

Indigenous Depictions in Strategy Games: An Argument for Flavour

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ABSTRACT

Video games have often depicted clashes in history between western forces and indigenous inhabitants; typically conveying or favouring the perspective and history of the West. The presentation will argue for greater inclusion of indigenous history in video games because of the flavour and entertainment value that the history adds to the game, specifically in the context of historical strategy game. Games with substantial indigenous content have the potential to be used as tools for educating an audience on the different and diverse indigenous histories of the world and their past interactions with western nations.

Keywords

Indigenous, Grand Strategy, History, Education

INTRODUCTION

Video games have often depicted clashes in history between western forces and indigenous inhabitants; typically conveying or favouring the perspective and history of the West. The presentation will argue for greater inclusion of indigenous history in video games because of the flavour and entertainment value that the history adds to the game, specifically in the context of historical strategy game. Games with substantial indigenous content have the potential to be used as tools for educating an audience on the different and diverse indigenous histories of the world and their past interactions with western nations.

Amongst scholars there is often much discussion about the idea of one historical narrative or a universal discourse of history (Smith 1999: 30 - 31). For discussions involving colonialism, this is usually depicted from a Western perspective. Uricchio believes this also rings true in video games with history usually only reflecting a singular western narrative as opposed to histories told from many perspectives (Uricchio 2005: 335-336). Bembeneck builds on this idea and notes that in Roman society the term "barbarian" was used to describe those who were not Roman and highlights the notion of "Self" and "Others" (2013: 81-82). She illustrates how this Roman view of non-romans has permeated into games, which shows the Others/barbarians as people that have limited potential and as a blanket culture with no or little diversity. We can see a similar notion in the depiction of some of indigenous peoples in *Civilisation IV*, as the Native American and *Civilisation V*, as Polynesia, which are represented as blanket cultures with several peoples and cultures being grouped into one Civilisation (Firaxis Games 2005, Firaxis Games 2010). The game sees them as one homogenous nation or people rather than being represented as nations by

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themselves with their own unique history and culture. We should include and better depict the world's indigenous people in video games, not only because it is the 'right thing to do' or because of a more socially progressive notion, but rather it makes the game more exciting with more flavor and immersion. To have a blanket culture or nation only impedes what could otherwise be a more colourful, fuller and historically accurate experience.

Grand Strategy games, such as *Europa Universalis IV* (EU4), express similar western-centric themes like the *Civilisation* series, however in contrast to other strategy games, the history of some indigenous people are explored and told more thoroughly (Paradox Development Studio 2013). EU4 has unique indigenous-specific game mechanics that reflect the previous nomadic lifestyle of some Native American tribes, and the religious and apocalyptic aspects of the Aztec Empire (Paradox Development Studio 2013, Paradox Development Studio 2015). Moreover, historical events that affect indigenous people are also expressed in the form of pop-up boxes. However, even in EU4, models and depictions of certain indigenous cultures (such as indigenous Australians or the Maori) are not fully represented or have generic/incorrect cultural depictions that break the immersion of the game. A way to overcome this issue is by creating mods for the game such as the Indigenous People of Oceania mod which introduces many Pacific nations, histories and religions to the base EU4 game (Cosmosis7 2016). Inclusion of these nations and cultures provides opportunities to learn about histories we would not have otherwise known about.

BIO

Rhett Loban is an PhD student at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. His PhD thesis focuses on how Grand Strategy games could be used to assist in formal adult education.

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