

Playing Native: Depictions of Indigenous People in *Sid Meier's Civilization VI*

Introduction

In *Civilization VI*, players control a historical civilization throughout human history. This study examines how the game depicts indigenous people, both playable and nonplayable, as well as how the core gameplay reflects a Eurocentric imperialist approach.

Questions

- How are indigenous people represented in the game?
- How historically accurate is the game?
- Are there any stereotypes that the game plays into?
- What kind of mindset does the gameplay encourage?
- How has the game changed over time through updates?

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Findings

Indigenous people are greatly under-represented in playable civilizations, and depictions of unplayable indigenous groups often hinge on cultural stereotypes such as the violent savage or the helpful native. The model of development assumes that all civilizations progress as Europe historically did. The core gameplay also encourages rampant expansionism and imperialism, presenting no downsides for the player in expanding their empire, while any potential victims are abstracted.



All civilizations must progress on the same civics tree, which follows European development. Pictured: Feudalism, Guilds, Medieval Faires, and Divine Right are all part of the Medieval Era. In-game descriptions of these developments almost exclusively focus on them in a European context.



At launch, the Aztecs (pictured) and the Kongo were the only playable indigenous civilizations, while eight European civilizations were included. To play as any other indigenous civilizations, players must purchase additional downloadable content.

Moving Forward

The development team appears to understand that some elements of gameplay are problematic. A new gameplay mode available as downloadable content improves the portrayal of barbarians, and other downloadable content has added several more indigenous groups to play as, some for the first time in the series. However, the core gameplay has remained largely the same throughout the series. Because *Civilization* is one of the most prominent strategy game series, its depictions of indigenous people carry great weight in the genre and for its players' views on these cultures.