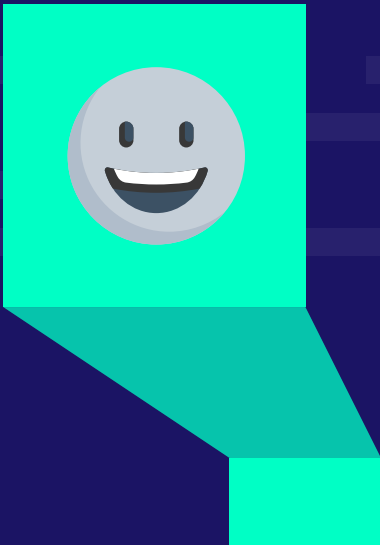# The Justification for American Foreign Policy in Video Games
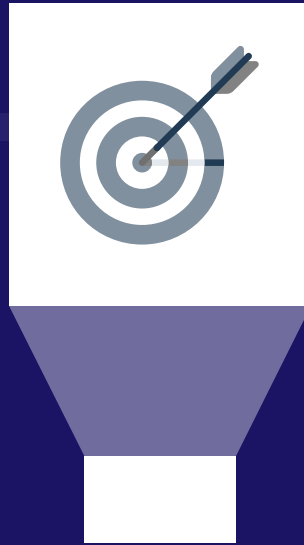
Johnathan Dewey

Why Choose Video Games?

Popularity

The most popular form of media with millions of player and billions of hours played.

Impact

Teach Americans more about sensitive topics (race, sexuality, etc.) more than schools are.

Potential

An experimental medium for telling a story. The player interacts with the story and environment.

How do Video Games Justify American Foreign Policy?

They often create orientalist distinctions that defend American foreign policy.

Orientalism is "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the orient' and 'the occident'" (Said, 2)

Prominent Orientalist Tropes in Video Games

Both tropes present American ideas as non-ideology to disguise foreign ambitions
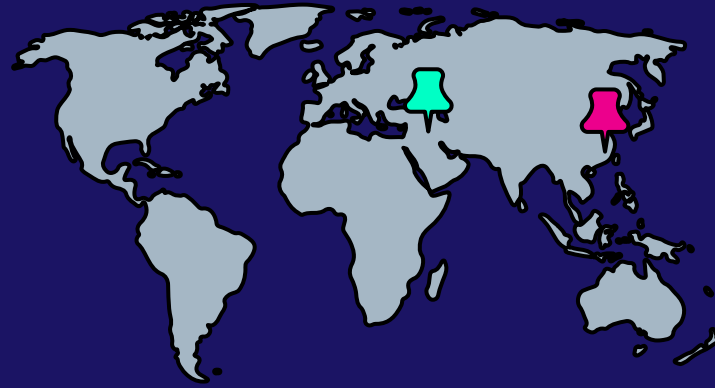
Middle East

the Middle East as a perpetual warzone of evil and uncivil men

East Asia

East Asia as a land that is overwhelmingly technologically superior

Ziggurat in the background of a Biblical tale about Arrogance

THE ZIGGURAT
HOW VIDEO GAMES TRANSFORMED ORIENTALISM

The Biblical Tower of Babel Inspired by the Etemenanki Ziggurat

THE ZIGGURAT

EVOLUTION

How did the Ziggurat's orientalist meanings change throughout time?

Original Meaning

an ancient Mesopitamian structure. Resembles a stepped pyramid a temple on top

Art

used in a depiction of the tower of Babel. associated the Ziggurat with arrogance and changed the perception of the Near East in western art

Video Games

Is now associated with themes of mysticism and chaos through games like *Serious Sam* and *Tomb Raider*. The Ziggurat also is used as the generic temple in the Near East for any game.

ORIENTALISM AND THE MIDDLE EAST

America's campaign is the War on Terror, which was prompted by 9/11

⬇

War has gone on for 20 years, which is over twice as long as World War II.

⬇

War continues because media justifies America's actions

⬇

Since 9/11, modern warfare games use the Middle East as a setting.

➡

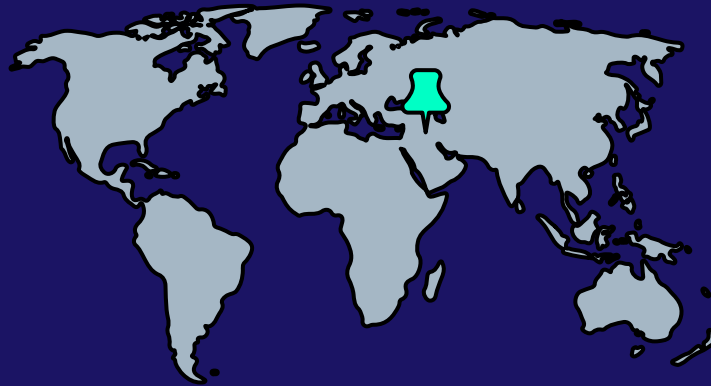Distinctions are created that justify American foreign policy

➡

Makes Middle Eastern men seem evil and uncivil

⬆

America's goal is to stabilize the region, these orientalist depictions help paint a picture that the Middle East is uncivil

⬆

America's foreign ambitions are justified

ORIENTALISM AND EAST ASIA

America's rival, China, is located in East Asia

⬇

America feels threatened and wants to remain superior

⬇

Rivalry continues because media justifies America's actions

⬇

Distinctions are created that justify American foreign policy

➡

Video Games portray Asian people as technologically superior to their occidental counterparts

➡

Makes the west seem behind technologically compared to a East-Asian resembling foe.

⬆

America's goal is to be ahead of China, these orientalist depictions help implement anxiety in Americans that China is ahead

⬆

America's foreign ambitions are justified

MY PROPOSAL

In my research I wish to investigate these two tropes in video games. While these tropes have been investigated in literature and film, video games still remain under-researched.

I have a list of games where I want to affirm that there orientalist messages that defend American foreign policy. I also want to investigate any other possible tropes hidden within these games.

After I identified an orientalist message, I want to interview developers, or read interviews of developers to understand why Asia is being depicted as the way it is.

METHODOLOGY

Step 1

Play the game and take note of anything that can be orientalist

Step 2

Examine elements of game (character design, environments, etc.)

Step 3

Classify a game as orientalist or not

Step 4

Write a review of orientalism in the game

Step 5

Formulate specific questions to send developers to figure out why distinctions were made

Step 6

Read about the development process of games to figure out why distinctions were made

THANK YOU :)

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