Examining Depictions of Indigenous People in *Sid Meier’s Civilization VI*

Shaan Budhwani

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Video games can provide enjoyment for almost any group. Children can learn from educational games, competitive players can strive to become the best in sports games or shooters, and anyone can pass time with casual phone games. History buffs also have a wide variety of games that can interest them, since games like *Assassin’s Creed: Valhalla* use the past as a rich setting for the player to explore. One genre of game takes this historical immersion a step higher. In strategy games, players don’t just control a single character. Rather, they control entire states or countries, ideally leading them to prosperity and glory. Some of the most famous examples of strategy game series also take place with history as a backdrop, such as the *Civilization* and *Total War* series. Balancing science and culture, the military and the economy, and foreign relations can be an addictive pastime for people who have studied these topics in real life.

However, these games are deeper than they appear at first glance. Though they have the appearance of history, it can be easy to forget the real world events that a player’s actions are based off of. Conquering a city can be as simple as a click of the mouse, abstracting the deaths of civilians and disruption of everyday life that would occur. Losing a unit of troops may mean little to a player, but would reflect thousands of soldiers dying in war. Even actions as drastic as a nuclear bombing can be easily rationalized: “It will get rid of those units, so I can move in my army next turn.” A degree of abstraction is necessary for these games; very few people would play them if they had to recruit every soldier individually. In many cases, though, this abstraction becomes too generalized, and it masks the dirty history that much of these games are based off of. This masking of history has consequences, as players may believe that the sanitized version of history they are playing is the truth. Video games present a uniquely engaging window on history; one that can shape players’ perceptions of it. Inaccurate beliefs about history can be dangerous, especially with aspects of history that still have consequences today. Indigenous groups, especially, have been subjects of misinformation throughout history and today. By examining how games depict history, we can consider ways that they can become more accurate, allowing them to better represent indigenous groups.

This essay will examine the depictions of indigenous people in *Sid Meier’s Civilization VI*. For the purposes of this study, indigenous people will refer to Native American, sub-Saharan African, and Oceanian peoples. The colonial era’s depiction, from roughly 1400 to 1900, will also be of particular focus. This is an era that has often been covered in strategy games, going back to 1994 with *Sid Meier’s Colonization*, a spin-off game related to the *Civilization* series. The era is particularly well suited to the “four Xs” of strategy gaming: exploration of new lands, expansion into those lands, exploitation of resources, and extermination of rivals.[[1]](#footnote-2) However, this era has also been subject to some of the deepest abstraction of its history. Slavery and genocide of indigenous peoples are central parts of this era, yet most games treat these only as background features, if they are included at all. In addition, many other strategy games have players take on the role of colonizers. If players are allowed to play as indigenous people at all, their play styles are often very similar or even identical to the colonial powers they interacted with in history. Games’ depictions of these cultures are especially important because many of these issues still affect them today. Indigenous communities are still suffering from the effects of colonialism, and colonial rule is still within living memory. Many indigenous groups experience stereotypes and misrepresentation, and poor representation in games can reinforce these stereotypes. One-hundred percent accuracy may not be possible, or even desired. As mentioned earlier, a certain degree of abstraction is necessary for gameplay to remain engaging and enjoyable. Striving for that balance of entertainment and accuracy is a worthy goal, and if accuracy cannot always be obtained, we can try to understand why certain compromises have been made.

Video game depictions of history have been the subject of scholarly study. Much of this study has centered around the potential for historical video games in education.[[2]](#footnote-3) Due to their interactivity and digital form, video games can be appealing ways to demonstrate history to students. However, it is important that games used in this way are historically accurate.[[3]](#footnote-4) Other studies have examined historical games to determine if they are accurate or what innate biases they may have.[[4]](#footnote-5) One of the largest collections of scholarship on this topic is *Playing with the Past: Digital Game and the Simulation of History*. The essays within the collection explore the Eurocentrism of many historical games, representation of history and how it is simulated, and user interactions with history as it is displayed in these games.[[5]](#footnote-6) Certain essays have also looked at depictions of colonialism and indigenous groups.[[6]](#footnote-7) The *Civilization* series has been a focal point of many studies, likely due to its prominence and age. Its relatively unique position of allowing players to experience the entirety of human history also allows it to be studied for multiple eras, compared to other strategy games that only focus on one historical era. Within this background of scholarship, there has been relatively little examination of how colonialism and indigenous groups are depicted, compared to general studies of history in historical games.[[7]](#footnote-8)

*Civilization* is one of the most prominent series within the strategy genre. The first entry, *Sid Meier’s Civilization*,in the series released in 1991. Unlike many strategy games, which focus on a specific era, *Civilization* encompasses all of human history, with players beginning as a migratory tribe in 4000 BCE and progressing into the future of 2050 CE. As civilizations progress through different eras, they unlock newer units, buildings, and cultural innovations. Players can choose from different civilizations, each of which have their own unique leaders, units, and buildings, as well as special abilities that reflect that civilization’s culture and accomplishments. The randomly generated map is divided into hexagonal tiles that provide the basic unit of measurement within the game. Players establish cities from which they can produce buildings and units to improve their infrastructure and wage war. They also interact with other civilizations, potentially forming alliances or going to war. Victory can be achieved in various ways, such as the conquest of all rival civilizations, creation of a space colony, or overwhelming other civilizations’ cultures with the player’s own. The game progresses through turns, with the player performing all of their actions before passing to the AI civilizations.

**Playable Indigenous People**

Any player’s first and most important choice is their choice of civilization. The first game’s choices were clearly Eurocentric and lacking in indigenous representation. The only Native American representation was the Aztec Empire, and Africa was represented only by ancient Egypt and the Zulu. Oceania was not represented at all. Europe, by contrast, had six representatives, as well as the colony-descended civilization of the United States. 25 years later, with the launch of *Civilization VI*, choices had not improved. In fact, by default, there were no Native American civilizations. The Aztecs were available only to those who had ordered the game before its release, and were added ninety days later for anyone who had not. Sub-Saharan Africa was also only represented by the Kongolese, and Egypt is represented by the Macedonian Ptolemaic Dynasty. Oceania was again completely absent. Europe, however, had eight inclusions, as well as the two colonial nations of the United States and Brazil.

That at launch, zero Native American civilizations were playable for anyone who had not pre-ordered the game is especially surprising, since in previous releases, groups like the Mayans, Inca, Iroquois, and Shoshone were all playable.[[8]](#footnote-9) In order to play as any Native American civilization besides the Aztecs in *VI*, players must purchase additional downloadable content. Through this additional content, four additional Native American civilizations, four African civilizations, and one Pacific Islander civilization are added to the game.[[9]](#footnote-10) This additional diversity is certainly welcome, and some of the civilizations represented here have little representation in other games, such as the Cree. However, this does not change the base game’s lack of representation of indigenous cultures. The base game includes some of the most influential civilizations in world history, such as China, India, and Rome. The comparative lack of representation for the Americas, Africa, and Oceania can create the impression that these regions were not as important or significant in world history. If this game is being considered for educational purposes, this inaccurate impression could simply be taken as fact by students who do not know any better. Furthermore, though the additional content did improve indigenous representation, it also included more European and colonial civilizations, ending with a total of seventeen European civilizations and five colony-descended civilizations. The overall ratio of European and colonial civilizations compared to indigenous civilizations is still present. This gap in representation presents a Eurocentric view on which civilizations have contributed to world history and are worthy of inclusion.

**Playing as Indigenous Civilizations**

The unique attributes of these civilizations also deserves closer examination. Each civilization has a unique unit representing the civilization’s military history, unique infrastructure in the form of a building or improvement to the land, a civilization ability that gives them bonuses, and a leader ability based on which historical figure leads the civilization. For example, the Cree have access to a powerful scout, the Okihtcitaw, and can construct Mekewap shelters. Their civilization ability promotes trade, while their leader, Poundmaker, gives bonuses to alliances, trade, and hunting. Taken as a whole, these unique attributes help define the civilization and differentiate it from others. The Cree are portrayed as expert traders and hunters with a focus on diplomacy. Other civilizations may focus on science, culture, or warfare. These unique attributes reflect a civilizations’ history in a way that is easily understandable and useful in gameplay. However, they also restrict the civilization and pay no heed to their status in-game, which can vary wildly from their history. The Cree may begin the game in a desert, with no other nearby civilizations, yet they would still receive bonuses to hunting and trade that do not reflect their situation in the game. In this way, the *Civilization* series presents a kind of large-scale cultural determinism: that the Cree would always be hunters and traders, regardless of where they originated or what environment they may have lived in. However, a conflict presents itself here. Though the unique attributes system makes civilizations appear inflexible and unchanging, making all civilizations the same would be equally, or possibly more, problematic for representation. A generic representation of all civilizations would make indigenous groups appear no different than colonizing powers.

The game’s viewpoint can become problematic when considering other indigenous civilizations’ representation, particularly the Moari. The Maori’s civilization ability gives powerful bonuses, allowing them to traverse the seas earlier than other civilizations, receive bonuses to fishing, and improving yields from forested areas. However, it also carries downsides. They cannot recruit Great Writers, a special unit that creates Great Works of Writing that are essential to cultural victories. The Maori also cannot harvest resources, an ability all other civilizations have. The first downside reflects the fact that the Maori did not have an indigenous writing system, while the second reflects a belief that the Maori lived in harmony with nature. The first downside is completely static, presenting the Maori as forever being unable to learn writing. This is an especially strange restriction, as the Maori did eventually adopt a writing system, and Maori language literature exists today. The basis for the second downside is the romanticized myth of the noble savage that often affects indigenous people. Though the perception that indigenous people live in harmony with nature may seem to be positive, it was often the justification for colonial powers to take indigenous land, since they were viewed as not exploiting its full potential.[[10]](#footnote-11) In this case, it is also inaccurate, as the Maori likely hunted moas to extinction within a century of their arrival in New Zealand.[[11]](#footnote-12) In game, the harvest resources action would be a near-perfect fit for this event, since other civilizations can permanently remove an animal resource to gain an immediate food bonus. In the real world, Maori people have written literature and harmed the environment, but in the world of *Civilization VI*, these actions are impossible. By enforcing these penalties on the Maori, the developers have, perhaps unintentionally, locked the Maori into a very specific time frame and mindset. The myth that indigenous people are “part of the past” is one that continues to harm indigenous communities today, since it interferes with these communities’ needs in the present.[[12]](#footnote-13) With the Maori’s representation, *Civilization VI* has perpetuated this myth.

**Unplayable Indigenous Groups: Tribes, Barbarians, and City-States**

*Civilization* is centered around the interactions between major civilizations. Players can trade, make alliances with, and declare war on other civilizations. However, many different types of societies existed throughout history, some of which are represented in the game. Many indigenous peoples lived in stateless societies with very little centralization. Though these societies interacted with other groups around them, they were not always organized enough for formal treaties and agreements. In *Civilization*, these societies are represented in two ways: tribal villages and barbarians. Tribal villages are features on a map tile. Players can only interact with them by moving a unit onto their tile, and the village will give the player a gift, such as gold, faith, or a free unit. That tribe will then disappear, and cannot be seen or interacted with again. These villages present a very one-dimensional representation of tribal people. They bring to mind stories of European explorers coming across isolated tribes, only to be hailed as gods and showered with gifts. Alternatively, they could represent the “helpful native” archetype, such as the Wampanoag aiding colonists at Plymouth. In some cases, text will explain that the tribe decided to join your civilization, but this is not always the case. When it is not, the player is given no explanation of why the village gave them a gift, or why the village disappears after aiding them. Instead, these tribal people only exist to briefly aid the player, before disappearing and making way for the major civilizations. This presentation of tribal groups mirrors many indigenous groups’ erasure from history, but makes that erasure much more literal.

The counterparts to tribal villages are barbarians. Barbarians reside in outposts, much like tribal villages. Unlike tribal villages, barbarian outposts will periodically spawn units that are hostile to all major civilizations and will attack any non-barbarian unit that approaches them. If barbarians encounter a city, they will pillage the land surrounding it, hampering its growth. The primary method to deal with barbarians is to defeat their units and destroy the camp, which will give the player a small amount of loot. If tribal villages represent the helpful native, then barbarians are the ignoble savage. Though the name brings to mind Germanic tribes during the collapse of Rome, barbarians can also be viewed as referring to colonialist stereotypes of hostile tribes in jungles, Great Plains Native Americans who resisted encroaching settlers, or cannibal islanders in the Pacific. In *Civilization*, all of these groups are merged together in barbarism. There is no distinction made between groups of barbarians in game; barbarians from one camp are treated identically to barbarians from another camp. Notably, there is only one way to peacefully deal with barbarians. Civilizations which follow a religion can recruit Apostle units to spread that faith. These Apostles can obtain the “Heathen Conversion” trait, which allows them to instantly recruit all barbarian units adjacent to the Apostle to the owner’s civilization. These options reflect the two choices that many indigenous people faced at the hands of colonial powers: convert and assimilate, or die. If the player leaves the barbarians alive, they will continue to produce armies and pillage cities. Because barbarians appear very frequently in the early stages of the game, it is very rare that a civilization will advance through the game without destroying at least one barbarian outpost. New outposts can also randomly appear in any area that has not been settled by a major civilization. Thus, the only way to permanently end the threat of barbarians is to ensure that the entire world is settled and civilized. The extermination of entire cultures and peoples is reduced to a near-mandatory challenge to be overcome.

It seems that Firaxis is aware of some of the problematic stereotypes associated with barbarians. Along with new civilizations, downloadable content can also contain new game modes that change how the game is played. One of these, the Barbarian Clans mode, changes barbarians.[[13]](#footnote-14) They are still found in outposts and are hostile by default. However, the player can interact with these outposts and enter a limited diplomatic state with them. They can bribe barbarians to keep them away from their own cities, turn them against a nearby rival, or recruit units for their own armies. In addition, peacefully interacting with an outpost causes it to begin civilizing, represented by a bar. Once the bar is full, the barbarians will become a city-state, no longer hostile to other civilizations. This mode presents a better representation of tribal societies, as very few societies were uniformly hostile to all outsides. Tribes are no longer hostile savages that must be conquered or converted. However, the fundamental basis of this mechanic is still intact. Unless interacted with by a civilization, the barbarians will never change. Major powers thus represent a civilizing force that is needed for these tribes to become worthy of recognition. Until that process is complete, they can be treated like any other barbarians and exterminated without guilt.

Between the major civilizations and the tribal villages and barbarians are minor states. Minor civilizations are represented as city-states that cannot expand past one city and its surrounding territory. These include some Native American and African cities such as Cahokia, Nazca, and Antananarivo. Players can become suzerains of these city-states to gain unique bonuses, like the ability to construct Nazca lines if they ally with Nazca. When considering indigenous peoples, these city-states allow *Civilization* toinclude groups that would otherwise be completely unrepresented. However, city-states are completely static. They will build units and buildings, but will never use them except in self-defense. They are also automatically included in any wars that their suzerain is part of. This is despite them representing groups and states that, in real history, had thriving cultures as well as wars and alliances with other groups. Instead, they exist only as pawns for the major powers to come into conflict with, exchanging loyalties quickly and easily. Unlike the player’s cities, which can become unhappy or even rebellious in prolonged war, city-states will always follow their suzerains into war, even if they are surrounded by potential enemies.

The depiction of city-states in-game reflect how colonial powers treated less powerful states, a relationship that is made explicit with the names of policies that players can enact. Civilizations’ governments are made up of different policy cards that give varying bonuses. Many of the policy cards associated with city-states have names associated with colonialism or Cold War theories regarding the Third World. For example, Gunboat Diplomacy makes it easier for a civilization to ally with city-states, while a Raj increases resources gained from allied city-states, and Containment makes it easier to influence city-states currently under the control of a rival civilization. Each of these policies is purely beneficial. Despite Gunboat Diplomacy representing the use of military force to intimidate less powerful nations, there is no possibility of this force failing to impress a city-state or invite backlash from another civilization. The colonial exploitation of the British Raj and the coups and wars that were essential to Containment Policy are all abstracted to additional numbers that benefit the player. Players, in turn, can enact these policies without knowing anything about their real world counterparts or their effects in history. Implementing consequences for these actions would not be difficult, and in fact already has a basis in-game. There are Dark Age policy cards, such as an Inquisition, Isolationism, or Robber Barons, which provide powerful bonuses but come with downsides. Including these downsides for other policy cards would not only provide consequences to engaging in imperialist and colonialist behavior, but could also provide more interesting gameplay. Rather than picking a card like the Raj because it provides the most benefit, players would have to consider the downsides and whether they are worth the benefit. In the current situation, the game only encourages players to follow in these imperialist footsteps, without any consequences or explanation of their historical background.

**Eurocentric Science and Culture**

These policy cards are not the only aspects of gameplay which reinforce a Eurocentric imperialist view. One of the most prominent gameplay features in *Civilization* is the technology tree. Players research technologies using science, generated by cities. These technologies link to each other, creating a tree-like structure. For example, Mining is a prerequisite for Bronze Working, while Combustion requires both Steel and [Oil] Refining. Each technology unlocks new units, buildings, infrastructure, and Great Wonders. In *Civilization VI,* there is also the civics tree, which works in the same way as the science tree, but represents cultural developments like Theology, Mercentalism, and Globalization. The technology and civic trees aim to capture the historical development of societies over six thousand years. However, they tell only a very narrow story, one that is almost entirely based on European developments.

The medieval era’s depiction is a particularly revealing example of this with its selection of civics. Feudalism, Medieval Faires, Guilds, and Divine Right are four of the seven civics available, and all but Divine Right are mandatory to progress to the next era. To examine the game’s point of view, the in-game Civilopedia provides descriptions and historical context for almost every feature of the game. However, the descriptions for these civics are almost entirely focused solely on Europe, with one mention of Han China in the description of Guilds and one mention of Japan in the entry for Feudalism. This was an era that saw the rise of the diffused mandala system in Southeast Asia, the creation of the Iroquois Confederacy, and the nomadic empire of the Mongols. In game, these diverse systems of governance are ignored, and all civilizations must conform to European development. The choice of units is also revealing. The medieval era has all civilizations unlock Pikemen, Crossbowmen, and Knights. Certain civilizations’ unique units offer more variety, such as the Zulus’ Impi which replaces the Pikemen, but otherwise, all civilizations use the same European army structure. The game seems to assert that, if indigenous people had access to iron working and horses, the development of a European-style military would be inevitable. As with the civilizations’ unique bonuses, the civilizations’ in-game situations are not considered. Civilizations in heavily forested or mountainous areas where cavalry would be ineffective still develop the same units. Here, the game is not only asserting historical determinism in its outcomes, but one continent’s history is being extrapolated to the entire world.

This determinism becomes especially dubious when considering one specific example. In the Industrial Era, one civic that is available is Colonialism. Colonialism unlocks the earlier discussed Raj policy card, as well as the cards for Native Conquest and Colonial Taxes. Colonialism is also a requirement for the Natural History civic, which unlocks the archaeology mechanic, an important component of the cultural victory. Due to the branching nature of the civics tree, Natural History is an indirect prerequisite for almost every civic available in the Modern Era and beyond. This means that all civilizations must at some point develop Colonialism if their culture advances enough. Players are not required to adopt the policies that come with Colonialism, but its development represents that the people of the civilization understand and are willing to enact it. For civilizations that represent cultures that were colonized, this discovery puts them on the same level as the powers that colonized them, even for countries that were famous for resisting colonialism, such as Ethiopia, or India when led by Gandhi. *Civilization* posits that, given time, every culture would eventually develop the idea of colonialism and have the potential to enact it.

**Reactions from the Poundmaker Cree Nation**

This implication has, in fact, already affected the series. When the Cree, led by Chief Poundmaker, were added to the game, some Cree Nation members voiced concerns. The headman of the modern Poundmaker Cree Nation, Milton Tootoosis, stated that “[this game] continues to promote some of these ideologies that are connected to concepts of colonialism and imperialism and that doctrine of discovery, which are totally contrary to the beliefs and values of Chief Poundmaker, and many other Indigenous leaders around the world for that matter.”[[14]](#footnote-15) He further criticized the equivocation of First Nations’ cultures with those of colonizing nations. In addition, he noted that Firaxis did not contact the Poundmaker Cree Nation when developing the civilization.[[15]](#footnote-16) By not contacting representatives of the nation they were depicting, Firaxis contributed to the erasure of already marginalized groups. Their depiction of the Cree was accurate in appearance but ignored their cultural values. The requirement that all civilizations develop Colonialism wipes away cultural differences and marginalized groups’ history as victims of colonialism.

The example of the Colonialism civic speaks to a larger issue with the technology and civics tree. Their extreme rigidity reflects developments in Europe adequately. However, other parts of the world did not always follow the same routes of development that Europeans did. For example, most Native American and sub-Saharan African cultures lacked widespread usage of the wheel.[[16]](#footnote-17) In the game, the Wheel technology is a prerequisite for Engineering. However, these regions were capable of great feats of engineering without the usage of the wheel, such as the Walls of Benin and the Incan road system. By the rules of the game, the Inca could not have constructed Machu Picchu, as the wonder requires the Engineering technology and therefore the Wheel. At the time of European contact, most Native American cultures would be classified as in the Ancient Era, lacking technologies like Bronze Working and Horseback Riding. However, this simplistic view would ignore the Maya’s advanced astronomy, which is presented as a Renaissance era technology. *Civilization* forces all civilizations to conform to a European standard of development, which portrays Native American and sub-Saharan societies as backwards and obsolete.

**Imperialism in Gameplay**

This Eurocentrism goes much deeper than the civic choices and technology tree. The entire core of gameplay is based on an imperialistic mindset. The player starts with a settler unit, who can found a city. Once the first city is founded, players will usually recruit units for defense against barbarians and establish some infrastructure. However, one of the most important early tasks is creating more settlers to expand the player’s civilization. Expansion is central to the gameplay, and almost always encouraged. Expanding presents no moral dilemma, since the land surrounding players is portrayed as empty, except for any tribal villages and barbarians. By adding cities, players have more places from which to recruit units and obtain science, culture, and gold. Expanding one’s territory can also grant access to new resources, some of which are necessary to recruit more powerful units. Perhaps just as importantly, settling land denies it to the other major civilizations and prevents new barbarian outposts from arising. Expansion is vital in almost every victory type. For conquest and religious victories, more cities allows more recruitment of units or missionaries to conquer or convert the other civilizations. In science and culture victories, more cities means more space to build scientific and cultural buildings. Only the diplomatic victory, which requires passing resolutions in a pseudo-United Nations, does not directly benefit from having more cities.

Another part of the reason for this expansionist bias is that there is simply no reason not to expand. Historically, empires would be restricted by long distances making governance impractical, terrain features like mountain ranges and deserts, regional diseases like malaria, or a lack of benefit in expanding. Only with improved oceanic navigation and modern medicine did the world see the rise of truly global empires. In *Civilization VI*, terrain is a poor blocker. Units can travel through deserts as easily as plains, and mountains present the only true geographic barrier. The primary restriction on expansion is amenities, a measure of the population’s happiness that is spread among all of a player’s cities. Too many cities, in theory, will stretch these amenities too thin and make citizens unhappy. In practice, it is very easy to manage amenities with the construction of entertainment buildings, removing the only barrier to expansion. This comes in contrast to previous iterations, which had penalties that could not be ignored. In *Civilization V*, each new city increased the costs of all future technologies and civics by a fixed percentage. A few cities would not cause issues, but expanding too much could rapidly inflate technology and civic costs, causing the empire to stagnate. Without this sort of harsh limitation, *Civilization VI* implicitly endorses rampant expansionism as the only viable strategy. This approach serves well for some of the civilizations in the game. Rome, the Mongols, and Russia all expanded rapidly. Even some indigenous groups, like the Aztecs, Inca, and the Zulu established powerful expansionist empires.

**Conclusions and Thoughts on Going Forward**

Where *Civilization* fails indigenous groups as a whole is in presenting this expansionism as the only way forward. Many other civilizations in the game did not engage in expansionist imperialism and were, in fact, the victims of this mindset. The game seems to assert that, if these cultures had been expansionist enough, they could have become powerful enough to resist their rivals. However, this singular line of thinking is not restricted to the idea of expansionism alone. The game also lays out a single path of scientific and cultural development. A player can lead the Cree to establish a mighty empire, but they can only do so by following a system of science and culture that is based on European developments. As Tootoosis said, the game represents an ideology that is not in line with many indigenous cultures, but presents that ideology as the only option available. Behind the representation of indigenous groups and their unique traits is a system that, at its core, is Eurocentric and imperialist in nature.

There are many ways these issues can be addressed. One of the ways already seen is through game updates and downloadable content. The Barbarian Clans mode and the many additional indigenous civilizations are a welcome addition to the game. However, there is also the potential for this kind of additional content to only further the gap. Along with the additional indigenous civilizations, there have also been many European and colonial civilizations, meaning that the overall ratio of representation is still heavily biased towards Europe. Other game modes also further the game’s imperialist mindset. For example, the Monopolies and Corporations game mode encourages players to seek out monopolies on vital resources, rewarding them when they do so. As with colonial policies, there is no downside to this, despite real world examples such as conflicts over oil, or the colonization of Pacific islands in search of guano. Furthermore, updates cannot change the core gameplay. For that, an entirely new entry in the series would likely be required. Though *Civilization VI* has made some improvements in depicting indigenous people, it remains to be seen whether an eventual sequel will carry on that work.

Improving representation of indigenous people is especially important for this series. *Civilization* remains one of the most prominent strategy genre series. For many people, it was likely their introduction to lesser known cultures such as the Cree or the Mapuche. The series also continues to expand its representation, and many of the indigenous groups of the game are being represented for the first time. However, merely allowing players to play as these groups is not enough. If the developers want to properly represent indigenous groups, there should be alternatives to imperialism in gameplay, to represent how many indigenous groups lived their lives before suffering from colonialism. By improving its representation of indigenous groups and its game mechanics, *Civilization* holds the potential to educate millions of players.

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1. Alan Emrich, “MicroProse’ Strategic Space Opera is Rated XXXX! A Revealing Sneak Preview,” (*Computer Gaming World Magazine*, No 110, September 1993), 92. The term “four X” originated in a description of then-upcoming space strategy game *Master of Orion* and has since become a shorthand for strategy games*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Jeremiah McCall, *Gaming the Past: Using Video Games to Teach Secondary History*. (New York: Routledge, 2011), Kurt Squire, *Video Games and Learning: Teaching and Participatory Culture in the Digital Age,* (New York: Teacher’s College Press, 2011). McCall and Squire both refer specifically to the *Civilization* series, with Squire devoting several chapters to it. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. McCall, *Gaming the Past,* 23.McCalluses the standard that games must “offer defensible explanatory models of historical systems.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Marc James Carpenter, “Replaying Colonialism: Indigenous National Sovereignty and its Limits in Strategic Videogames,” (*American Indian Quarterly*, Vol 45, no 1, 2021). Gerald Voorhees, “I Play Therefore I Am: Sid Meier’s Civilization, Turn Based Strategy Games, and the Cogito,” (*Games and Culture*, vol 4, no 3, 2009). Eva Vrtacic, “The Grand Narrative of Video Games: Sid Meier’s Civilization,” (*Teorija In Praska*, vol 51, no 1, 2014) All examine the *Civilization* series. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Matthey Kapell and Andrew Elliott, *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Kapell and Elliot, *Playing with the Past*.Within the collection, pieces from Peterson, Miller, and Fedorko (33), Mir and Owens (91), Holdenried and Trepanier (107), and Apperley (185) study games set in or including the colonial era. Carpenter (2021) examines indigenous representation within *Civilization*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Carpenter (2021), and essays by Mir and Owens and Holdenried and Trepanier within *Playing with the Past* (Kapell and Elliott, 2013) are exceptions. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. All four of these groups, as well as the Aztecs, were available in *Civilization V*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Respectively, the Cree, Inca, Mayans, and Mapuche; the Ethiopians, Malians, Nubians, and the Zulu; and the Maori. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Raymond Hames, “The Ecologically Noble Savage Debate,” *The Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol 36, no 1, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. R.N Holdaway and C. Jacomb, “Rapid Extinction of the Moas (Aves: Dinornithiformes): Model, Test, and Implications,” *Science*, vol 287, issue 5461, p 2250. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Dina Gilo-Whitakers, *All the Real Indians Died Off: and 20 Other Myths about Native Americans*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. John Higgs, “Civilization 6’s Barbarian Clans Game Mode is a Real Game-Changer,” *Game Rant*, February 19, 2021. Accessed April 3, 2021. <https://gamerant.com/civilization-6-barbarian-clans-game-mode-game-changer/> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. CBC Radio, “Civilization Video Game Paints an ‘Inaccurate and Dangerous’ Picture of Poundmaker Cree Nation Chief.” CBC Radio, January 9, 2018. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-january-09-2018-1.4478144/civilization-video-game-paints-an-inaccurate-and-dangerous-picture-of-poundmaker-cree-nation-chief-1.4478159> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. This comes as a surprise, since Firaxis had previously contacted the Pueblo Council regarding the potential inclusion of the Pueblo in a piece of downloadable content for *Civilization V*. In that instance, they were turned down, as the Pueblo did not want their language to be in a video game. Russ Pitts, “Knowing History: Behind Civ 5’s Brave New World,” *Polygon*, June 27, 2013, accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.polygon.com/features/2013/6/27/4453070/civ-the-making-of-brave-new-world> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Isaías Chaves, Stanley L Engerman, and James A Robinson, “Reinventing the Wheel: The Economic Benefits of Wheeled Transportation in Early Colonial British West Africa,” in *Africa's Development in Historical Perspective,* eds Emmanuel Akyeampong, Robert H Bates, Nathan Nunn, and James A. Robinson, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)