

Investigation into Video Games as Media portraying History **Jackson Hansen, Class of 2023**

Over the course of the summer, I have worked closely with my faculty advisor to investigate a media format that is often overlooked in media studies, video games. Although video games are often dismissed as a simpler, less thought out or unartistic media format, video games are steadily becoming one of the most consumed entertainment mediums globally, with many games engaging with increasingly complex social and artistic themes to cater to a maturing audience. In the course of our research, we focused primarily on studying how video games engage with history, and how different gameplay and design elements influence how the player interacts with the history the developers are seeking to construct.

Much of our research has been focused on the development of a course that will be available during the fall semester of 2022. In the early stages of this course's development, we focused on selecting which games would best contribute to discussion and allow the students to explore a wide range of different genres and types of gameplay. During the course, the students will be assigned these games alongside supplemental readings we have selected, which they will use to inform their play and to better understand the history that inspired the media they are engaging with. One such example of a game that will be played will be *Europa Universalis IV*, a game in which the player takes control of one country with a playable time frame focused on the renaissance to the beginning of the industrial age. As players engage with this title, they will encounter various historical themes and settings, such as European colonization of the Americas or the slave trade. Students will explore the ways in which these themes are portrayed and presented to the player audience, and will examine how the gameplay elements, design, player choice, as well as a variety of other factors influence the portrayal of these historical themes alongside many others. Through our work this summer, we have curated a curriculum of games that we believe will provide a course that looks at differing historical areas and various video game genres, allowing the student to widely explore this field of media studies.

In addition to the designing of the course work and course materials, our research this summer has also included elements of my own personal academic study. Working closely with Professor Rael in supplement to my own personal academic research, I have been working on writing my own essay, in which I will analyze the portrayal of slavery in videogames, drawing upon games that will be used in this course and others I have come across through the course of my summer. This piece will operate as a case study of different games from varying genres that all engage in either a historical or fictional version of slavery, the ethics and impacts of portrayals such as these in video games, as well as the reaction these games have generated from consumers and critics. Upon completion, this piece will hopefully be published either on an academic blog or journal available online.

Faculty Mentor: Professor Patrick Rael
Funded by the Gibbons Summer Research Program