food storage, the number of entrances to his home, whether or not he has a telephone, and whether or not he has a second home. *The Choice* reveals that this special questionnaire was sent to twenty percent of the population, a figure which just happens to approximate the percentage of collective non-white minorities in this nation, and was found to be heavily concentrated in known Black areas. Just examples of governmental efficiency? Maybe, but Sam Yette believes otherwise, and he continues with even more disturbing facts. Despite constant attacks, Congress

has consistently refused to repeal Title II of the 1950 Internal Security Act which provides for the internment of any "subversive" during an "internal security emergency." Master pick-up lists have been prepared by the FBI and "Operation Dragnet" is the code name which will trigger mass arrests. In 1968, the House UnAmerican Activities Committee submitted a plan to the President to "isolate and destroy Black guerrilla fighters." The plan provides that a disrupted ghetto area would be sealed off from the rest of the city by State troopers, National Guardsmen, and Army soldiers. A curfew would be imposed and any attempts to break out of the confined area would justify "open combat." All civil liberties would be suspended, search and seizure operations would be instituted, special "census cards" issued, and immediate arrests made based upon "reports" of "suspicious activities." All insurgents would be placed in detention camps, for whatever period of time necessary.

Bit by bit, and point by point, the pattern grows. The reader is now referred back to that great governmental scheme to rescue the poor by placing them in training camps. *The Choice* tells us that in April of 1969 the Job Corps was transferred from the Office of Economic Opportunity to our old friend, the Labor Department. Shortly thereafter, the government announced that it was closing fifty-nine of these massive camps. This decision was made in spite of the fact that fifty million dollars had just recently been expended for their improvement. So now these remodeled camps sit empty and waiting, but for what?

The Choice goes on to tell us that a few months later the government reported that 500 sheep in Colorado were killed due to an accident in experiments with poisonous gases. Shortly thereafter, it was announced that the military had decided to terminate its experiments in this area and that all current stockpiles would be dumped in the ocean. But instead of going to the nearer Gulf of Mexico or the Pacific Ocean, the gas was transported, by train, over 2,200 miles to the east coast. During this trip thirty-seven stops were made for "repairs" and "safety checks," most of them in urban areas with large Black communities. In January, 1970, the United States Navy commissioned Purdue University to conduct a survey to determine public attitudes towards mass murders. In November, 1970, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence reported that research which it had initiated revealed that only eighteen percent of the American public would protest, even non-violently, the mass repression (arrest and imprisonment) of Black Americans, and only nine per cent would consider resisting with violence. The picture is now complete.

WHETHER OR NOT the reader is willing to accept the specific conclusions which Sam Yette has derived from these and many other facts is not really important. What is important is that the American public become aware of the pattern of decisions which are being made within the governmental-political superstructure. In a conscious and deliberate manner a choice has been made to foster racism, oppression, exploitation, and yes, even genocide. We know the Why and the How, but not the When. That is a choice which can be made only by the American public. The ultimate step will be taken only after the People have shown that they will allow it to be taken. The Choice is now ours.

MICHELE WASHINGTON