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*Representation of Native Americans: From Literature to Video Games.*

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Abstract:  
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Native Americans have been an oppressed people since Columbian times, at the end of the fifteenth century. Even though indigenous cultures trace back further than the Neolithic period, the European colonisation brought about a threat to their way of life, traditions and culture; a threat that was later perpetuated in literature by means of the use of stereotypes and inaccurate misrepresentations, which, in turn, had a great influence on popular culture and, especially, on video games. The aim of this paper is to analyse how video games reinforce racial stereotypes, and how they can also be used to subvert such oversimplified conventions.

The first section of this master's thesis will briefly examine Native American history in order to contextualize the indigenous identity so as to reach a better understanding of the struggles Native Americans had to go through in colonial times exploring the assimilation and acculturation process they endured. We will continue to analyse how the Native American's portrayal shifts from reality in literature for political or entertainment reasons, with the appearance of racial stereotypes in literary texts, ranging from Columbus' letters and captivity novels to children's and contemporary fiction, with the subsequent film adaptations, such as *Peter Pan* or the *Twilight* saga. We will continue to analyse how the oversimplified conventions of the noble savage, the great warrior, the spiritual shaman and the pan-*Indian* construct created by mainstream white society gain strength in video games, providing a justification of the importance of video games within popular culture as an industry that reaches millions of people around the world which has a powerful potential to raise racial awareness but not always accounts for racial diversity and tolerance, as seen in successful franchises such as *Street Fighter* or *Tekken*. Titles like *Never Alone* and *Assassin's Creed III*, however, make use of this potential by means of faithful Native American portrayals.

To conclude, we will ascertain that, despite the high number of Native American misrepresentations in the industry, video games can help subvert racial issues, promoting diversity, equality and tolerance, which can be achieved by means of a racially inclusive and collaborative game creation process.

Keywords: Native American, Video games, Stereotypes, Race, Amerindian

# Representation of Native Americans: From Literature to Video Games.

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## **1. Introduction**

“We seldom realize, for example, that our most private thoughts and emotions are not actually our own. For we think in terms of languages and images which we did not invent, but which were given to us by our society” (Watts 53).

As British philosopher Alan Watts points out, we are not the sole creators of our own ways of thinking and perceiving the elements around us. Children start learning their mother tongue unconsciously at home, listening and repeating the same sounds they hear their parents say on a daily basis. Once they start attending primary school, certain roles and behaviour patterns begin to be imitated and tested out. As children grow up, they put into practice everything they have learnt, and, in turn, when they become adults they become a source of imitation and inspiration for others, perpetuating this cyclic chain.

In a similar fashion, knowledge has been passed down for generations throughout the centuries by all the means available at a particular time: oral tradition, literature, media, etc. As a result, by transmitting and acquiring knowledge in such ways, we are at times exposed and biased towards certain stances that are not always positive or accurate, stances that find their roots in outdated beliefs that no longer apply to the twenty first century individual.

Whether it is the role of women in a patriarchal society, the position of a predominant culture or race above a suppressed one, or the supremacy of a sexual tendency over the rest, stereotypes have been both reinforced and subverted by tools as important as literature. This topic has been thoroughly discussed by authors such as Pierre Bourdieu, who defines this occurrence as symbolic violence: a subtle form of violence that is inherent in our society and that often goes unnoticed (1). This could be applied not only to gender issues but also to all forms of inequality that have been reinforced over generations in a very subtle way.

The information and images we are exposed to on a daily basis play a key role in the eradication or perpetuation of these prejudices, and, bearing in mind that we live immersed in the digital era, we cannot overlook the importance that lies in mass media and, especially, in the world of entertainment regarding this matter. Mainstream media is known to have been used as a communication device that also reinforces racial stereotypes in, at times, a negative way. This has led to the justification of certain groups

being relegated to a low position in the racial hierarchy, and the Native American people is no exception.

Although often dismissed because of their violent nature, video games and computer games might in fact prove a very efficient tool to overcome these traditional stereotypes and to reinforce positive values and equal rights to all human beings, even though this is not always the case. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to analyse how video games emphasize racial stereotypes and also how they can be used as a tool to subvert them and to promote racial awareness, focusing on the often-stereotyped representation of the Native American people in video games for the last decades. In order to do so, we will provide a historical context of the Native American people, which sets the grounds for the origin of stereotypes in literature that will later on permeate popular culture. Special attention will be paid to how the depiction of indigenous people reach the video game industry, accounting for both accurate and oversimplified examples of successful video game franchises.

## **2. It is not a New World: Diversity within Native Americans**

In order to understand the representation of the Native Americans in literature and popular culture, we need to examine their history from a subjective perspective that will allow the detachment from the predominant culture point of view.

The Native American people had been around long before the Friday morning of August 3, 1492, when the Italian adventurer Christopher Columbus set on his quest to find a new way to sail from Europe to Asia in order to open up a shorter trade route. In fact, Native American cultures could be traced further back than the Neolithic period, and scholars such as Willey and Phillips have established five stages to distinguish different Native American cultures through time and space (75).

STAGE	CHARACTERISTICS	CULTURES
<b>Lithic stage</b>	There is a predominance of big-game hunting and it can be traced back to before 8000 BCE in some specific places. The	Clovis culture and Folsom tradition groups.

	Paleo-Indians arrived inhabited the Americas around 16,500 BCE.	
<b>Archaic stage</b>	The hunting lifestyle disappearance eventually lead to the gathering of resources. Archaic cultures are dated from 8000 to 1000 BCE approximately.	Archaic Southwest, Arctic small tool tradition, Poverty Point culture and Chan-Chan culture.
<b>Formative stage</b>	The development of technologies such as pottery, weaving and food production begin to appear. People start to be socially organised in permanent towns and villages that are highly dependent on agriculture. Dated from 1000 BCE to 500 CE.	Dorset culture, Zapotec civilization, Mimbres culture, Olmec, Woodland, and Mississippian cultures.
<b>Classic stage</b>	Cultures begin to be more specialized in their crafts and metallurgy emerges. As the Classic stage approaches its early civilization status, ceremonial centres start to be used and theocracy is developed. Dated from 500 to 1200 CE.	Maya and Toltec cultures.
<b>Post-Classic stage</b>	The also known as Pre-Columbian cultures have fully developed metallurgy. Their social organisation is more complex and elements such as urbanism and militarism, as well as an ideological secularization, are present in this stage that is dated from 1200 CE until the European colonisation.	Late Maya and Aztec cultures.

Fig. 1. Native American stages and cultures.

By the time Christopher Columbus landed in what he thought were the Indies, on October 12, the Amerindians and their ancestors had inhabited this so-called “New World” for over 50,000 years, ever since they moved from Asia to America during the last ice age. They were scattered in tribes across the grasslands and forests of what is now known as the United States and Canada, as shown in the following map, leading different lifestyles and speaking over three hundred separate languages.



Fig. 2. Tribal locations prior to European contact.

The Amerindian people have very often been reduced to oversimplified and inadequate stereotypes by the so called civilized cultures, especially in popular culture, which describe them as savages and warlike. However, their development throughout time and the existing cultural differences amongst their own tribes account for their complex identity. After the first hunters from Siberia crossed the bridge into Alaska they moved south and east across America, evolving from wandering hunting tribes to gatherers of food and even further into a more settled way of life. This change was made possible due to the seeds found in the highlands of what is now known as Mexico, thus allowing Native Americans to farm the land.

The evolution and complexity of the Amerindians reached its peak in organisation with the Pueblo people of present day Arizona and New Mexico, who lived in organised towns with buildings made of adobe bricks that could hold up to eight hundred rooms. The Pueblo people learnt how to make clothes out of the cotton that grew in the surrounding deserts, which led to the appearance of the iconic boot-shaped leather moccasins, which has since then become a very recognisable sign in most current stereotypes. However, the fact that they built networks of canals across the deserts to

bring water to their fields is not something that popular culture would typically associate with Native Americans.

Although the Pueblo people are, in fact, far from the warlike and fierce stereotype of Native American tribes, there were other coetaneous tribes that did fall into this category. The Apache wandered the mountains and deserts in bands, and besides hunting and gathering food, they also raided their neighbour tribe, the Pueblo.

The Iroquois lived far away from these two tribes, inhabiting the woods of north-eastern North America. Very much like the Pueblo people, they based their lifestyle on hunting and fishing, creating birch bark canoes for this endeavour. They were fierce warriors, and as such they usually built fences around their villages to increase their defences.

The Sioux, another Native American tribe, depended completely on the buffalo, which wandered across the western grasslands, for their way of life. Unlike the Pueblo or the Iroquois, they were nomadic people, as they had to follow the herds of buffalo in order to survive, which meant that they had to take down their tepees, another iconic element of the Native American culture, within hours.

By briefly analysing the above-mentioned tribes and their ways of life, it is easy to notice that the American peoples of North America adjusted to the natural environments in which they lived, thus creating significant differences between one another. However, the arrival of Europeans would eventually destroy most of them. As a result of the hunger for wealth and land, by the seventeenth century, plenty of Europeans were ready to settle in America in order to become rich by doing so, or to find safety from religious and political reasons. It was with the arrival of the first European settlers that the processes of acculturation and assimilation began in America.

## **2.1 Unwanted visitors and Colonisation**

Bearing in mind the Native American historical context, we must also consider their struggle to survive conquests, relocations and organized efforts to eradicate the native cultures in order to understand how the process of indigenous stereotyping began.

In the early seventeenth century, not so long after the arrival of the sailors sent by the Virginia Company, the first lasting English settlement, Jamestown, was established.

However, and despite the efforts of the joint stock company, the colonists went through a period of hardship in which they suffered diseases, starvation and Amerindian attacks. Nevertheless, more settlers continued to arrive in an attempt of the Virginia Company to make a profit out of the colonies, sending to the newly discovered land children and convicts. The settler's unfavourable conditions began to improve once they learnt how to dry and grow tobacco leaves, more workers began to be sent to the colonies and a more organised and established way of living emerged with the appearance of the House of Burgesses, but, eventually, the English government dismissed the Virginia Company and took over the control of the Virginia colony, and despite the heavy Amerindian attacks in 1622, Virginia survived.

With the arrival of the Puritans in the Mayflower, the Boston settlement began to take form as the Native Americans helped the Pilgrims overcome the poor weather conditions and the lack of food, thus proving that not all tribes were fierce and warlike. This allowed the Boston settlement to grow and it eventually lead to their combination with the Plymouth colony under the name of Massachusetts. By the end of the seventeenth century, a significant number of English colonies stretched along the east coast of North America during what is known as the tidewater period of settlement.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, settlers started to move deeper into the continent, spreading west through central Pennsylvania and north along the valley of the Mohawk River of New York. Settlers would cut their way through forests, clearing the land of trees further in order to own more land, until they reached the forest homelands of the Native Americans and what is called the frontier. As the settlements kept spreading, the frontier was pushed further back, and while they colonies were fighting for independence and the ownership of land, the Native Americans had to fight a war of their own that would save them from extinction.

## **2.2 Broken treaties and civilization for survival**

Amerindians who already lived in lands north of the Ohio river saw the new settlers as intruders and thieves who had come to threaten their way of life. As a consequence, they perpetrated fierce attacks on their farms and settlements. However, armed with axes and guns, the settlers would fight back with violence, sometimes even destroying entire Amerindian villages that had been there for centuries.

In an attempt to keep the peace, the new government of the United States tried at first to make treaties with the Amerindians, trying to ensure that they were treated fairly with the Northwest Ordinance Law of 1787, which said that lands and properties would never be taken from the Amerindians without their consent, and that their rights and liberty would never be disturbed.

However, not much later, President James Monroe considered their way of life barbaric and therefore demanded that if they did not abandon the land and become civilized, extinction would soon fall upon them. According to O'Callaghan, Monroe thought that the only way for the Native Americans to survive was to move further west from the land that was required by the white colonists (36). There, Amerindians would be free to live undisturbed by the settlers, continuing their traditional way of life or adopting that of the colonists.

As a result, the Indian Removal Act was passed by the United States government in 1830, which stated that all Indians living east of the Mississippi River had to be moved west to what was known as Indian Territory, a land unsuitable for farming that no settlers wanted. Although it has been perceived by some as a way to save the Amerindians, others have claimed that it was, in fact, a legal strategy to get rid of them and take hold of the land.

Thus, the process of assimilation and acculturation began to take place, forcing Amerindian tribes such as the Cherokees to change themselves into civilized community by the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Cherokees took possession of large farms and started to live in a European style, their houses, their school and their religion changed to mimic that of the white settlers.

However, this was not enough to keep the Cherokees safe, for Congress declared that their lands belonged now to the state of Georgia, which forced the tribe to move even further to what is now the state of Oklahoma. The Cherokees took several cases to the United States Supreme Court, and even though they won some of them, such as the case against the missionary A. Worcester, the Cherokees were forced to leave their lands. According to Thornton, as many as 100,000 Amerindians were removed from eastern homelands to places west of the Mississippi River during the first half of the nineteenth century after the passage of the United States Removal Act in one of the toughest episodes of Native American history, which is now known as the Trail of Tears (289). The Trail



of Tears lasted for five months, and by the time it was over, a quarter of the whole Cherokee nation (4,000 individuals) had died.

As the settlers kept spreading across the Great Plains, Amerindians who had lived in the land for hundreds of years suffered the consequences. With the development of the railroads and the trains, settlers kept pushing the boundaries and interceding with the tribes' way of life. In the 1840s, trains heading for Oregon and California began to cross the Great Plains, invading the Sioux hunting grounds. Although they tried to live together in peace, soon they realised it was not possible. Forced by their poor circumstances, the Amerindian tribes such as the Pawnee, the Dakota, the Sioux or the Comanche started to sign treaties which would grant them peace in exchange of pieces of land.

Nonetheless, these treaties were often broken, and the Amerindian's land were yet again taken away from them. Such is the case of the Fort Laramie treaty of 1868, which declared that the land between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains belonged to the Sioux. Six years later, upon finding gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota, the treaty was broken, and miners were allowed to enter the Black Hills.

Having land taken away from them was not the only difficulty that Native Americans had to struggle with as the colonisation process kept developing. The buffalo were starting to disappear as their natural habitat was destroyed by the settlers and they were hunted for their skin and for sport, encouraged by the American army. In a way, the destruction of the buffalo meant that the Amerindian way of life would also come to an end, thus clearing the land sought by the white settlers.

The situation of the Native American tribes worsened as more settlers claimed territories in the West, forcing them to leave their wandering way of life and sending them onto reservations, dry and rocky areas that were not wanted by the colonists. Although the Amerindians resisted this new attack, they were soon outnumbered in men and weaponry. They managed to win some victories, such as the Battle of the Little Big Horn in June 1876, killing all 225 men of a company of the United States cavalry and their commander, George Armstrong Custer.

The American government, humiliated and angry due to the victory of the Sioux and the Cheyenne, sent more soldiers against the starving, ill and weak tribes, which meant they had to surrender and march away to the reservations. By 1890, the Amerindians had nothing left except the reservations.

Reservations were places of suffering where Amerindians had to endure the shortage of food, materials to build their homes and to cultivate the land despite the promises made by the United States government. Although the Amerindians confined in the reservations tried to protest in peaceful ways through ritual dances and ceremonies, they were always dismissed by the government as their concern increased. Protest leaders were arrested, and the tribes had to give up their arms, which they only waved up in the air.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a group of 350 Sioux left their reservation at Pine Ridge, led by the chief Big Foot, to set off to join another group for safety, but they were stopped by the soldiers, who shot men, women and children and destroyed most of the Sioux in what is known as the Wounded Knee Battle. This event marked the dismissal of any hope the Amerindians would hold to return to their traditional way of life.

According to scholars such as Matte, the survival of the Amerindian tribes depended almost exclusively upon the adjustment to white man's civilization, but this was an extremely difficult and painful process for the Native Americans used to the nomadic way of life that involved cultural aspects such as buffalo-hunting and scalp-lifting (2). Nonetheless, the Sioux did survive.

Conditions seem to improve by the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1924 Congress passed the Indian Citizen Act, which recognized Amerindians as full citizens of the United States and gave them the right to vote, and in 1934 the Indian Reorganization Act encouraged them to set up their own councils to deal with the affairs of their own reservations. But this only left room for the Native Americans to adjust to the new so-called civilized way of life that most Americans led, in which they had better life conditions in terms of education, health and wealth.

O'Callaghan argues that the rate of unemployment amongst the Amerindians was 39%, and 25% of the Amerindian families had to survive with incomes that were too low to meet their basic daily needs of food, clothing and housing. On top of this, diseases and alcohol addiction were killing twice as many Amerindians as other Americans (69).

As a result of this poor conditions, Amerindians from all over the United States of America joined and formed the American Indian Movement, and together they marched to Washington in order to protest in the Trail of Broken Treaties and they also

occupied the small South Dakota village that stands on the grounds where the Battle of Wounded Knee took place in order to draw attention to their demand for the return of the lands that had been forcefully taken from them.

The most important compensation was the one Amerindians achieved thanks to the Sioux who sued the United States government for breaking the old treaties. They demanded the Black Hills back and the courts ruled in their favour, granting them \$122.5 million in compensation for the loss of their land. However, many of them did not want to accept the money as what they longed for was their land and a come back to their old ways of life.

### **2.3 Assimilation and acculturation of the Native American people**

George Washington, considered the first President of the United States of America, established many of the protocols for the office and also set the basis for the federal Indian policies. He approached the Native Americans as a group of vanishing people who were bound to disappear in the United States due to starvation, migration or assimilation. Together with military officer Henry Know, he promoted the Americanization policies which hoped that when the Native Americans learnt the American customs and values, they would be able to merge their traditions with the American culture and thus join and be a part of the society. However, by the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the government forbade the practice of traditional religious ceremonies and started their efforts to ensure assimilation of the Native American people would take place.

Since the early days of colonisation, the white settlers have striven to ensure that all Native Americans are educated, civilized and Christianized, but despite this fact, Amerindians are still looked upon by white population as members of an inferior category.

According to Beatty, the cultural and physical differences between people from different races and cultures make the dominant group feel uncomfortable, therefore, Amerindians who lived in houses that were perceived as similar to our own, who accepted our sanitary standards, dressed and spoke like us, and used a similar monetary system, were more likely to feel at ease with the rest of Americans (397).

In his article, Beatty also analyses how the process of assimilation begins with the physical relationships between white settlers and Native American women. Either because in some cases they were not so different to the colonists in terms of physical appearance or because their physical and personality traits attracted the settlers, Native Americans and settlers began to have relationships which resulted in the birth of a new generation of mixed-race offspring. Having a parent that belonged to the dominant culture, these children were not looked upon in such a negative manner and therefore began to adopt a different role to that of the original Native Americans.

It is clear, then, that the processes of assimilation and acculturation arise when two different cultures come in contact, each with their separate set of cultural beliefs, ways of life, languages, preferences... It is then that one of the cultures, in this case the Native American culture, is assimilated by the dominant one, the American. However, a more structured approach to assimilation and acculturation is necessary in order to understand Native Americans' history.

In his article, Roy proposes a three-step process that can be broken down into:

1. Acculturation
2. Social integration
3. Amalgamation

Roy defines acculturation as the simple adoption of white culture traits by the Native Americans that would provide them with social prestige amongst the predominant culture (543). Within this category, he focuses on the socioeconomic status which comprehends education, level of living and occupation.

He goes on to argue that the acquisition of traits that give social prestige does not automatically provide social acceptance. In terms of social integration, the fact that Native Americans had to endure a physical separation from the colonists (for they lived in reservations) enhanced the social segregation. This meant that Native Americans could not be a part of the same social groups as the whites, and therefore their social integration had to be measured according to their participation in all the non-Indian formal organizations available, and also those organizations within the reservations where there was presence of white Americans.

Amalgamation or miscegenation has to do with the family lines of the Native Americans as it leads to different self-conceptions and evaluations. This is related to how Native American blood lines could be traced back to a mixture of *Indian*-white in the reservations in some cases, as Beatty's article, mentioned above, explores. This awareness of ancestry and self-conception lead, in turn, to different behaviour patterns in the Native American communities.

Roy concludes with four assumptions that must be taken into account regarding acculturation (544). The first one, implies that the acquisition of cultural traits (also known as acculturation) is necessary but not enough in its own to for social integration to take place. The second assumption assumes that the smaller society, in this particular case the Native Americans, will be assimilated into the dominant culture, the white Americans, without causing a significant impact on the traits of the said culture. The third assumption states that acculturation and assimilation are not synonyms, but rather, acculturation is only a part of the assimilation process that can, indeed, lead to the assimilation of the smaller culture, although this does not always necessarily happen. Lastly, Roy emphasizes the idea that the process analysed in his study is concerned mainly with the assimilation of a whole group and not an individual. Thus, the timeline of the process would be as follows:

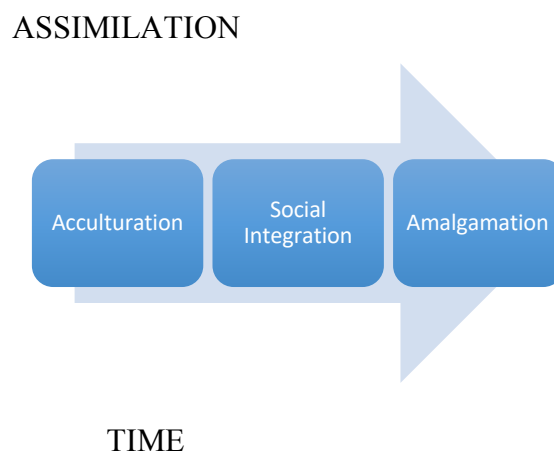


Fig. 3. Assimilation process timeline.

Within the acculturation process, education played a role of the utmost importance. Indigenous children were removed from their families and communities and were forced into institutions where teachers and officials tried their best to teach them the white American way of living and thinking, and it is important to bear in mind that without this process, assimilation would not have been possible the way we know it. The

process of acculturation resulted in the destruction of families and caused social drinking problems within the indigenous community.

According to Ellinghaus, however, the assimilation policies adopted by the United States were slightly more generous than others taking place at the time, for example in Australia (567). Ellinghaus argues that white Americans assumed that in most cases, Native American children could return to their homes after their education had finished, and they were somewhat hesitant to take complete legal control of indigenous children. White American assimilation policies, as opposed to Australian ones, did not focus overtly on the biological absorption of mixed-raced children.

Nevertheless, as well-intended as these actions might seem, the quality of the education offered to Native American children were far below the education standards provided to white Americans. Education was mainly aimed towards farming, labouring and domestic service. There were very few students who would graduate from these government funded institutions, and many suffered under the oppression of an educational system that was extremely disciplined and whose goal was to remove any traditional cultural background.

Davis explains that through boarding schools, reformers, educators and federal agents declared war on the Native American students' cultural, psychological and intellectual identities in an attempt to turn them into "white" Americans (20). Their hair was cut and their dresses changed; they were no longer allowed to follow their traditional diets and they had to adopt an American name. Even the notion of time was expected to be changed. Their tribal languages and religion, important signs of their cultural identity, were threatened by the imposition of the English language and Christianity.



Fig. 4. Sioux boys arrive at the Carlisle School, October 5, 1879.

Although most indigenous children were not believed capable of achieving higher education, those who indeed finished their acculturation process were expected to return to their communities in order to further extend the process of assimilation by teaching their own families and community what they had learnt in these institutions.

Despite the strong attempts made by the United States government and the federal boarding school system, which for many indigenous children meant the first separation from their families and their first confrontation with the American system of rules, regulations and values, many believe that, in fact, the United States government failed. Instead, the assimilation policies are believed to have inadvertently continued and reinforced the formation of a Native American identity.

McBeth argues that despite the negative effects that boarding schools had on indigenous children, they accomplished their short-term goals of teaching them English and instilling a work ethic amongst the children, while unconsciously fostering an ethnic unity that might not have been possible in the public-school system (123). According to McBeth, this was made possible thanks to three different factors:

1. Visiting by family members: Although boarding schools were designed to be geographically far away from the children, the situation in Native American territory was not so. This allowed students to be close to their families, especially in the western section of the United States where there was a heavy concentration of Native American people. Typically, indigenous children would go back to their families on Saturday and not return to school until Monday in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This physical link to their cultural roots was also made possible due to the frequent illegal trips home, and it meant that tribal identity survived in this setting.
2. Segregation: Although the goal of boarding schools was to assimilate the Native American children, this process took place within a segregated environment in which indigenous children were kept separate from their white American peers. Some of the few positive experiences accounted for in McBeth's interviews with Native Americans have to do with the close bond that was created amongst tribal and intertribal groups, especially in the Oklahoma region, thus reinforcing and maintaining tribal identity throughout the assimilation process.

3. Government obligations to Indian People: the boarding school system was soon associated with government obligations to Indian people, who were set apart as citizens to whom the federal government owed special rights and obligations. The schools were and are still now controlled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and therefore it represents government control of the Native American people, emphasizing their sense of community.

Scholars like McBeth conclude that the response of the Native American people to the boarding schools and the United States government's attempt to assimilate them into mainstream white American culture is characteristic of their adaptive nature. By re-directing the devices of control imposed on them by the predominant society, the Native American heritage has persevered and strengthened.

### **3. Literature as the origin of stereotypes for Native Americans**

Bearing in mind the complex historical context of a nation that struggled in order to keep hold of its own identity despite assimilation efforts made by the United States government, we can now analyse the portrayal of the Native American people in nineteenth and twentieth century white society. The image of the Native American people has been distorted in mainstream literature and popular culture, reducing it to an oversimplified and unrealistic portrayal that is far from the truth.

The Cambridge Dictionary of English defines the word stereotype as a set idea that people have about what someone or something is like, especially an idea that is wrong.<sup>1</sup> More often than not, Native Americans are represented as tokens of the past, depicted in a simplistic way by those who are unaware of their tribal customs and therefore display a lack of respect for such an important part of America's history.

It is hard to define what a Native American is, what they look like, the way they speak or behave. This is due to the fact that there is not a single definition or portrayal that would fit the large number of tribes which inhabited the "New World" and continued to do so long after the first settlers arrived into America. The concept of Native American cannot be overgeneralized and applied to every single tribe, even less to every single

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<sup>1</sup> "Stereotype." *Cambridge Dictionary*. Cambridge University Press, 2017. *Cambridge Dictionary*. [dictionary.cambridge.org/es/diccionario/ingles/stereotype](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/es/diccionario/ingles/stereotype). Accessed Oct. 4 2017.



individual, for, even though they are usually grouped as one single people, each tribe celebrates their own culture based on their tribal beliefs and heritage.

Whenever most people are asked about the indigenous people of North America, the first picture that comes to mind is that of a savage and warlike individual who wears loincloths, feathers in the head, and uses a tomahawk as a weapon to inflict damage on white people or even on other tribes. This description leaves only room for a role that is inaccurate, outdated and irrelevant in our society nowadays. But, how is it possible that this stereotyped vision of the Native Americans has remained almost unaltered over the centuries? Despite the efforts of writers and activists, this racist misrepresentation of the Native American people has been perpetuated throughout the centuries, and literature has served as one of the means to keep the stereotypes alive.

Very much like it happens with gender issues, literature has the power to subvert or reinforce cultural stereotypes by means of the narrative discourse. Naturally, there is a tendency in literature promoted by contemporary writers to vanish unfair depictions and to portray the indigenous culture as it really was and is. Nonetheless, the insensitive stories that have been told over generations have found their way into popular culture, including video games, which is why we can trace back the origins of these misconceptions to literature. In order to observe and analyse the depiction of Native Americans in literature, we will focus on three different categories:

- Early depictions of the Native Americans and captivity novels
- Children's literature
- Contemporary literary fiction

### **3.1 Early depictions of the Native Americans and Captivity Novels**

According to Cotton, literature addressing Amerindians date back as far as the late fifteenth century (3). The oldest recollection of the Native Americans came by the hand of those European explorers who first set foot on America in the form of narratives and letters in which they described their travels and discoveries in order to report to the monarchs who allowed and funded their expeditions. Due to the reporting nature of their writings, those letters were often idealised and somewhat unfaithful to reality. The political influence was, therefore, very present in early American literature, frequently

shaped by the political views of the crown, as the explorers needed to justify their expensive travels in order to receive funding for future expeditions.

In fact, Christopher Columbus was one of the first people to ever write about tribal life in the “New World” in his letter, printed in 1493, when he described the Tainos tribe, referring to them as innocent, friendly and naked creatures which lived in an exuberant landscape full of life and unspoilt vegetation. This first image of tribal life is characterized by the docility of its individuals, conveying the idea of the noble savage, which seemed very fitting bearing in mind the prospects of conversion to Catholic Christianity, but Columbus also mentioned unfounded rumours of man-eating tribes who inhabited the area.

The letter, translated into several languages, served as a vehicle to spread the news about his voyage throughout Europe within the first year of his arrival. This first literary piece serves as a good example of how literature can be used, bent and shaped for political reasons, as Columbus was hoping for a second expedition to be funded.

Giovanni Verrazano was chosen by King Francis I of France to lead the expedition sent out to discover the area between Florida and Newfoundland in hopes of finding a new route to China. Verrazano touched land at Cape Fear, where he had an encounter with the Native Americans which produced the first description of indigenous life within what is now known as the United States, by 1524. He also described them as naked people who only covered their private parts with beasts’ skin. For the first time the portrayal of the indigenous people wearing garlands of bird’s feathers appear in literature. Verrazano also described their physical characteristics: dark skin, black hair and black eyes. He goes on to describe them as great runners, with strong arms and legs which allowed their athletic nature, a description which seems to fit the long-lasting Native American conventions.

One of the most important recollections of indigenous life and people in the “New World” is the one provided by historian and writer Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, who took part in the Spanish colonization of the Caribbean. Although only a small fragment of his work was published for three centuries, it was widely read by a vast public of avid readers who wished to know more about life in America, which is why it was successfully translated into Spanish, English and French in the sixteenth century.

In the first half of his *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*, Fernández de Oviedo focuses on a rather negative depiction of the Native Americans. Although scholars such as Santacruz justify the simplistic overview of the Native American identity accounted for in Fernández de Oviedo's work, based on the grounds of the propagandistic nature of the text and the writer's concern with Catholic conversion as well as his strong sense of nationalism, we cannot overlook the impact that his recollection of the Native Americans had, and continues to have, in mainstream society (23).

*Historia General y Natural de las Indias* is considered one of the most important primary literary sources about the Spanish colonization of the Caribbean, and yet, the narrative discourse dealing with the Amerindians is extremely hyperbolic, subjective and simplistic. Fernández de Oviedo focuses not only on their ugly and almost abominable physical appearance, but also on their vicious and idle nature. Heathen, clumsy, disgusting, shameful, dirty, criminal, ungrateful and uneducated are only some of the adjectives used by Fernández de Oviedo to depict the indigenous people's way of life, appearance and personality (134).

Such strong claim of the inferiority of the Amerindians in contrast to the supremacy of the white predominant European cultures has, no doubt, affected the stereotyped vision of indigenous life that has been perpetuated over the centuries.

Little by little, as indigenous writings began to emerge, the concept of the noble savage began to take form in American literature. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the noble savage, in literature, is an idealized concept of an uncivilized man who symbolizes the innate goodness of one not exposed to the corrupting influences of civilization.<sup>2</sup> This idealistic concept that seems to evoke no negative meaning was first used by Michel de Montaigne in his *Des Cannibales*, published in 1580, where he reports how the Brazilian tribe of Tupinambá eat their dead enemies' bodies in a ceremonious way to celebrate honour. For the sake of satire, Montaigne uses cultural relativism in a comparison that makes no distinction between sixteenth century Europeans and the cannibals depicted in his work.

The concept was further formalized and applied to American literature by John Dryden and his Restoration play, *The Conquest of Granada* (1672). We must bear in

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<sup>2</sup> "Noble Savage." *Enciclopedia Britannica*. Britannica, 2017. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. [britannica.com/art/noble-savage](http://britannica.com/art/noble-savage). Accessed Oct. 10 2017.

mind, however, that at the time, the word “savage” did not have the negative connotations that it does nowadays. It could, in fact, be understood as a synonym for the adjective “wild”.

Nonetheless, it was only twenty years since the Noble Savage concept was coined that a new one emerged: that of the bloodthirsty savage. Scholars such as Cotton believe that it was inspired by the recollections of Governor John White upon his return to the colony of Roanoke in 1590 (3). Roanoke was the first colony to be set up, off the coast of North Carolina in 1585. Still unknown circumstances caused the colonists to disappear in a mysterious way, which lead White to declare that the only plausible explanation had to do with the Native Americans. As a result of the events that took place in what is now known as the “Lost Colony”, the distrust of the Native Americans as well as their bloodthirsty nature began to settle in mainstream culture.

Even nowadays, the illogical and mysterious events that occurred in Roanoke keep inspiring new products for mass-media consumers who are avid to learn more about the legend of the “Lost Colony”, such as the *American Horror Story* TV series, produced by FX, which dedicated its 2016 series to strange events happening to a married couple living in a colonial house within the Roanoke grounds.



Fig. 5. Lady Gaga as Scáthach, in AHS: My Roanoke Nightmare

Another important element in the representation of the Native Americans in early American literature are the captivity narratives that sprouted at the end of the seventeenth century. The captivity narrative is not a genre that emerged for the first time in America, European adventurers from England, France, Portugal and Spain had already published important recollections of what was happening in the “New World”.

According to Professor Johnson in his article for Oxford Bibliographies, what has come to be considered the classic US captivity narrative derives from centuries of narratives describing encounters between European explorers and settlers and the Native peoples throughout the Americas. Professor Johnson explains that the most common formula is ideologically charged in relating the hardships of a colonial Euro-American woman who is been captured by the savage and cruel *Indians*. Throughout the narrative, the main Euro-American character's journey of captivity, escape or rescue and, in some cases assimilation, is accounted for by the author.<sup>3</sup>

Due to the enormous popularity at the time and the impact it had on future writers, Mrs. Mary Rowlandson's *Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682) could perhaps be the most important narrative of captivity. Rowlandson's narrative depicts the conventional plot structure and the associated stereotypes of savagery, civilization and feminine purity that fuels the action of the story. Rowlandson's *Sovereignty and Goodness of God: A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) also saw more than thirty editions published to meet the public's demand.

In her narratives, Rowlandson fosters negative indigenous stereotypes and includes several references to the Native Americans as barbaric, savage and deadly. At times, Rowlandson also describes the indigenous women as a fairly minor variation on normative English femininity, thus stepping aside the savage stereotype if only for a limited amount of time. Nonetheless, scholars such as Potter believe that Rowlandson's sense of superiority comes from a deeply ingrained sense of cultural privilege that, at the same time, is strongly tied to her strong identity as a puritan woman (156).

Rowlandson is able to make a comparison between Euro-American femininity and Native American femininity thanks to the character of Weetamoo, as well as a comparison of a religious nature that eventually leads Rowlandson to believe that the non-Christian indigenous culture was determined invalid by its ungendered social order, which served as a confirmation of the savagery of the tyrannical heathen she calls her captors (156).

*The History of Maria Kittle*, Ann Eliza Bleecker's epistolary novel, serves as another great example of captivity narrative. At the end of the eighteenth century, a time

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<sup>3</sup> "Captivity Narratives." *Oxford Bibliographies Online*, 2017. [oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199827251/obo-9780199827251-0115.xml#firstMatch](http://oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199827251/obo-9780199827251-0115.xml#firstMatch). Accessed Oct. 12 2017.

when captivity stories were becoming very popular, *The History of Maria Kittle* added on to the stereotyped vision that was widely spread around the world. In her novel, graphic scenes of violence in which the savage indigenous people kill both women and babies alike fuel the misconception and simplification of the Native American identity.

According to Rex, Bleecker's depiction of the Amerindians is no different from the ones provided by the afore-mentioned authors; for Bleecker, the figure of the *Indian* was a fraught one that could bring instability and also threaten the superiority of the Europeans (76). However, Bleecker also relies on the figure of the imagined *Indian* – an *Indian* created by the colonists' spectre of loathing and desire and which, in time, could serve both as a veil and a justification for her female character's inappropriate actions.

As she explains, the *Indian*, with his savage body and his incursion into the civilized world of the true woman, allowed for and even excuses the non-traditional behaviour of her feminine characters. In other words, the ambiguity of the Native Americans as imagined by the colonists, allowed for ambiguity in the interactions of the colonizers with him.



Fig. 6. *The Death of Jane McCrea*. John Vanderlyn (1804).

Although the early stage of American literature was not completely populated by stereotyped versions of the Native Americans, it is clear that from the first recollections of indigenous life in the fifteenth century up to the eighteenth-century captivity narratives, the Native American portrayal has served different purposes that have blurred their image and provided readers across the world with misconceived ideas that would also inspire

and set the grounds for future work on the matter, as nineteenth-century literature has, at times, followed the same patterns described above.

### 3.2 Children's Literature

Children's literature has always had the double role of entertaining and fostering different positive values in our society. As a result, the books that children read nowadays can have a powerful effect that will shape the concepts which will be further developed throughout their lives, making them a valuable tool to raise racial awareness, amongst other issues, from very early stages.

In a similar way as the misrepresentation of the Native American peoples had a major impact in the literary trends that followed after the eighteenth century, children's literature also played an important part when it comes to the creation and perpetuation of certain stereotypes attributed to the Native Americans.

From this very early stage, mainstream society is, perhaps subconsciously, perpetuating a wrong conception of what being a Native American truly is by means of images and simplistic stories. *My "i" Book* (1984), by Jane Belk Moncure, illustrated by Linda Hohag, shows a picture of an indigenous girl with tanned skin and black braided hair. In the cover, she is wearing a traditional robe and moccasins. The book, which is meant to guide children through their first steps towards reading, identifies the letter "i" with the word "Indian", which at the same time is corresponded to the above-mentioned picture of the *Indian* girl which is merely a pan-*Indian* construct created by the predominant culture.

By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, authors who intended their work to be read by younger audiences seemed to draw the same picture Jane Belk did in her *My "i" Book* (1984). Gary Paulsen, American writer of young adult literature who is well-known for his coming of age stories about the wilderness, has written over two hundred books dealing with this topic. Even though he received the Margaret Edwards Award from the American Library Association in 1997 for his lifetime contribution in literature for teenagers, his work is not deprived of Native American conventions.

One of his earliest novels, *The Night the White Deer Died* (1978), deals with a love story in which the main character, Janet, has a recurring dream in which an *Indian* shoots an arrow at a white deer while it drinks from a pool of water in the moonlight. Janet, who is one of the very few Anglo teens in the New Mexico colony, is drawn to Billy Honcho, an old, alcoholic *Indian* who she gets to know while the meaning of her nightmare becomes clear.

The description of the *Indians* in this coming of age novel is very stereotypical: the “brave” *Indian* warrior is armed with a shield and a fighting headdress, wearing no clothes but a breechclout. As Seale and Slapin explain, this stereotypical depiction of the brave warrior is further reinforced by the character of Billy Honcho, who turns out to be the young *Indian* in her dreams, depicted as a drunken individual who begs for money to tourists, who is incapable of uttering full sentences and sings Navajo chants while wearing traditional regalia (360). In this novel, full of traditional indigenous rituals and braided dark hair, conventions such as the noble savage, explained previously in this paper, are taken to young audiences who might have not experienced the Native American heritage in any other way, thus creating and promoting a false image that keeps permeating mainstream popular culture as well as literary works that are becoming more numerous and available for the public.

Another notable example is the story of *Peter Pan*, well-known to most people as it was taken to the big screen by Walt Disney in 1953. It was originally created by J.M. Barrie for the homonymous play in 1904. The play, which achieved great success, was later on transformed into a novel which was published in 1911. One of the most endeared creations of J.M. Barrie was the island of Neverland, populated by pirates and indigenous people who he described as savages and lonely liars. This stereotyped vision is further reinforced by the Red Indians’ behaviour, who always lay their ears to the ground, yell and prepare to scalp people.

The “Piccaninny tribe” communicate in pidgin, a language that is grammatically simplified which includes elements of other languages which is, to put it simply, hard to understand. There is an important character in the story that seems to embody most of the Native American stereotypes: Tiger Lily, who even smokes from the peace pipe and submits herself to Peter once she has been rescued.



It is easy to understand that such stereotypes were spread during the beginning of the twentieth century, for Barrie only followed the trends in literature and the mainstream white society in which he lived. However, it is important to notice how seemingly small and unimportant details such as the ones described before can have a long-lasting effect in our society, which is perfectly exemplified by Disney's adaptation of the story.



Fig. 7. Native American portrayal in Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953).

In the Disney film, the stereotypes are taken a step further, allotting the indigenous tribe with red-faces, feathers and broad noses. For the sake of entertainment, several songs were included in the film, and yet they seem to reinforce the misconceptions previously discussed as the *Indian* chief explains to the educated English kids, while the rest of the tribe plays the drums, that their faces are red as the result of blushing for an awkward situation. The Disney film adaptation has also been re-adapted into musical plays that are performed around the world.

Another novel that is very much loved by the readers but not so much by the Native American people is Lynne Reid Banks' *The Indian in the Cupboard* (1989), which has sold over ten million copies over the world and, like *Peter Pan*, was adapted as a children's film in 1995. In the novel, the Native American presence is embodied by a miniature toy, thus objectifying the individual, who is described as an Iroquois warrior. However, the warrior is simply dressed as a plains *Indian* chief, with an eagle feather headdress. Once again, this caricature is deprived of a proper language and therefore the toy can only communicate with grunts and partial sentences while, as pointed out by Cadwell-Wood and Mitten, he is manipulated by a more powerful white child who holds control of the naïve *Indian* toy (26).

As Cadwell-Wood and Mitten explain, it is obvious that not all the children's books which deal with Native American characters are harmful due to the misrepresentations that plague them, but there is an urgent need to call out on those stories, especially those belonging to the fiction genre, which provide a dehumanizing picture of the indigenous people of America, and also to make more visible those stories which are in fact accurate and entertaining while they subvert oversimplification and promote cultural diversity and respect while raising racial awareness (27). In their article, Cadwell-Wood and Mitten provide a thorough reading list of books to avoid as well as recommended titles.

### **3.3 Contemporary literary fiction**

This overview of the depiction of Native American stereotypes in the last five centuries leads us to contemporary literary fiction, a genre which has been greatly influenced by some of the works analysed in this paper.

When talking about popular culture and contemporary literary fiction, we cannot help to mention Stephenie Meyer's best-seller, the *Twilight* saga, which has sold over one hundred million copies ever since the first instalment was published in 2005. The vampire-themed fantasy-romance novels have gained an immense popularity and commercial success around the world since they were released, especially amongst young adults, and they hold the record of being the biggest selling novels in 2008, having been translated to over 28 languages.

The saga follows the steps of Bella Swan, a teenager from Phoenix who goes to live with his father in Washington, when she is drawn to a mysterious young man, Edward Cullen, only to find out that he is in fact member of a vampire family. Throughout the novels, Bella's relationship with Edward develops into complicated events involving evil vampire covens, childbearing, and a love triangle that leads us to the characters this paper is concerned with: Jacob Black and his family.

Despite how popular the novels and the film adaptations of the saga have become, Meyer's work is in fact not inventive when it comes to the representation of the Native Americans, for she relies on well-worn stereotypes that have been used countless times. As Burke explains, Bella Swan's love interests are completely the opposite from each other, creating contrasting racial hyper masculine stereotypes (207). On the one hand,

Edward Cullen is represented as a sensitive and extremely attractive young man, with fair skin and good manners. He is mysterious and polite, a true gentleman who cares about the feelings of the young woman he loves.

On the other hand, Jacob Black belongs to the Quileute people, and he is also a werewolf. He represents an alternative to the artfully rich vampire, Edward Cullen, embodying the concept of “the other”, an exotic individual who displays warrior skills and whose skin and long hair are dark. The rest of his Native American friends are represented in a very similar way, and very much like Jacob, they usually go around with their chests bared, which provides some sort of exotic temptation for readers as we have already seen in the captivity novels previously mentioned. Once again, Meyer is providing readers with the created image of the Native American that is far from the truth, offering a mixture of the noble savage stereotype and the fierce savage, an individual who is at the same time sensitive and a dangerous warrior, naturally handsome and close to nature and the wilderness.

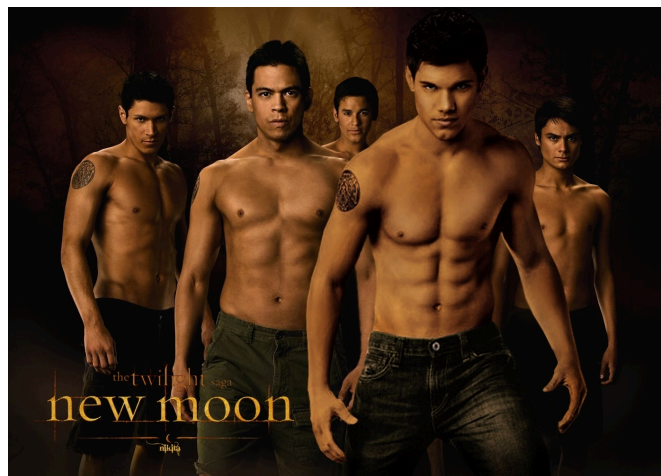


Fig. 8. Native American portrayal in the *Twilight* saga film adaptations (2008).

Scholars such as Burke determine that Jacob conforms to American stereotypes of Native Americans, and his characterization works towards the undermining of Native sovereignty and cultural survival, reinforcing existing stereotypes (208).

However, other scholars, such as Pearson, believe that, although not flawless, Meyer creates complex Native American characters that have been easily dismissed by the critics because of the themes included in the novels, often considered too girly or aimed for younger audiences. Pearson argues that Meyer offers a deep understanding of Quileute people, displaying values such as the strength and balance of their relationships,

a portrayal of how family life is on the reservation, and how the author avoids making the Quileute wolves into animalistic savages (8).

Nonetheless, if we pay close attention to the dichotomy analysed by Burke, it is easy to see that the representation of the vampire Edward Cullen is on the winning side. Whereas he is allotted European characteristic traits such as education, wealth and manners, Jacob is in fact depicted as partly an animal, for he becomes a wolf at will. It is true that both characters take part in fights, but the sensitive and romantic personality traits that Pearson describes as complex, are merely part of the American handmade conception of Native Americans.

Meyer's reiterations of the same patterns that have been portrayed in mainstream culture and media are undeniably undermining the work that Native peoples have done for centuries to change the negative and unrealistic images of the Native Americans that have worked as a mirror of the dominant society's anxieties and desires, which are often taken as the truth. Furthermore, as a result of the enormous success that the book saga had, these images have been even further reproduced by the Hollywood film industry.

The strong power and influence of literature and mass media when it comes to forging false images and reinforcing stereotypes has been thoroughly discussed and analysed over time. Luckily, this means that literature and mass media also have the power to raise racial awareness in an attempt to bring light into matters that have been unfairly portrayed. If we follow Cadwell-Wood and Mitten advise to choose realistic and non-biased pieces of work, we will be working towards building a common ground in which diversity of cultures and races can be fostered.

There are several authors who have written about the Native American's struggle to adapt into the new civilized way of life, respecting different perspectives and reinforcing values such as diversity and tolerance. Louise Erdrich is an American writer who focuses on Native American characters and settings, considered one of the most significant writers of the second wave of the Native American Renaissance. In her novel, *The Antelope Wife* (1998), she proposes a whole new definition of the Native American which focuses on survival and coexistence of indigenous people and white Europeans by means of overcoming social and cultural barriers, paying special attention to the issue of civilization. Through her character Matilda Roy, Erdrich explores the possibilities of an individual who has been raised under the influences of the indigenous people and the

white people, who attacked her village when she was a baby, forcing her to grow up as some sort of hybrid individual.

The antelope wife, who is a descendant of Matilda's, is similar to her in the sense that she is also a hybrid, as a result of her miscegenation. As Martinez explains, the antelope wife's portrayal is the result of the behaviour two male characters have towards her: the Native American Klaus Shawano, who wants to own her and possess her because he is in love with her, and Jimmy Badger, a traditional American who understands that she needs freedom if the community self-sustained system of cooperation and respect is to survive (335).

Throughout the contrast present in the novel, Erdrich favours integration and community life over individuality and spirituality over materialism. This theme is present in most of Erdrich's work, which led her to achieve a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction nomination in 2009 for her novel *The Plague of Doves*.

The role of the Native American woman has also been written about by other authors as important as Leslie Marmon Silko, a Laguna Pueblo writer who preceded Erdrich in the first wave of the Native American Renaissance. In her last novel, *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), Silko tells the story of a girl named Indigo, who sees the traditional way of life she has always known destroyed in the hands of the white settlers. Having her tribe reduced to the last surviving women of her family, she tries to survive in the desert until she has no choice but to move into town, where she is separated from her sister and made go to school. Upon trying to escape, she is rescued by a white woman, Hattie, who takes her with her around Europe. Hattie happens to be a rebel in her way, devoted to the study of the role of women.

The brilliance of this novel relies on the sisterhood of all the women present in it, whether they are Native Americans or not, with a vision of the world that unites them in their love for nature and away from men. Together, this diverse group of women enjoy their passion for nature and reminiscence of times before colonisation took place. As opposed to those who defined the Native American woman as a passive element, Silko proposes a new definition which embodies women with a voice and an active identity.

The generalisation of the identity of women is therefore subverted through these texts, in such a way that every woman is a unique individual which is unable to fit into stereotypical moulds, in the same way that the word "*Indian*" or the expression "Native

American” cannot work as a container which identifies all the different indigenous tribes as the same. At the same time, the voice of the Native American woman is given back outside the patriarchal world that characterized the colonisers’ paradigms.

The high number of Native American images, either in literary works or in other forms of popular culture, are sometimes established as a faithful representation of reality for those who encounter them. Nonetheless, it is important to approach those images from a critical perspective since it has been proven that, in many cases, the representation of certain aspects is in fact promoted by those who have a particular goal which could be of a political or ideological nature, as it was the case of the representations of the indigenous people provided by the first colonists.

As a result, there is a growing need to tell which conceptualizations of reality are true and which are not, and also to promote ideas that reinforce cultural diversity and tolerance in hopes of subverting the stereotypical and simplified visions that have been plaguing mainstream society for centuries. This is the reason why the Native Americans have taken it upon themselves to take back the control of those misconceptions, and with the help of authors such as Silko and Erdrich, they support a more realistic representation of society in which all the differences present even within their own culture and tradition are welcome, thus fostering the racial awareness previously discussed.

#### **4. Popular culture and the role of video games**

As we have already established, the representation of the indigenous people has permeated every possible cultural aspect: from literary texts, to Hollywood films and eventually, video games.

The advances in information and communication technologies have changed the way knowledge and information are transmitted in the twenty-first century, making it more accessible and available for everyone, however, whenever we talk about mass media and popular culture in relation to history, culture and especially literature, we often think of literary works that have been adapted to the screen: Jane Austen novels, Shakespearean plays and Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories to name but a few. The subject of popular culture adaptation and appropriation has been long and thoroughly discussed by scholars all over the world who relentlessly try to determine whether it should be approached as a cultural degradation or, perhaps, as a sign of democratization.

The definition of mass and popular culture is born by comparison and contraposition to that of high culture, which involves any cultural product of aesthetic value considered as art by a group of people often linked to a higher social position. However, as time went by and new forms of media emerged, what was considered high culture by certain strata of society often described as elitist, found its way into popular culture, which made it more accessible for individuals as art forms were now not only dependant on books.

For a better understanding of this dichotomy, we can resort to Dominic Strinati's work, where he makes a comparison between mass society and the atoms present in a chemical compound. As he explains, these atoms are individual elements which form a heterogeneous mix and therefore have no specific relation to one another or sense of community (5). According to Strinati, this lack of a sense of community allowed for the manipulation of its individuals by the creation of mass culture, a culture consumed by this collective of people due to the lack of morality often present in more homogenous and closed groups. According to Strinati, mass culture is not only created in order to control the people, but it is also a way of obtaining economic profits. He goes as far as to reduce it to a repetitive type of culture that only focuses on trifles and sentimentality, providing an immediate and false pleasure that is far from the one found in high culture.

As a relatively new form of entertainment, the role of video games in popular culture might seem difficult to discern. According to The Oxford Dictionary, modern popular culture is "based on the tastes of ordinary people rather than an educated elite", and the Cambridge Dictionary defines popular culture as "music, TV, cinema, literature, etc. that is popular and enjoyed by ordinary people, rather than experts or very educated people".<sup>4 5</sup> The definitions provided by these two dictionaries are in fact coherent with Strinati's ideas in the sense that popular culture is seemingly linked to the young and less educated and, therefore, the more easily influenced people.

Nevertheless, video gaming reached mainstream popularity in the 1970s and the 1980s, which means that the first generation of video gamers would now be in their forties and fifties, thus expanding the demographic that is included in the definition provided by

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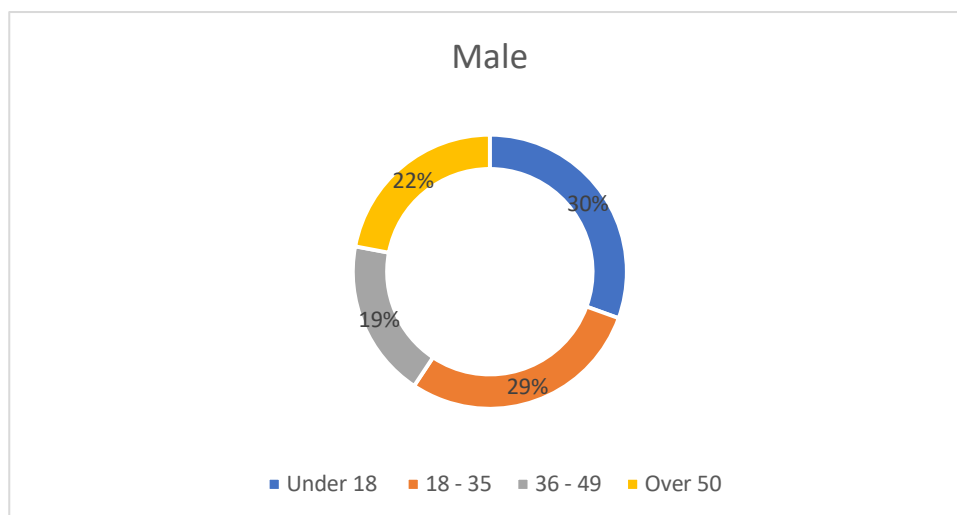
<sup>4</sup> "Popular Culture." *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, Oxford University Press, 2017. *Oxford Dictionaries*. [en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/popular\\_culture](http://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/popular_culture). Accessed Aug. 9 2017.

<sup>5</sup> "Pop Culture." *Cambridge Dictionary*. Cambridge University Press, 2017. *Cambridge Dictionary*. [dictionary.cambridge.org/es/diccionario/ingles/pop-culture](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/es/diccionario/ingles/pop-culture). Accessed Aug. 9 2017.

the Oxford and Cambridge dictionaries. It was in the 1980s that video games made a major impact on popular culture. As the number of players and video games increased, so did the number of elements that permeated other aspects of popular culture: videogame characters began to star TV shows and merchandising started to spread, thus leading to the acceptance of video games as a form of entertainment.

The Entertainment Software Association is a U.S. association devoted to serving the business and public affairs' needs of companies that develop video games, and it also works on demonstrating the positive impact of entertainment software in areas as important as education, health and workplace. According to the information provided by the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) in their 2017 Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry, 65% of U.S. households are home to at least one person who plays video games regularly (at least three hours per week), and 67% of U.S. households own a device used to play video games.

The total consumer spend on games industry ascends to a total of \$30.4 billion only in 2016, which proves the importance of video games in popular culture and its social impact, which gains strength every year. Contrary to what most people believe, video games are not just restricted to young male consumers, in fact, the ESA reports that the number of female and male players is equal, and it estimates the game player's age as the following charts illustrate:





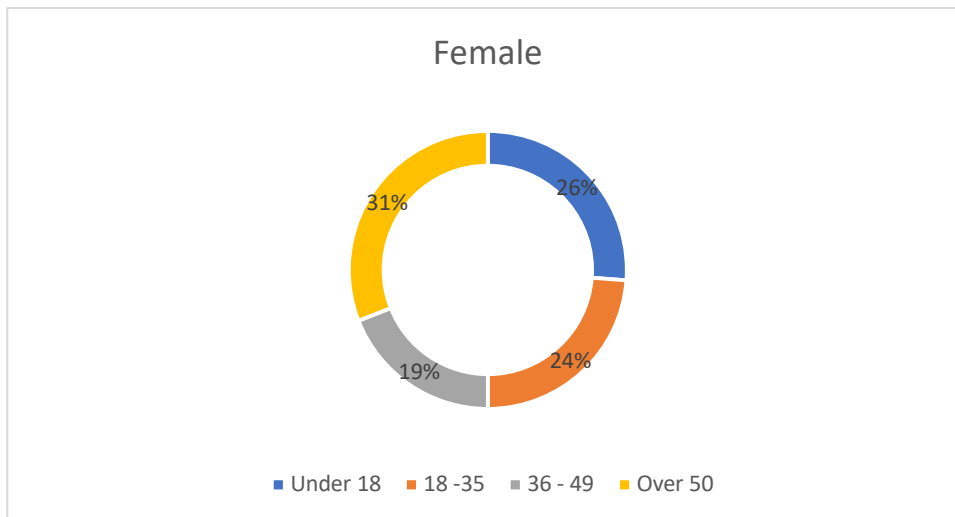


Fig. 9. Video game players' demographic.

After analysing this data, we can conclude that video games are, in fact, a very important form of entertainment in the twenty-first century that is not restricted to only the less educated or the young, and they play a very important role in society that is yet to be further exploited from a cultural perspective, for, as Fiske explains, video games are relevant and functional because their structure can be related to the social system, and playing them can therefore enact the social relations (140). In fact, as technology advances, online gaming is becoming more and more popular, setting aside the stigma of social isolation that is so often linked to video games.

Once the relevance of video games has been ascertained, taking the aforementioned ideas as a starting point and considering the heated debate on the matter of popular culture and the role of video games, we must ask ourselves: if popular culture can in fact influence people, can it be used in order to subvert negative racial issues and raise racial awareness?

#### **4.1 Video games as a means to raise racial awareness**

There are many elements that make video games such a powerful and influential form of entertainment, and they are as diverse as the nature of the players who devote a significant amount of time to this interactive medium. Squire argues that video games elicit powerful emotional reactions in their players, such as fear, power, aggression, wonder or joy (1). According to him, video game designers evoke these emotions by

balancing a number of components such as the character's personalities, game rewards, obstacles, game narrative, competition with other humans, and opportunities for collaboration with other players, whether it is online or offline.

Furthermore, video game playing takes place in a rich socio-cultural context which is bound to make friends and families get together, allowing for debating and the sharing of ideas between both adults and teenagers. Video games can also work as an important input source to be exposed to, and as a force capable of spreading information and ideas, whether accurate or not, which is especially appealing to consumers due to interactive nature of video games which allows them to gain control over the medium, if we compare it to literature, for example.

As a consequence, there has been an increase of educational institutions that have included video games as part of their methodology, which is only the natural result of video games reaching mainstream popular culture. Studies that proved that video games improved children's learning began to appear, such as the one carried out by the Federation of American Scientists in 2006, which also determined that video games could improve analytical skills in children, strategic thinking, interpretative analysis, problem solving, plan formulation and execution, and adaptation to rapid change. These are undoubtedly positive skills that should be fostered for they help individuals become well-rounded and functioning citizens in our society and, according to the Federation of American Scientists and the Summit participants, there are many features of digital games which can also be exploited in order to tackle different social issues, covering subjects as important as gender, race or sexuality (4).

Nevertheless, when it comes to raising awareness of sociocultural aspects and not formal aspects of specific branches of knowledge, the range of video games that are capable of fulfilling this role throughout their narrative becomes wider, although not all video games can serve this purpose and the large number of violent video games available for the public partially clouds the true potential this industry has to encourage change towards a more tolerant and egalitarian society.

Some notable examples of popular video games that most parents dislike but children and teenagers seem to love are violent ones such as *Grand Theft Auto*, *Call of Duty*, *Halo*, *Gears of War*... The amount of aggressive and inappropriate content in such video games have often alarmed the public, afraid that in fact, negative values and violent

behaviour is being reinforced and fostered. The increasing number of rampage killers in the news in the past few years that are said to be fans of first person shooters seem to spread the belief that video games make people violent, and it is common to see the association between murderers and players in the media nowadays.

The controversial debate in the media is also backed up by associations as important as the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Paediatrics, which stand firmly against children and teenagers playing violent and aggressive videogames. The Resolution on Violent Video Games released in 2015 by the American Psychological Association resolves that their research has demonstrated the existence of a link between violent video game use and the increase of aggressive behaviour as well as a decrease of empathy, prosocial behaviour and moral engagement, after considering other known risk factors.

On the other hand, the American Academy of Paediatrics warned in its 2016 guideline that this type of violent content set a negative example for children and teenagers, stating that human or any other living targets should not be used and no rewards should be given to such behaviour, for it teaches children to make an association between pleasure and success with their ability to cause pain and suffering to others.

Nevertheless, the arguments stated by both the American Academy of Paediatrics and the American Psychological Association might not be representative of the whole field of expertise, since, more recently, social scientists have obtained new and unexpected results on similar studies.

Whitney DeCamp, a professor of sociology at Western Michigan University run a study in which he examined a large and diverse sample of youth in eighth (5133) and eleventh grade (3886) from the 2008 Delaware School Survey in order to prove that the small correlations between violent game play and violence-related outcomes might in fact be caused by other factors such as gender, mental health, and social influences. The sample used to obtain to the data was diverse both in terms of gender and race. After analysing the results of the study, DeCamp concluded that:

A meta-analysis consolidating these effects indicated that increased time playing violent video games does not significantly affect the risk of violent behaviour. Rather, it is the social and familiar background that seems to

play a larger role in determining risk of violent behaviour instead of videogames. (DeCamp 397)

DeCamp calls for a need to differentiate between violent media use and real-life exposure to violence as developmentally distinct, and he points out that, although youth often seek violent fictional narratives, they very rarely seek out direct exposure to violence in real life.

Further research has been carried out on the same topic that has led scholars to similar results. Christopher Ferguson, an associate professor of the Stetson University also supported DeCamp's findings. In his study, he examined videogame consumption against youth violence rates in the previous two decades, and he concluded that video game consumption is associated with a decline in youth violent rates, suggesting that societal consumption of media violence cannot predict violent behaviour.

Bearing in mind the results obtained by recent researchers in their studies, we can conclude that violent video games do not lead to real violent behaviour, which should defuse tensions amongst alarmed people with regards to violent video games. If we analyse the statistics provided by the website Statista in the following chart, we can see that fast-paced and action-packed video games are in fact the most popular ones in the United States, being shooters the most purchased ones, accounting for a 27.5% of the retail sales, closely followed by a 22.5% of action games.

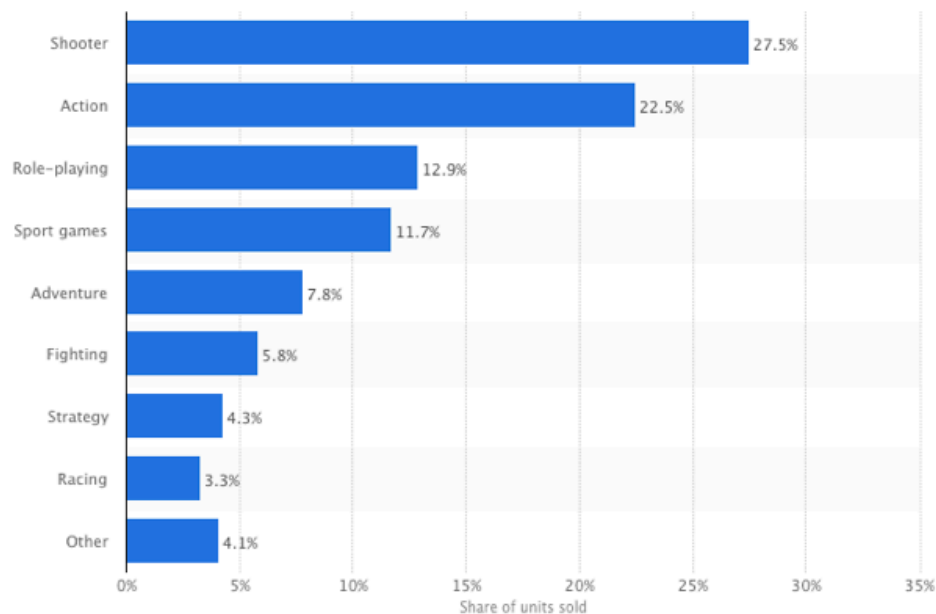


Fig. 10. Percentages of video games sold in each genre.

However, as we have mentioned before, this data should not be cause of alarm. In fact, there is a large number of action video games that promote positive values through their narrative, managing to raise awareness on controversial matters and to bring literature, history and cultural aspects, in a very interactive way, to people who would perhaps not have been exposed to such information otherwise.

People in general, and children and teenagers in particular, will grow up to be non-racist adults only when they live in a non-racist society, which is why it is important to foster the accurate knowledge of one's cultural identity as well as the accurate knowledge and appreciation of other racial groups, which will eventually lead to an understanding of how racism works and how to combat it.

Cultural and racial differences cannot be denied, they exist, and they can be easily perceived, and therefore they should not be denied. However, these differences become racist when a specific ethnic group is labelled as inferior or superior to the other. It is here that the role of video games gains its utmost importance in relation to this topic, for different ethnicities do not inherently possess negative or positive features, but rather, these are allotted by groups of people. By faithfully representing different cultures and races in video games in a subjective, not stereotyped way, we can foster racial awareness and appreciation amongst video game players.

#### **4.2 Video games and the representation of culture, history and literature**

There seems to be a large number of video game genres to choose from in the twenty-first century, ranging from action to strategy. Every year the biggest selling companies keep launching new video games, either as a brand-new type, as a continuation of an existing series or as a remake that appeals to the nostalgia of the earliest gamers.

The source for inspiration for those video games is just as varied as the number of games itself. However, there is a tendency to look back into the past in order to find material to base video games on. This is due to the fact that the video game industry thrives on other entertainment hits, and it also has the ability to modify and change other forms of entertainment into something else. Developers often look out for films, TV series

and novels to come up with new popular games that will provide them with significant benefits, taking advantage of the existing popularity of the topic at hand.

It is common to see famous films become video games, and it is also usual to see book series and novels become films, only to later be turned into video games as well. Perhaps the most known examples of this practice are J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* series and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. However, as profitable as this might be, it is not enough to meet the high demand of video games.

From a cultural studies perspective, it is interesting to notice how literature, history and sociocultural aspects of the English-speaking countries have permeated popular culture in general, and video games as part of it in particular.

The influence of Western culture on video games is easily noticeable. The existence of games based on films such as *The Godfather*, *the Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, or *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* series are proof of it. Video game experts such as Douglas Perry explain that writers and developers are now searching for deeper and more sophisticated stories to tell, stories that are unlicensed and mature enough to attract all sorts of audiences (1). He points out that recent titles such as *Shadow of the Colossus*, *God of War* and the *Prince of Persia* series are good examples of video games that find their roots in literature, myth and folklore; and that the *Soul Reaver* series are highly inspired by T.S. Eliot and James Joyce.

As far as literature is concerned, we can find a large number of games based on canonical literary texts. Such is the case of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which saw its video game counterpart come to life in 1994 for the Super NES system. In this videogame, the player takes control of Frankenstein as he walks around the streets of Ingolstadt, Bavaria, in the year 1793 seeking revenge against Victor for rejecting him once he was created. Since he is not a natural creature, but rather, manmade, he is condemned and declared an expendable pariah by society, believed to be a demon that needs to be killed. Although the title was not critically acclaimed, it served its purpose as a means to learn about Mary Shelley's work, making it available for consumers who might otherwise not have read the book.

Another great example of literary canonical text that has seen its way into the video gaming popular culture is Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, with over nineteen video game adaptations that were launched in different platforms, the most popular one being the

*Dracula Resurrection* series, developed by Index+, France Telecom Multimedia and Canal+ Multimedia, which was followed by four more instalments. The game begins with the final scene from the novel; Dracula's gypsies are attacked by Jonathan Harker and his men, and Dracula is killed, releasing Harker's wife, Mina, from her psychic enslavement to Dracula. Despite Dracula's apparent death, however, Harker remains sceptical as to whether or not he is really gone. The game then focuses on Mina's interest in Dracula's castle in Transylvania and her quest to find out more about this link.

Also related to the same topic, we can find the *Castlevania* video game franchise, which deals with the vampire hunting family of the Belmonts and Dracula. Every hundred years, Dracula is brought to life and the Belmonts must fight him. Although some of the characters are made up, the series is also loosely based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which is included in the official timeline of the series, with *Castlevania: Bloodlines*, taking place shortly afterwards. This video game franchise was created and developed by Konami, and the first title of the series was launched in 1986 for FDS and MSX 2 platforms. From 1986 to 2014 there have been thirty-nine *Castlevania* videogames that are somehow linked to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, thus proving the deep relationship existing between video games and literature.

Although incapable of matching the number of *Dracula's* adaptations, the private detective Sherlock Holmes, created by the British author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, has been the main character of over twenty video games in the last three decades. The first Sherlock Holmes video game, *Sherlock*, saw the light in 1984 for the ZX Spectrum platform, in which Sherlock and Watson had to solve a double murder committed in the town of Leatherhead. The detectives kept solving mysterious cases in successful series such as *Consulting Detective* series and the *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series until 2014.

H. G. Wells' novel, *The War of the Worlds* not only inspired a Hollywood film, but also a video game that was released in 1999. The game is set in 1890s Britain and it remains faithful to the setting of the source material. As the video game is played, we come across familiar locations such as London, Dover, Oxford, Glasgow and the Scottish Highlands while we control several World War I military vehicles in this third-person shooter that also includes fictional elements such as the Martian invasion.

Despite the fact that we may find fictional elements in some of the video games mentioned, they can be a very useful tool when it comes to bringing historic events to players.

Going back as far as the 1970s, we find the first video game that would set the ground for the new genre: historically informed computer programs. *Oregon Trail*, designed by three student teachers in Minnesota for public school students, dealt with the crossing of the American frontier in the 1800s during the Independence War as they had to make choices in order to survive. However, as Osberg points out in her article for *TheVerge.com*, *Oregon Trail* was consciously educational, and therefore it was favoured by parents and teachers who saw it as a harmless board game in which they had a limited number of options to choose from.

As a current counterpart of *Oregon Trail*, we find *Mission US*, a computer video game developed for its use in the middle and high school classrooms. The aim of this game is to make students take part in important moments of American history. According to their website [Mission-US.org](http://Mission-US.org), *Mission US* aims to get students to care about history by seeing it through the eyes of peers from the past and to help students achieve the following goals:

- Learn how Americans struggled to realize the ideals of liberty and equality.
- Understand the role of ordinary men and women, including young people, in history.
- Develop historical empathy.
- Build understanding and critical perception to think like an historian.

This video game has been put to the test with great results in Scott Jackson's American History class at Brooklyn International High School. According to Schwartz's article, the students who played the video game are recent immigrants who are learning English and have no common shared knowledge of history. By allowing students to play with this video game in class, they are given a chance to experience what it would have been like to live those important historical events, to empathize with the characters, and ultimately, to learn what happened in history through debating and discussing controverted matters.



Although games like *Mission US* and *Oregon Trail* are accurate and fulfil the purpose of raising cultural awareness, Osberg observes that nowadays, video games resort to vague collective memories of the past to enhance the playing experience by means of drama and nostalgia. This practice is popular amongst shooters, mysteries and war games, specially franchises such as *Medal of Honor*, *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield*, which use the historical background as a mere atmosphere that serves as a pretext for the action to take place.

Nevertheless, there are certain video game franchises in which the historical elements play a bigger role than just a contextual one. The *Assassin's Creed* series, developed by Ubisoft, are one of the most successful series in the twenty-first century and it is composed of ten main video games, seven spin-offs, eight novels, one movie, four short movies and nine comics. *Assassin's Creed* is mainly an action-adventure video game that portrays the struggle of the Assassins, who fight for peace and free will, against the Templars, who believe peace comes through control of humanity. The franchise mixes historical fiction with real historical events and characters that are easily recognisable for the public.

The franchise began in 2007 with the release of *Assassin's Creed* and their games are available for most platforms both in single and multiplayer modes: PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, Wii U, Microsoft Windows, OS X platforms, Nintendo DS, PlayStation Portable, PlayStation Vita, iOS, HP webOS, Android, Nokia Symbian and Windows Phone platforms.

The *Assassin's Creed* series' goal is to create a world that is consistent with the specific time period at hand in the particular instalment, and for that purpose they include among their writers a number of history graduates as members of staff, in order to make it realistic and accurate, up to a certain extent, considering that non-fiction is also present.

It is not unusual to come across video games that alter the real events that took place in history; games like *Age of Empires* and *Civilization* give players the chance to live some of the most important historical battles on a great scale, and by allowing the players to choose their nation, the result of a war that has already been won or lost can be changed.

Osberg argues that video games that deal with specific real moments in history are controversial ones, which explains why they are not so common. The reason behind

this controversy lies in the strong relationship existing between our historical narratives and our national (or otherwise) identity. According to her article, this type of game endangers the idea that the past is an immutable thing, and yet, because the process of video gaming is based on modelling, it can be perceived as a way to understand that, in fact, the result of specific events in the past that forged our present are the result of certain circumstances that could have turned out another way. Video games can show us the different outcomes that were possible at specific time periods and, even though this cannot change the past, it could help us imagine a dystopian future or present that does not resemble the one we live in.

A great example of a dystopian video game that can teach us some cultural aspects of English speaking countries is *The Order 1986*, a third-person action-adventure game that was developed by Ready at Dawn and SCE Santa Monica Studio, and published by Sony Computer Entertainment. It was released in 2015, and even though it was discretely received by the critics, it can be a useful source of information in terms of the cultural aspects of nineteenth-century England, as well as the Arthurian theme of medieval oral literature, that are displayed throughout the gameplay.

*The Order: 1886* takes place in an alternate London city, in 1886, where an ancient order of knights safeguards the world from human-like beasts that try to destroy it. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these creatures took over the cities, and it was not until the nineteenth century that humanity found its opportunity to fight thanks to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Nevertheless, the knights are outnumbered by the beasts and they realise it is a losing battle despite their unnaturally long lives. However, once the Industrial Revolution takes place in England, new weapons and technology began to emerge, thus providing the knights with the boost they needed.

Even though the storyline of the video game might seem farfetched, it still provides a good chance to bring these historical and cultural aspects to an audience that, perhaps, would not otherwise be engaged with it. Elements such as the Industrial Revolution, Jack the Ripper and King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table as well as the geographical setting itself embody *The Order: 1886* with some aspects of the English folklore that is worth discovering in this new interactive way.

Other video games take a different approach when it comes to representing the socio-cultural aspects of a certain ethnic group, specially minorities, and they deal with

the differences between dominating cultures and suppressed ones, thus exposing players and raising awareness amongst them about the unfair circumstances these minorities had to go through.

*Red Dead Redemption*, is a Western action-adventure video game that was developed by Rockstar, the same company that developed the highly profitable and also highly controversial *Grand Theft Auto* series. It was released in 2010 and it offers a realistic portrayal of the Latin American community that had not been experienced before in the world of video games, where most of the members of that community have been thoroughly stereotyped in video games such as *Tropico*, *Call of Juarez*, or *Call of Duty: Black Ops*. *Red Dead Redemption* is ground-breaking from a cultural perspective because it is not reduced to only using Latin American geographical locations, but rather, being a sandbox type of game, it allows itself the time to portray the Latin American people in a realistic manner.

The game is set along the Texas-Mexico border during the Mexican Revolution and has as its main character John Marston, a man who seeks revenge for past crimes against him. As Penix-Tadsen explains, the presence of Mexican population increases while we follow the narrative, leading up to the Revolution itself in which Marston takes part, first on the side of federal authorities and then as a revolutionary, being disappointed with their corruption (184). When left to his own devices, Marston is likely to be found collecting herbs, learning about Mexican poetry, reading the details of the Revolution in the newspapers available... All in all, although some of the characters might seem somewhat stereotyped, they all have their own motivations and desires that drive them.

Stereotypes play a key role in the reinforcement or subversion of racial issues, and by representing the uniqueness and authenticity of different ethnic groups in a media as important in the twenty-first century as video games, developers are promoting values such as equality and tolerance towards different cultures. Taking this example as a starting point, the final sections of this paper will focus on how the Native American people have been represented in video games throughout the last decades.

## **5. Native Americans in Video Games**

As it has been previously discussed, popular culture in general and video games in particular have become yet another source of representation for different ethnic and

racial groups. In a sense, video games work just like literature or any other form of art: it is the tool used by the creator/author to tell a story which can be potentially received by millions of consumers, especially considering the successful means of entertainment that the video gaming industry is.

The presence of the representation of the indigenous people of North America is just as large as it is in literature, and very much like in the early depiction of Native Americans in fifteenth and sixteenth century literature, it can be full of misconceptions. However, as a result of the short age of the medium, it could be expected that oversimplified visions of Native Americans should be less frequent in video games than they were in literature.

In the following sections of this paper, we will analyse how Native Americans have been represented in video games throughout the last three decades, paying special attention to whether or not these depictions help subvert or reinforce pre-established misconceptions of the Native Americans, some of which include the notions of the half-breed hero, the wise old *Indian* sage and the oversexualized *Indian* princess, as well as the tendency to conflate all sorts of tribes and cultures into the one simple definition created by mainstream white society which is the pan-*Indian* construct.

### **5.1 The *Turok* series**

An account of the representation of Native Americans in video games would never be complete without the *Turok* series, one of the first to feature a Native American as a protagonist in mainstream video gaming. Although there is a total of six video games in the series, which is loosely based on a comic under the same name, we will focus on the three main canonical ones which follow the storyline of the main character in a continuous plot.

The first instalment of the series, *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* was first released in 1997 as a first-person shooter developed by Iguana Entertainment and published by Acclaim for the Nintendo 64 console and Microsoft Windows. Tal'Set, the Indian warrior protagonist, needs to stop the evil Campaigner from using a powerful, ancient weapon which has the ability to control the universe. One of the game's premises is that the title of "Turok" is passed down over generations from one eldest tribe's male to the next, who will have to safeguard the frontier between Earth and the Lost Land, the primitive world inhabited by dinosaurs and animals, completely opposed to the civilized real world. On

the other hand, the Campaigner tries his best to break this barrier and bring chaos into the world.

This mysticism is further fostered in the second instalment of the series, *Turok 2: Seeds of Evil*, released for the Nintendo 64 video game console in 1998 and ported to Microsoft Windows computers in 1999. This new game incorporates new elements into the story: the energy totems and magical talismans that provide the new Turok, Joshua Fireseed, with special new powers. Joshua has inherited the title of Turok from Tal'Set and he is taken to the Lost Land in order to stop an ancient alien, The Primagen, from escaping his spaceship and enslaving the world.

*Turok 3: Shadow of Oblivion* was exclusively released for the Nintendo 64 video game console in 2000 as the third main instalment of the series. The game follows the storyline of the previous one, continuing from the point where the Primagen's Lightship was destroyed at the end of *Turok 2: Seeds of Evil*. As a result of this destruction, the universe was completely eradicated, pushing Oblivion, an evil cosmic entity that consumes the bodies of the living, to the verge of destruction. However, Oblivion manages to strike back in an attempt to destroy the line that separates the living world from the Lost Lands. As it happened in the previous games, the last bits of the pure energy source that created the living world are contained in the Light Burden, a bag that every Turok has to carry.

The game starts with the previous Turok, Joshua Fireseed, being attacked by the Oblivion in his sleep. He manages to fight the Oblivion but is blown away on the process. His siblings, Danielle and Joseph, will have now to face the enemies in an attempt to keep both worlds apart.

All three main instalments of the *Turok* series were a critical and commercial success, selling millions of copies world-wide and receiving an average grade of 85, 86 and 77 points respectively, according to the Metacritic website. However, we must carry out a deeper analysis of the representation of these Native American characters in order to answer the question whether or not this series reinforces negative stereotypes.

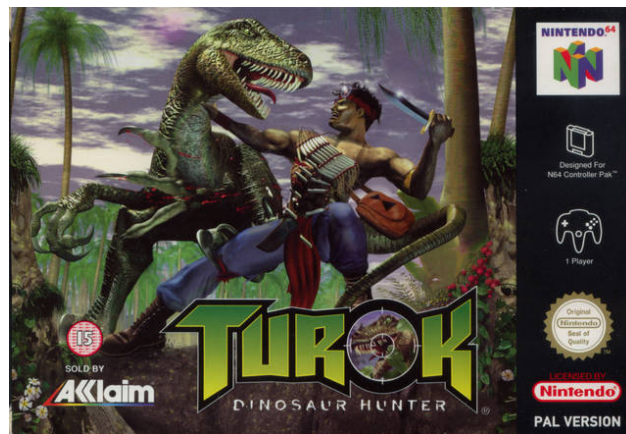


Fig. 11. *Turok* video game cover (1997).

The first element worth mentioning is the connection our Turok tribal characters have to another mystical and spiritual world, the Lost Land, along with the presence of magical totems and talismans. The fact that the *Indian* characters are the only link between this magical world and the civilized world, reinforces the notion that the Native American culture is an ancient and alien one, connecting with the idea of otherness. In terms of their abilities, the characters represent a handful of long worn out stereotypes in which bows, arrows, tomahawks and feathers are in display most of the time, only to remind the players of the popular construction of the homogenous (and non-existent) pan-*Indian* culture that is so present in literature and films. There is no context for the tribal heritage of the Turoks and no sense of individual cultural identity that justifies the use of such characters.

There is no question that the choice of Native Americans as main characters in the series could be a significant platform to give voice and visibility to a culture that has been suppressed for centuries. However, the plot never delves into the cultural background of the protagonists, which are basically characterizations with a personality that does not extend beyond the conventional stereotypes that have persisted throughout the centuries: the noble savage, the warrior who fights evil relying on ancestry and mystical elements related to magic.

Nonetheless, the positive aspect of having Native Americans as main characters for the first time in an industry where most of the protagonists are individuals who are easily recognisable by mainstream white society is something that must be commended. This positive aspect, however, falls short when it comes to breaking pre-established

patterns if we consider the potential that video games can have in terms of racial and cultural awareness, and therefore, there was a big opportunity wasted in the *Turok* series.

## 5.2 *Prey*

Video game experiences allow for the portrayal of all sorts of characters, worlds and stories, and the *Turok* series mentioned above as well as the conventional tribal members who lead their narrative are just an example. As in literature, it is possible in the video game industry to break conventional roles and empower minorities that have so often been subdued to the predominant culture.

Such is the case of *Prey*, a first-person shooter developed by Human Head Studios, under contract for 3D Realms, and published by 2K Games (the Xbox 360 version was ported by Venom Games). The game was initially released in North America and Europe on July 11, 2006. Perhaps one of the most important aspects to take into account when it comes to *Prey*, is how the development of the video game took place. *Prey* is considered to be one of the first fully collaborative effort between Native and Western-American video game developers and, as a consequence, the resulting product is very different to what we have seen in similar video games such as *Turok*.

In *Prey*, we follow the steps of a Cherokee war veteran and garage mechanic, Tommy Tawodi, who embarks on a science-fiction journey that will allow him to get in touch with his heritage. Video game analyst Fabius observes that the themes present in *Prey* are, in fact, very similar to those represented in the literary works of authors such as Leslie Marmon Silko and N. Scott Momaday. It is important to notice how the main character is described as belonging to one particular tribe, the Cherokee people, as opposed to the *Turok* series characters: the Fireseed, who are categorized under the inaccurately homogenous concept of *Indian*.

The development of the character goes further than to just assigning him a tribal community to belong to. In fact, in an attempt to recreate a deeper sociocultural background for our character Tommy, *Prey* is one of the very few video games to depict modern reservation life, adding to the complexity of the character and providing him with a unique identity that contrasts with the previously discussed caricatures.

For the first time in video gaming grounds, we come across a character that feels like a complex and realistic being that steps outside conventions, whose heritage is explored as an important and integral part of its backstory, which is completed with a mixture of modern world and tradition. This is in part achieved thanks to the visual aspect of the main character: it is pleasantly surprising to see a Native American who no longer wears feathers and war paint; Tommy simply wears casual clothes. Although this detail might seem unimportant, it is a significant step towards a realistic and current representation of Native Americans that can be recognized by all sorts of cultures, while it also provides players with a more contemporary image to relate to, and not just some romanticised Western creation.



Fig. 12. Tommy Tawodi. *Prey* (2006).

In terms of his personality, the moulds of the noble savage and the great warrior are somehow broken by Tommy considering he is a unique individual. He wants to break away from the Cherokee traditions, he is against life in the reservation and he despises those who are stuck in cultural customs. Through images and controversial situations, video game developers manage to make players reflect on cultural stereotypes, tackling issues such as alcohol and gambling in a very witty way while raising cultural identity questions.

Tommy is not the often represented mystical Native American either. Once he is abducted by aliens and taken into a mysterious spaceship, his *Indian* heritage begins to appear, which might be considered stereotypical by some, for he is able to use certain magical skills that others cannot, such as seeing invisible paths, using mystical bows and arrows, etc. This might be perceived as the exploitation of the mystic *Indian* conventions;



however, it is only part of Tommy's journey to reconnect with his heritage, a heritage that he seems to despise. By understanding how his superpowers can help him overcome situations (superpowers that are specifically Cherokee), Tommy becomes more accepting of his own heritage and also his individual identity and he is able to reconnect with his culture.

All in all, the presence of the mystic *Indian* stereotype is justified, for it is an integral part of our character's journey towards the acceptance of his heritage and the perception of himself as a Cherokee, and we never feel we are playing with a pan-*Indian* construct designed for mainstream media consumption. *Prey* game developers set a new precedent by employing Native American people and by taking into account the cultural sensitivity that is lacking in other franchises, marking an important step towards the self-representation of Native Americans in the video game industry.

### **5.3 Fighting games: *Street Fighter*, *Mortal Kombat* and *Tekken***

Fighting or *beat 'em up* is perhaps the video game genre in which Native American conventions take place the most often in a simplistic way. Fighting games simulate close-range combat against a few opponents, often involving violent and exaggerated unarmed attacks against rivals. In this section, we will focus on the characters depicted in three mainstream fighting video game franchises that are very popular worldwide.

*Street Fighter* is a fighting video game franchise developed and published by Capcom. The first game in the series was released in 1987. Since then, five other main series games, as well as various spin-offs and crossovers, have been released. *Street Fighter II* is credited with establishing many of the conventions of the one-on-one fighting genre. The game's playable characters originate from different countries around the world, each with a unique fighting style. The franchise has sold 39 million software units and over 500,000 arcade hardware units. Being one of the highest-grossing video game franchises, it is important to bear in mind how the characters who belong to different cultures are portrayed, for this representation will get to millions of people who might not have encountered any other source of information on the matter.

Thunder Hawk (also known as T. Hawk), is a Native American character of Mexican descent who was first introduced in the series in *Super Street Fighter II*, being

the only Native American character to appear in the *Street Fighter Saga*. The character's background story is not surprising: when he was only a child, his tribe was forced out of their lands by Shadaloo. Some of the tribe members fought back and lost their lives, including T. Hawk's father, who was killed by M. Bison. The force that drives our character to fight is his need for revenge; he wants to take back his land and to avenge the death of his people, some of whom also went missing. Contextual backstory seems to fall within the early depictions of the Native Americans in literature, in which they were portrayed as warlike savages.

Our character's physical appearance seems to be made of the simple stereotypes that have been perpetuated by mass media and literature: he is an extremely tall and strong man (the second largest street fighter character), with long black hair and a manly facial expression composed of a flat nose and a prominent jaw. His face is decorated with tribal white face paint and he wears a band with feathers, leather moccasins and tribal patterns. He matches up the stereotypical physical appearance: he is a savage killer, fast and focused, but he is also big-hearted. T. Hawk seems to have a powerful connection with nature and animals, linking with the idea of the mystical *Indian* discussed throughout this paper.



Fig. 13. T. Hawk. *Street Fighter* (1991).

The cliché elements present in this character seem to have been pushed too far: from the physical appearance to the cultural context, all the aspects related to T. Hawk are caricatured. The indigenous tribe he belongs to, Thunderfoot, is completely fictional, which shows a lack of interest to provide players with a meaningful representation of Native Americans that would effectively help them create a realistic

impression of their culture. T. Hawk was born in Guadalajara, which is depicted in his home fighting stage. It is interesting to notice that the people in the background wear similar unrealistic and oversimplified colourful outfits with feathers, as well as the blonde, blue-eyed tourists who seem to be visiting the town, thus reinforcing the idea of otherness once again.

The second series of this genre to be analysed is *Mortal Kombat*, a video game franchise originally developed by Midway Games' Chicago studio in 1992. The original game has spawned many sequels and has spun a media franchise consisting of several action-adventure games, films (animated and live-action with its own sequel), and television series (animated and live-action). Other spin-offs include comic book series, a card game and a live-action tour. Along with Capcom's *Street Fighter* and Bandai Namco Entertainment's *Tekken*, *Mortal Kombat* has become one of the most successful fighting franchises in the history of video games.

In *Mortal Kombat*, the Native American character named Nightwolf is depicted as a half-naked, hyper-masculine fighter who falls into the mystic and nature-friendly pan-*Indian* stereotypes that effectively depict Native people as primitive and antiquated. In a similar fashion to T. Hawk in *Street Fighter*, Nightwolf is given little to no background or personality, and his mere presence seems to, again, provide the game with an exotic feel that derives from the sense of otherness previously mentioned.

*Mortal Kombat* developers seem to be promoting a pro-*Indian* sentiment amongst players by allowing Nightwolf to regain the lands his Native American people had lost over the centuries, thus establishing their own nation who would soon lead the world in an unrealistic and fictional manner. However, the lack of depth in the development of the character makes this sentiment impossible to get through to the players. Once again, Nightwolf's physical appearance is that of a Native American warrior who wears feathers, traditional Native and Western American clothes and face-paint. Their long hair, bow and arrows make it hard to distinguish T. Hawk from Nightwolf, which reinforces the idea of the pan-*Indian* construct. In terms of his magical skills, Nightwolf is capable of turning into a wolf in order to destroy his opponents, which links to the connection to nature stereotypes that have been promoted over and over, even in literature and film sagas such as *Twilight*, as discussed in the literature section of this paper.



Fig. 14. Nightwolf. *Mortal Kombat* (1992).

Although Nightwolf is in fact provided with a real tribal background, his Apache heritage seems to be mixed up with other cultural religious practices that are not related whatsoever to Native American ones: the sin-eating nature of this character is more commonly found in European religious practices, and his special attack “rhino charge” seems outdated, since there were not rhinos in North America since the Pliocene epoch.

The ethnic misrepresentation of Nightwolf has been unfavourably received by the public, who was given yet another unrealistic individual who had been created to merely take up the slot of the Native American fighter that every fighting game needs to have.

The last fighting video game franchise to be analysed in this paper is the very popular *Tekken* saga. *Tekken* was created, developed and published by Namco (which later became Bandai Namco Entertainment). The original game was released in December 1994, and after its major success, the franchise has received several sequels, updates and spin-offs based on the original title; and there are seven main instalments. Following the same trend as *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat*, the series have been adapted into three films based on the characters.

The plot of the franchise revolves around the events of the King of Iron Fist Tournament, held by the Mishima Zaibatsu. The winner of the tournament will gain control over the company and allow the winner to host the next tournament. Although seemingly simplistic, *Tekken 2* and *Tekken 3* are regarded as pioneers in the genre and some of the best games of all time, the latter being the best-selling fighting game to date. The series itself is the best-selling fighting game franchise in history.

With around thirty characters per instalment, players are able to choose from a varied cast that displays a wide selection of ethnic background and, consequently, fighting styles. The majority of characters are embodied with a background story that drives their will to win the tournament and competing for the prize, and this is seen through the cinematic scenes at the beginning and end of the main arcade mode.

The Native American heritage comes at play with two female characters who belong to the same family, Michelle Chang and her daughter Julia Chang. Michelle Chang was introduced in the original *Tekken* in 1994. Portrayed as a young girl of Chinese and Native American descents who has just come of age, Michelle owns a mysterious pendant which is said to be capable of controlling evil and powerful spirits. We learn throughout the game that the pendant was the source of many troubles in her life, which includes the murder of her father when Heihachi Mishima and his men tried to retrieve it, a situation which worsened once both her and her mother were kidnapped a few years later. Eventually, she becomes the adoptive mother of Julia Chang, who masters her mother's discipline.

Julia was abandoned in Native American lands, and it was thanks to Michelle that she learnt martial arts so that she could fight for her homeland. When Julia turned eighteen, martial artists began to suddenly disappear around the world. Upon finding out, Julia and Michelle's tribe worried the disappearances could be related to Michelle's pendant. Consequently, Michelle travelled to Japan in order to confront Heihachi about the matter, only to never come back. Fuelled by the disappearance of her adoptive mother, Julia decides to join the King of Iron Fist Tournament 3 in order to seek the truth. In the following instalment, she joins the competition out of worry for the rapid growth of a global ecosystem that was threatening her homeland. However, the data she collected along the research team she belonged to was stolen by Heihachi, which forced her to join the Tournament in two more instalments in order to get the forest rejuvenation data back. After finally retrieving the stolen data, Julia managed to finish her research and agreed to meet with a group of people who would help her carry her plan to terms. However, Julia also meets a mysterious old woman who claimed that she could hear the spirits, and she warned Julia that the rejuvenation program could not be completed for it would resurrect a great evil that would destroy the world. To stop this from happening, Julia decided to enter the King of Iron Fist Tournament 6.



Fig. 15. Michelle and Julia Chang. *Tekken 1*(1994) & *Tekken 2* (1995).

As it can be inferred from the background stories of these two characters, the Tekken franchise is not exempt of stereotyping the Native American culture and heritage. Both characters are linked to the construct of the mystical and spiritual *Indian*, in contact with nature and spirits that can help them overcome difficult situations. In the case of Michelle, this convention is brought to the players by means of the magical pendant that can control powerful forces and is sought after by the villains of the video game. When it comes to Julia, she is more attached to her homeland and her ancestors, perhaps due to the fact that she was abandoned as a child. The forces that lead her towards the tournaments are always related to the disappearance of other tribal members, the protection of nature and her homeland, characteristic traits that have been often attributed to the Native Americans. This conventional representation is further reinforced by the incorporation of the old lady that provides Julia with the omen of the destruction of the world.

*Tekken* is no different from the fighting games previously analysed in this paper, as all three of them provide players with a pan-*Indian* representation of Native Americans that lacks depth and consistency. There is no faithful depiction of tribal characteristics that would help players understand the choice of a Native American cultural background. *Tekken* makes things even worse by creating two unrealistic characters that are highly interchangeable: Michelle is taken over from *Tekken 3* onwards in an almost unnoticeable manner, making players think, upon closer analysis, that developers only needed an excuse to throw another ethnic group into the mixture of characters.

In fact, the physical appearance of both characters is so similar that is easy for most people to mistake one for the other. Both Julia and Michelle wear their hair in plats complemented with a feather hairband. Leather boots, short jeans or denim skirt and cropped top finish the look that combines traditional tribal elements and patterns with Western pieces of clothing. These two Native American women are very sexualized in the *Tekken* series in an inappropriate way, which might seem harmless considering it is a video game. However, according to a study by Amnesty International, Native American Women are 2.5 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than other women, and 86% of these assaults are committed by non-Native males, which makes the matter all the more sensitive (2).

According to analyst Fabius, this suggests that the common sexualisation of Native women in pop culture is both responsible for and indicative of continuing colonialist sentiments in Western society, and overall, the common disrespect for Native American people, and particularly women, in art leads to the same sentiments in real life.

#### **5.4 Assassin's Creed III**

*Assassin's Creed III* is a 2012 action-adventure video game developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft for PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii U, and Microsoft Windows. Part of the Assassin's Creed franchise, it is considered the fifth major instalment and it follows directly the events of *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*.

The plot of the video game is set in a fictional history that takes place within real world events, following the struggles between the Assassins who seek peace with free will, and the Templars, who are after peace by means of control. In order to avoid the 2012 apocalypse, Desmond Miles relives the memories of his ancestors by means of the Animus, a machine that allows him to do so. Within this premise, players can control Desmond's ancestors throughout history, focusing on a particular era in every saga instalment. In the case of *Assassin's Creed III*, we travel to eighteenth-century America, during and after the American Revolution from 1754 to 1783, following Desmond's Mohawk ancestor, Ratonnhaké:ton, also known as Connor, while he fights the Templars' efforts to take over the colonies. In *Assassin's Creed III*, we find an open-world game in which Connor is able to freely explore eighteenth-century Boston, New York City and the American frontier.

Overall, the game received positive reviews from the critics and it was praised by the players, who commended it for its gameplay, narrative and diverse cast of characters as well as the outstanding visuals and ambitious scale of the game. Consequently, it became a huge commercial success which translated into more than twelve million copies sold worldwide. Similar to *Prey*, *Assassin's Creed III* conforms another solid collaborative effort between Native and Western-American video game developers.

Ratonnhaké:ton, the main character of the game, is a half-Mohawk, half-British boy who was raised in a Mohawk village during the American Revolution. Native Americans are portrayed within a historical setting, but we must bear in mind that even though all the *Assassin's Creed* games recreate fictional stories, developers go to great lengths in order to make sure that the representation of past times are both accurate and culturally respectful, which is something noticeable throughout the game. In the particular case of *Assassin's Creed III*, the development team counted on Kanien'kehá:ka cultural and linguistic consultants who helped them verify information and also advised them on the use of precise cultural elements, ensuring they made the language, clothing, weapons, and dwellings as authentic as possible.

This collaborative work between Native and Western American developers and consultants is also displayed in the use of the language, for a third of the game is spoken in the Mohawk language, also known as Kanien'kéha. The fact that the voice actor who played Connor was also of Native American descent adds up to the realism of the story and reinforces the cultural respect displayed by game developers. One hundred actors were auditioned for the role, for they wanted to take the Native American heritage seriously and move away from stereotypical voices, until Noah Watts joined the project.

As a result, we find in *Assassin's Creed III* an immersive experience that recreates Mohawk culture and gets players closer to accurate indigenous knowledge by means of the gameplay, approaching the Haudenosaunee Confederacy's effect on the American Revolution and exploring both sides of the war.





Fig. 16. Reservation in *Assassin's Creed III* (2012).

Nevertheless, we might encounter some Native American stereotypical elements throughout the game, especially when it comes to Connor's physical appearance and gear: bows and arrows, tomahawks, long black hair and tribal patterns. This, however is done in a much subtler way than in previously analysed games, for the outfit that Connor wears remains within the same style that was shown in other *Assassin's Creed* instalments, only to be updated with gear and touches that Connor would use to customise his suit. In terms of his personality and skills, he is highly attached to family and tribal life, and he proves to be an outstanding hunter, capable of hunting animals across the forest with almost no effort as he jumps from tree to tree in order not to be seen. The character of Connor is noble, brave and deadly, and yet, it does not feel forced as all these more conventional features are introduced in the game.

Some scholars, such as Shaw, also argue that the game never truly dwells in a critique of history from Connor's perspective, but rather, that it focuses more on offering an aesthetically realistic game (5). The expected player is assumed to be non-Native, which Shaw argues results in a disjuncture between who the player-character is and where the game narrative goes, and therefore the level of game actions and overarching of game narrative is told from a white American perspective of United States history.

Despite this fact, we cannot deny that we are dealing with one of the very few mainstream video games that look at Native American history in an accurate manner, and which showcases Native American culture in a realistic and authentic way.

## 5.5 inFAMOUS: Second Son

*InFAMOUS: Second Son* is categorized under the same genre as *Assassin's Creed III*, the action-adventure video games. It was developed by Sucker Punch Productions and published by Sony Computer Entertainment for PlayStation 4 only. It is the third instalment of the *inFAMOUS* saga and it was released worldwide on 2014. In the series, the players control a protagonist who possesses superpowers to be used in combat and when wandering around the city. In the particular case of *inFAMOUS: Second Son*, we follow protagonist Delsin Rowe as he fights the Department of Unified Protection in a fictional Seattle. One of the most distinct characteristics of the video game is that our character, as well as his powers, can become either good or evil as the player's choices influence the gameplay's morality.

In general, *inFAMOUS: Second Son* received positive reviews and it was praised by players and critics due to its dynamic gameplay and impressive visual design. As a result, *Second Son* became a commercial success, selling over one million copies within the first nine days of its release, making it the fastest-selling instalment of the franchise.

The main character, Delsin Rowe, is a 24-year-old Native American from the fictional Akomish tribe who spends most of his time doing graffiti as a street artist. His rebellious personality is portrayed from a very early stage in the game, setting the ground for his standoff with the Department of Unified Protection which often results in him being arrested by his brother, a police officer who is presented as Delsin's antagonist.

Delsin lives on the Akomish reservation, which is perhaps one of the most defining elements of his personality. As a rebellious young man, he despises the tyrannical government and his hatred is reinforced even further as an attack of the D.U.P. leaves most of the Akomish severely wounded. This event acts as the motivation for Delsin's actions throughout the game, as he wants to seek revenge and protect the people he cares for. All in all, this premise could account for a sound and interesting story to follow through, however, the Native American background takes a second place in the narrative of the video game as developers seem to lay more importance on other aspects of the game. The fact that Delsin belongs to a fictional tribe feels like a disinterested attempt to represent tribal life in a racially sensitive way. While the story takes place in a fictional area of Seattle, game developers did not go as far as to research real tribes who were natural to the state in order to provide a more realistic representation of the

indigenous people. We are, therefore, facing yet another video game that perpetuates the pan-*Indian* construct so present in mainstream entertainment, whereas it could have been a faithful representation of an under-served culture which is often depicted as a homogeneous group, despite its many differences.

It is inevitable to compare *inFAMOUS: Second Son*'s approach to Native American heritage to that of *Assassin's Creed III*, provided that both of the video games belong to the same genre. Creating a realistic and complex Native American character in the world of entertainment seems to be something Ubisoft developers excelled at, perhaps due to the fact that they collaborated closely with Native American consultants. While Ratonhnhaké:ton belongs to a distinct, unique and real tribe (the Mohawk), one which speaks its very own language, Sucker Punch game developers chose to focus more on providing a faithful representation of the architectural elements of Seattle and not so much on embodying the protagonist with a realistic and respectful backstory that would encourage cultural diversity. The power of video games to raise racial awareness, thus, is not used up to its full potential when it comes to *inFAMOUS: Second Son*, wasting the opportunity to offer players a video game that goes beyond mere entertainment.



Fig. 17. Ratonhnhaké:ton. *inFAMOUS: Second Son* (2014).

Delsin's physical appearance and skills, however, do seem to move away from mainstream western conventions, which is something rarely seen in video games, even in those which respectfully depict Native American life. Whereas Delsin displayed his Native American heritage in early conceptual artwork, wearing feathers, headbands and long black hair, developers went down a different road, choosing to showcase a Delsin who is much more current and urban, looking like and wearing clothes that any other

American would, with no bold elements that have been endlessly attributed to the indigenous people. In terms of Delsin's skills and superpowers, we find no caricatured relation to ancestors, spiritual animals, tomahawks, bows or arrows. Unlike in *Assassin's Creed III* and the rest of the games analysed in this paper, Delsin's skills are not linked to his heritage, but rather to the main plot of the story. Delsin does not stand for conventional figures such as the mystic *Indian* or the noble savage, which makes it a more individualized and unique Native American character.

This could be considered a positive aspect that would have added to the overall experience of the game, had the narrative been carried out more carefully. All in all, *inFAMOUS: Second Son* remains as a vague attempt to represent Native Americans faithfully. It succeeds in not falling into the same visual mould that has been repeated countless times, but it lacks the background depth necessary to account as a real effort to empower indigenous heritage.

### **5.6 Never Alone**

The last game to be analysed in this paper is *Never Alone*. Also known as *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*, *Never Alone* is a puzzle-platformer adventure video game developed by Upper One Games, and it was based on the traditional Inupiaq tale, first recorded by storyteller Robert Nasruk Cleveland in his collection *Stories of the Black River People*. It is the first game developed in collaboration with the Inupiat, an Alaska Native people, and almost forty Alaska Native elders, storytellers and community members contributed to the development of the game. It was developed by Upper One Games in conjunction with Ishmael Hope and the Cook Inlet Tribal Council, a non-profit organization that works with Native Americans living in Alaska. It is considered the first indigenous-owned video game, and benefits from the game fund the Council's education mission.

Considered the first indigenous-owned video game developer, Upper One Games aimed to create a game that promotes and celebrates culture, telling intergenerational stories that entertain and revitalize Alaskan indigenous folklore. It was first released in 2014 for PlayStation 4, Xbox One and Microsoft Windows, and it arrived in mobile platforms in 2015.

In terms of the reception of the game, *Never Alone* received mixed reviews. Critics commented positively on the game's art design, full of scrimshaw influences, and the cultural context of the video game. The inclusion of documentary videos was also

perceived positively by critics and players, who enjoyed the informative as well as entertaining experience of the game. Negative reviews focused on controls and technical aspects.

The game follows the steps of a little girl, Nuna, and her companion, an arctic fox, as they embark on a quest to end a hard blizzard and save their clan. As they wander the tundra searching out the source of the endless blizzard, they come across important figures from Inupiaq oral tradition and are aided by the “Helping Spirits”. *Never Alone* takes pride in its Native American heritage, bringing the concept to a new audio-visual experience that rarely approached Native Americans in such a way. The story itself is told by a traditional Inupiaq storyteller, and the game visual aspect is heavily influenced by Inupiaq art by means of the use of the traditional scrimshaw.

In addition, the narration of the story is told in the Inupiaq tribe’s native language, which, as it happened in games such as *Assassin’s Creed III*, adds to the realistic representation of a specific Native American tribe by using Alaskan terminology and English subtitles to narrate the story. We are no longer dealing with a pan-*Indian* construct that categorizes all indigenous tribes homogenously, instead, game developers offer players a distinctively Inupiaq experience that caters not only to an Inupiaq audience. In doing so, the game deconstructs the stereotypes that have been established in the world of entertainment and the game industry in particular, while it advocates for an authentic understanding of cultural differences within Native American tribes.

As opposed to the feeling of lost opportunity encountered in *inFAMOUS: Second Son* when it comes to the cultural context of the character, *Never Alone* makes the most out of its Inupiat heritage by placing the traditional story, which has been passed down orally from generation to generation, as front and centre of the game. The result is a video game that does not feel forced, in which customary imagery often associated with Native American culture is nowhere to be found: no war paint, no headbands, no feathers or bows. *Never Alone* manages to successfully stay away from the never ending tribal clichés.



Fig. 18. Nuna. *Never Alone* (2014).

The visual aspect of the main character, Nuna, is not sexualized the way it was in other games such as the *Tekken* series, nor does it look like a Disney character, instead, developers opted for a more traditional animation character that is more representative of how the Inupiaq are as a people.

Although not as popular as previously analysed video game franchises, *Never Alone* successfully depicts Native Americans in a sensible way that seems exempt of Western clichés, choosing to portray the Inupiaq tribe as a distinctive and unique tribe that stands out as different from any other within Native Americans. The game is embodied with traditional elements, artistic and narrative, that reflect the Inupiaq heritage, but it also offers players a learning experience in the form of short documentary videos that explore Native American culture. The involvement of Native Americans in the creation of the video game has had a positive influence in the resulting product, which is shown in the accuracy of the cultural elements represented in the game.

## **6. Steps towards racial sensitivity in video games**

Video games have proved to be one of the strongest sources of entertainment in the last four to five decades, growing in popularity ever since they appeared in the 1970s. Being an industry capable of producing approximately thirty billion dollars a year in profits, there is no question that there is a high demand of video games in nowadays' society, where there are multiple ways and platforms to enjoy the products.

As such, we are dealing with a medium capable of reaching millions of people all over the world with every new title that comes out. The demographic of video game consumers is both wide and varied, including people of most social classes and all ages. Video games have not only the power to entertain players, but also to raise racial awareness, as it has been discussed in previous sections of this paper. Video games have been proved to help construct a positive and knowledgeable racial and cultural identity as well as to respect and understand that of others.

The combination of all these elements results in a powerful new purpose that is attributed to video games. This new socio-cultural purpose which is capable of fostering tolerance and diversity has the potential to bring all sorts of information to millions of players worldwide, shedding a light on issues that would normally not be approach by some of the players that consume this form of entertainment.

However, there seems to be a general lack of understanding from those outside of the Native American culture. In an industry predominated by white European and American people, game developers choose to portray what it entails to be Native American and what it means to the people that live the Native American culture from their own perspective, thus creating a pan-*Indian* construct that is agreed upon by most European and American countries and which is far from a realistic depiction of what it is to be a Native American.

Representing Native Americans in popular culture is no easy task, for indigenous people do not identify themselves as a homogenous group who share the same characteristics and traditions.

There is no complete picture of what Native culture is, and the high number of tribes, nations, peoples and languages attached to the term means that a single definition would not suffice. And yet, the Amerindian people have very often been reduced to an oversimplified and inadequately stereotyped vision by the civilized cultures. A vision that originated in literature in the fifteenth century with the first letters sent by Columbus, who had political and personal motifs, and that has found its way through popular culture, reaching the film industry, and ultimately, video games.

This singular and monolithic representation of Natives in popular culture could be perceived as the last stand of an assimilation attempt by mainstream society. Their languages and cultures are dying off, and their people are stripped of their worth by an

inaccurate representation that is handed down over generations in recent history. Most literary texts, films and video games offer audiences a decaffeinated version of the indigenous people. A nation composed of hundreds of tribes who had to struggle to survive slaughter, segregation and almost destruction, is replaced by a unified national vision that only allows choosing between the mystic and the savage. Characters, literary or otherwise, which do not fit into these boxes are largely ignored.

Hardly ever is popular culture concerned with what being Native American means to Natives. It is usually not concerned with life on a reservation, with boarding schools, assimilation or cultural heritage in general. Characters who break away from indigenous conventions that include the savage, the mystic or the oversexualized Native American is something rarely seen in video games, as we have seen in the titles previously analysed: *Tekken*, *Street Fighter*, *Mortal Kombat* and *Turok*. As a result, and because Native voices are so few and far between in the video game industry, the need of a sensitive depiction of Native Americans in video games arises.

Nevertheless, there are some instances which do not perpetuate the Eurocentric view of Native Americans, providing complex video game characters that do not display derogatory conventions such as the feather hairbands, the tomahawks or the set of indigenous abilities that result in a cartoonish depiction of a unique culture. That is the case of video games such as *Assassin's Creed III* and *Never Alone*, which are concerned with providing a truthful and respectful portrayal of their characters. Ratonhnhaké:ton and Nuna stand for their unique tribes, tribes that are not the product of the game developers' imagination, as it happened in *inFAMOUS: Second Son*. Their tribal particularities are respected throughout both games, and the narrative leads the players towards a journey in which specific traditions and even languages are presented.

This faithful representation is undoubtedly influenced by the presence of Native American consultants who were involved during the development of both video games. In the case of *Assassin's Creed III*, members of the Mohawk tribe as well as others were consulted in order to accurately recreate Ratonhnhaké:ton and his surrounding environment. Languages and clothing were faithfully taken to the video game, and just as important, the creation of the United States, which sets the common grounds of the plot of the game, does not seem to be glorified, instead, perspectives of the native tribes that were caught up in the war are highlighted.



*Never Alone* follows the same trend, offering players a way to explore Inupiaq traditions in a realistic way. As it happens with *Assassin's Creed III*, *Never Alone* goes to great lengths in order to display accurate cultural aspects such as clothing, traditional stories and languages. It seeks to inspire indigenous people around the world to reclaim native identity. Upper Games, which is formed by the Cook Inlet Tribal Council, an organisation that represents Alaska Natives, is currently creating video games that are imbued with Inuit culture in an attempt to explore and rescue the native identity that has been lost to European colonization.

Consequently, we can confirm that the involvement of indigenous people in the creation of video games results in a faithful depiction of their culture, one that needs to be promoted. Only by offering realistic portrayals of the Native American people will the socio-cultural power of video games be used up to its full potential when it comes to this issue.

## **7. Conclusion**

Popular culture has played a key role in the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the other, and it still continues to do so. Whether this transmission is accomplished through oral means, literature or mass media, people who receive this input are exposed to both accurate but also biased information that will influence their perception of reality and those elements portrayed in the aforementioned mediums, for they often represent imprecise and overgeneralised ideas that see themselves perpetuated throughout the centuries, diminishing aspects as important as gender, heritage or race.

The representation of the Native American culture is no exception to this rule. As a nation that endured a colonisation process that started in the fifteenth century, the indigenous people have struggled and overcome extremely difficult situations that include the removal of their lands as well as assimilation and acculturation attempts by European settlers. The Native American's situation worsened when they first appeared in literary contexts, where insensitive stereotypes first emerged, as they were the subject matter of texts whose authors had a political aim in mind. Eurocentric conventions and false constructs spread fast in literature as the centuries went by, finding their way into other areas of popular culture such as films and video games.

Despite the existence of over five hundred tribes which speak over three hundred different languages, Native Americans have been and still are represented as a singular group of people who share the same traditions, characteristics and ideas. Figures as popular as the noble savage, the spiritual shaman or the oversexualized indigenous female seem to be the only available interpretations of Native Americans, who are all made to fit the pan-*Indian* construct created by the dominant Western society. This construct is very present throughout literary texts: whether we are dealing with fifteenth century Columbus' letters, Mary Rowlandson's captivity novels, children's literature or modern fiction, such as the *Twilight Saga*, previously analysed in this paper. Such a simplistic portrayal is further reinforced by the inclusion of easily recognisable visual elements like the war face paint, the feather headband and the tomahawk or bow and arrow. Representations that do not fit into these categories hardly ever come by, and more often than not go unnoticed by the public.

The world of entertainment, and the video game industry in particular, have seen these patterns permeate over the past five decades. The same elements that were depicted in literature and later on in films, are now available for millions of players around the world, who can shoot their arrows and use their magical skills in order to save the world in video games such as *Turok*, *Tekken* or *Street Fighter*. As it happens in literature, however, there are exceptions in which game developers take the opportunity to offer players a faithful representation of Native Americans, remaining respectful to the individuality of their tribes, their languages, clothes and traditions. An example of the shift in the representation of the indigenous people is provided by video games like *Prey*, *Assassin's Creed III* and *Never Alone*, amongst others. These games celebrate the Native American heritage, taking players on a cultural journey towards the discovery of their truthful identity.

As twenty-first century individuals immersed in the digital era, we must advocate for a faithful cultural representation of individuals that promotes diversity, tolerance and equality. The video game industry, capable of reaching millions of people worldwide in all sorts of platforms, must not overlook its power when it comes to this matter. Ever since video games originated in the 1970s, some companies have undertaken the task of teaching children (as well as adults) basic aspects of mathematics, languages and even history. Nevertheless, more emphasis should be placed on the narrative element of video

games if we are to exploit its potential to raise racial awareness in order to overcome cultural stereotypes.

Only by stepping away from outdated conventions and beliefs will video games succeed in subverting racial and cultural stereotypes that damage the identity of the Native American people. In employing Native American people in the game developing process, consulting them and carrying out proper research on the matter instead of focusing only in entertaining, companies such as Upper One Games (*Never Alone*) and Ubisoft (*Assassin's Creed III*) have raised the bar and set a new standard on the representation of Native Americans. Not only have they provided specific tribes with a voice that feels their own, but also, they have offered players an opportunity to take on a different approach to what being Native American truly is.

Consequently, we can conclude that, although often dismissed because of their violent nature, video games might in fact prove a very efficient tool to overcome these traditional stereotypes and to reinforce positive values and equality, a process that can be successfully completed if we give a voice to those who have been silenced and oppressed over the centuries.

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