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Manifest Destiny's reinforcement through Native American stereotyping in *Red Dead Redemption 2*

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Abstract

Video games are currently acquiring a more central role in contemporary society from a storytelling perspective. They are products that engage with a broader, younger audience and seem to be progressively establishing themselves as new forms of narrative. However, as a relatively new field of study, video games are usually exempt from analysis from non-specialized media outlets, and the little analysis it undergoes tends to be centered on either its technical aspects, or, as of late, on the means by which the video games were produced. Among the criticism directed towards *Red Dead Redemption 2*, the most noticeable is its extreme case of unpaid overtime suffered by the developers. These circumstances, however, seem to have hidden certain elements, such as narrative analysis. Hence, in this paper the game's most prominent Native American characters were examined under a postcolonial perspective. The study argues that the game's Indigenous portrayals were harmful and stereotypical as they are part of the game's reproduction of colonial discourse that reinforces the Manifest Destiny.

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1. Introduction

Cultural contemporary products that relate to previous historical times provide a unique perspective on how media evolves. Depicting a historical context different to ours is a difficult task, due to both the extensive previous study needed to be done, as well as the several nuances and challenges that representing a different time with different sensitivities and understandings of their varied social elements that arise. It is in these intricacies that *Red Dead Redemption 2*'s screenwriters are submerged. Their specific complications came from trying to present the often glorified genre of the Western, and all it meant when representing the Native Americans, to a game. This led to the creation of Rains Fall and Eagle Flies, a Native American chief and his son, and their conflict of ideologies to save their tribe. These two characters served as the gateway to the representation of pejorative stereotypes of the noble and ignoble savage. Little has previous literature explored Native American representation in video games. While representation of Native Americans is one of the most studied aspects of postcolonial studies, especially in non-conventional media such as cinema, its application to video games is still an aspect that is lacking. Moreover, the game under study, *Red Dead Redemption 2*, was released in late 2018. Its recent nature, as well as the controversial circumstances that surrounded the game when it was released (regarding the overtime the workers had to endure to release the game), made it so that cultural analysis of the game in its more nuanced aspects, such as their depiction of their Native Americans, was either missed or unnoticed. As such, a question arises. How does *Red Dead Redemption 2* depict its Native American characters, and what does this representation mean from a postcolonial perspective? The game attempts to depict a healthy image of these communities. However, due to both previous lack of representation and misrepresentation of Native American population in media, it ultimately represents harmful colonialist portrayals of them. This is done by both establishing its Native American characters under the umbrella of the “noble savage” and “ignoble savage” stereotypes, and by reinforcing the Manichaeian idea that the former is acceptable while latter is not. In doing this, the game ultimately embraces the colonialist idea of the Manifest Destiny.

The game will be analyzed under a postcolonial perspective, and the Native American characters of importance will be examined considering current definitions and understandings of the stereotypes of the “noble savage” and “ignoble savage”. Moreover, the results of such an examination will also be studied in accordance with whether the idea of “Manifest Destiny” is reinforced or criticized. The purpose of this study is to analyze the characters of Rains Fall and Eagle Flies, their development, and their interactions with other important members of the plot

of the game, and to examine the colonialist or postcolonial message their representation provides. The paper shall only focus on the game from a narrative standpoint, but will not analyze more technical or mechanical aspects of the game, nor how they relate to the issue at hand. First, the study shall provide a theoretical framework to understand the context and possible terms needed to understand the paper. Then, the paper will provide an overall analysis on the game's perspective on colonialist struggle. Afterwards, the character of Eagle Flies shall be examined using the concepts explained as well as his role in the plot. Later on, the same shall be done with the other character under study, Rains Fall. Finally, some concluding remarks shall be provided.

2. Theoretical framework

Video games as media is a complex topic. The industry is still recent, compared to other visual forms of media. As such, it is far more susceptible to change, since it is still being established as its own medium, and changes in its technology result in massive advancements to both how games are done and how they result. One of the common trends that video games seem to be directed to is getting more and more similar to cinema. After all, technology advances and allows for more realistic graphics. However, it is not only visually speaking that video games are getting closer to cinema, but also narratively. *Pac-Man* (1980) did not need a plot, but most mainstream modern video games need several teams of screenwriters, because video games, same as any other art piece, are means by which an author portrays a reality that wants to share with an audience, and a plot is one of the most effective ways to accomplish that. However, it is through this usage of written narrative that harmful and stereotypical imagery may impact a project. *Red Dead Redemption 2* is a highly narrative video game, and the pejorative representation it portrays of its Native American characters is mainly propelled through its plot.

This is the reason behind the closeness between cinema and video games. They are both visual media that, in most cases, use narrative as their vehicle to engage its audience. However, it is because this closeness that video games tend to commit the same mistakes cinema has in the past. One of them (the focus of this paper) is its treatment towards minority groups, most specifically, Native Americans, and how such treatment produces a colonialist message. The biggest and most prominent cinema industry is the one made in USA, and its narratives are a magnificent point of view to study the American gaze on the themes it depicts, especially its own conflicted history. No genre in cinema is as important (and detrimental) to Native American representation as the Western. The “othering” of Native minorities can be observed even before the very Western cinema origins, in the figure of Buffalo Bill. Nine years before

the creation of *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* tour, Cody founded its personal troupe, the Buffalo Bill Combination (Johnson 2017). One of its first shows, written alongside the playwright Prentiss Ingraham, *The Red Right Hand; or Buffalo Bill's First Scalp for Custer*, depicted a scalping, in this case, of a young Cheyenne warrior, Yellow Hair (Hedren 2005, 16), legitimizing the use of violence against Native population due to the US Army's sense of entitlement towards the land. Buffalo Bill would continue to be a paradigm in entertainment at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. His shows would establish the basis of contemporary representation of Native American people in media, and would make the conflict of Native American population against US Army a genre in and of itself. Cody's shows would also reinforce the idea of the Native as an ignoble and violent savage, a force to be reckoned with. This image would continue until 1890, when a major historical event in Native American history would change how non-Native Americans saw these communities. The Massacre of Wounded Knee would mark the abandonment of the Native American as an ignoble savage and would begin the trend of representing Native Americans as noble savages in media. As Deloria argues, "[F]or non-Indian Americans, the possibility of nineteenth-century Indian violence existed before Wounded Knee; afterward, it became a thing of representation, perfect for twentieth-century movies and books" (2004, 16). *Red Dead Redemption 2* is undoubtedly a Western, and it would take this approach of noble and ignoble savages when representing its Native American characters.

It is with this heavy cultural baggage that video games emerged, and, of course, minority groups did not end up being represented in a positive manner (or represented at all). A study done in 2009 showed that no Native American between March 2005 and February 2006 had been the protagonist of a video game and that, in comparison to the US population as of the 2000 census, they were under-represented by 90 percent (Consalvo, Ivory, Martins, and Williams 2009, 824-825). It is important to notice that the sample from this article accounted for 95 percent of video game sales within the sampling period, so the indie market might not have been considered. One example is *Brave: A Warrior's Tale and The Search for Spirit Dancer* (2005), which does have a Native American protagonist and launched within the sampling period. Nonetheless, the little representation Native American people had throughout the whole video game history is extremely detrimental, and *Red Dead Redemption 2* is not free of its impact. Up until its launch, there had only been one mainstream video game with a Native American protagonist, *Assassins' Creed 3* (which also did not provide a positive representation of a Native American community) so it is not surprising that a writing team mainly composed

of three people with no connection to any Native American community (Dan Houser, Michael Unsworth, and Rupert Humphries) misrepresent such communities.

The first Native American characters in video game history are those portrayed by *The Oregon Trail* (1971). *The Oregon Trail* was a text-based educational video game that portrayed the lives of white settlers crossing the real-life Oregon Trail. *The Oregon Trail* was a massive success at the time, but critical perspectives also allowed for a more profound understanding of the game. Bobbie Conner, director of the Tamástslikt Cultural Institute, argued that

[m]ost of what is written about the Oregon Trail is about the triumph of the United States [...] Americans like adventure stories and heroes, so we make explorers iconic, we put them on pedestals, and we romanticize Indians. These stereotypes get reinforced when we make heroes out of the wagon masters and the people who claimed the land. (Landry 2017).

Another critical perspective towards *The Oregon Trail* argues that players only care about Indigenous people insofar they need to avoid “misunderstandings” and incurring the wrath of potentially hostile natives, and that the game backgrounds the Plains Indians cultures by only allowing the player to be a white settler (Bigelow 1997, 87-88). All these are critiques that, as it shall be explained later in this paper, can also be applied to the game under study, *Red Dead Redemption 2*.

While it is true that not all stereotypes in video game history are represented in *Red Dead Redemption 2*, there are some that still heavily influenced Native American representation in media, and that depicted a harmful image. For instance, both the first two games from the *Turok* saga (1997 and 1998) and *Assassin's Creed 3* (2012) would use the pejorative stereotype of the Native American as the bow and arrow hunter, and the latter would include a mechanic that would reward massive hunting. However, they still provided a better image than, for instance, *Custer's Revenge* (1982), a game that glorified sexual violence against Native American women. To sum up, throughout its history video games have provided a continuum of negative images regarding Native Americans that ultimately, whether directly or indirectly, would affect *Red Dead Redemption 2*.

As for the stereotypes that relate to the representation of the Native American characters of the game, “noble savage” is defined as “a mythic conception of people belonging to non-European cultures as having innate natural simplicity and virtue uncorrupted by European civilization” (Merriam-Webster n.d.). Its complete opposite, the “ignoble savage” is understood as a stereotype that depicts Native Americans as “merciless Indian Savages whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions” (Jefferson [1776]

1997). These two stereotypes, represented by Rains Fall and Eagle Flies respectively, serve as the gateway for the subtextual acceptance of the “Manifest Destiny”, the idea that “the doctrine or belief that the expansion of the United States throughout the American continents was both justified and inevitable” (Oxford English Dictionary n.d.).

3. *Red Dead Redemption 2*'s colonial representation

The first and most important issue about Native American representation in *Red Dead Redemption 2* is that, even though most of their conflict (although not all) is depicted in the main plot of the game regardless of whether you have chosen to be honorable or dishonorable, the Wapiti community (the Native community the screenwriters invented for the game) is secondary. Their struggle against the US Army's systemic land appropriation is just the scenery in which the main protagonist, Arthur, can evolve. In the original title, John Marston's redemption was reuniting with his family being a better man and teaching his son not to follow his footsteps. In the new installment, the story revolves around Arthur Morgan's redemption, the realization that the man he follows (Dutch van der Linde) might not be who he thinks he is, and how he tries to leave the world a better place by trying to fix the negative impact Dutch leaves behind before dying of tuberculosis. By the end of the game, he performs “some heroic actions, and a number of everyday, banal activities that Arthur must undertake in order to fulfil his objectives.” (Ruffino 2022, 346). For all intents and purposes, both Eagle Flies and Rains Fall are there so that Arthur can help them and become a better man.

The secondary nature of the Wapiti community becomes more conspicuous when examining its characteristics, or lack thereof. The Wapiti community has no remarkable features that could separate them from other Native communities. The only glimpse the player has of this community's culture is in the mission “Archeology for beginners” (Rockstar Games 2018), which the player can only play if they choose to be honorable and help the chief Rains Fall when asked by Charles Smith (the Native American member of the Van der Linde gang). The chief first invites Arthur to a sacred place in the mountains, and after discovering how it has been vandalized and pillaged by the US Army, begs for Arthur's help in recovering the relics (Rockstar Games, 2018). The only cultural items mentioned in the game are the “Owl Feather Trinket” and the “Chanupa”. The first one is a mechanical reward and is not based on any specific Native American relic. The inspiration for the second one is unclear. When asked about the chanupa, Rains Fall clarifies it is a ceremonial pipe. According to the current Lakota Native American spiritual leader, Chief Arvol Looking Horse, “the Lakota/Dakota/Nakota oyate (people) were given seven sacred rites of healing by a Spirit Woman, Pte San Win (White

Buffalo Calf Woman). She brought these rites along with the sacred Canupa (pipe) to our people” (2009). This leads to the idea that the Wapiti community are indeed related to one of those communities (most likely the Lakotas, since the word “chanupa” comes from their language), or at least inspired by them, hence, some research was likely done. However, as stated before, this is one of two cultural items mentioned in the game. More research might have been done regarding Native American communities, but since the chanupa is the only cultural element portrayed in the game that is not invented, the player ultimately arrives at the conclusion that the research behind Native American communities is lackluster. Moreover, the fact that the Wapitis are indeed a community that screenwriters have invented allows them not to do research and leads to the idea that the little study on Native American communities was done before the creation of the game, most likely because, since this is the story of a white man, screenwriters did not deem it necessary. When writing about Charles Smith and his lack of knowledge regarding his own community, Bird argues that “this move, on the part of the developers, serves to not only dismiss the effectiveness of oral culture, but it also allows the developers and writers to forego any cultural research or consultation in regard to the formation of Charles’ character” (2021, 11). The Native American characters in the game are ultimately relegated to the background as their purpose is to provide the setting in which Arthur, the main protagonist, can redeem himself.

The game portrays a severe misunderstanding when representing the Native American struggle, because it compares it to the struggle the criminal gang is facing. It is not only their relevance to the game secondary and subjected to Arthur, but their conflict as well. The first time Arthur, Rains Fall, and Eagle Flies meet, Arthur replies to an insult from Eagle Flies in a very particular manner. When accused of being a mercenary, Arthur tells Eagle Flies that “I got a price on my head in two states my friend. The government doesn’t like me any more than it likes you. Like you, I’ve been running for as long as I can remember. And like you, my time here is nigh on done” (Rockstar Games 2018). This sentence explains well enough one of the main problems the game has regarding Native American characters. Arthur (and as such, the screenwriters and the player) is comparing himself, a white settler descendant, with Native Americans. It is implying that his struggle with the law authorities for being a criminal and an overall dangerous person (at this point in the game, Arthur has already killed several people regardless of his honor) is the same as that of Native Americans who are systemically deprived from their lands and forcefully moved to reservations. One might consider normal that sentence coming from Arthur, an uneducated nineteenth century man. However, this was written by a group of white screenwriters in the twenty-first century. An argument could be made that they

are just portraying the reality of the time, but that contradicts with the fact that overall, Arthur is depicted as what could be considered a “progressive”, especially in a high honor run. Throughout the game, Arthur helps suffragettes, shoots members of the Ku Klux Klan (Locke and Mackay 2020, 179), and opposes several members of the ruling class who benefit from the exploitation of the proletariat (Cornwall, Bronte, and the Braithwaite family being the most prominent examples). Not only that, but he also often expresses sensitivity towards social issues, and the gang itself has a motto that follows, it being “[w]e shoot fellers as need shooting, save fellers as need saving, and feed ’em as need feeding” (Rockstar Games, 2018). Arthur comparing himself and his struggle to that of Native Americans is not a means of representing his lack of education. Instead, it shows that Arthur, and at the same time the screenwriters, truly believe that they are going through the same experience.

The game *Red Dead Redemption 2* launched almost 50 years after *The Oregon Trail*, and still commits the same colonialist mistakes *The Oregon Trail* did. The very first instance the players can observe the Wapiti community, Hosea, an elder member of the gang, hurries Arthur to continue, and not to push his luck (Rockstar Games 2018). However, when asked why, Hosea starts introducing their circumstances to Arthur, and at the same time, to the player. Charles Smith is also there, and remarks that this situation with the Wapitis is also happening with all the Native American communities in the country. Nonetheless, Arthur’s question remains unanswered. Neither Hosea nor Charles explain why is dangerous for them to remain in that specific place for too long. Of course, the idea behind the comment is that the gang should be careful because they are trespassing a land that used to be owned by the Wapitis. This heavily resembles one of the original aspects as to why *The Oregon Trail* was criticized in the past. The players “should care about indigenous people only insofar they need to avoid ‘misunderstandings’ and incurring the wrath of potentially hostile natives” (Bigelow 1997, 87). An argument can be made, however, that this is in fact intentional, and not an after-effect of the general misconception of Native Americans from the screenwriters. After all, this is the first information that the player is given regarding this community. It can be argued that this is done so that later on the conflict established between the stereotypes of the ignoble versus the noble savage the game illustrates is further magnified. Notwithstanding the fact that this might have really been a move to provide more importance to the aforementioned conflict, the end result is the same, and that is to raise awareness to the idea that players should not disturb nor anger the Wapitis.

This idea, however, does not prevent for a major error that can be perceived in the game to occur. As mentioned beforehand, the story of the game is the story of Arthur’s redemption.

Arthur keeps helping the Wapitis throughout the whole game. This, however, creates a dynamic that ultimately evolves into a representation of the white savior trope. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “white saviour” as “a white person who helps non-white (typically black) people, esp. for reasons viewed as ultimately self-serving, such as seeking recognition or assuaging guilt” (Oxford English Dictionary n.d.). This is a perfect example of how the plot of the game develops. Even though Arthur as a character might not be actively trying to redeem himself, he does, and the Wapiti community is one of the means by which he does so. When talking about such trope in contemporary media, Hughey argues that “[t]his trope is so widespread that varied intercultural and interracial relations are often guided by a logic that racializes and separates people into those who are redeemers (whites) and those who are redeemed or in need of redemption (non-whites)” (Hughey 2014, 2) and that

[i]n a climate in which many whites believe they are unfairly victimized and losing dominance, many people are exhausted with talking about race, and there is a latent desire to see evidence of interracial reconciliation and amity, films that showcase strong, kind, and messianic white characters assisting nonwhites, down-on-their-luck characters deliver just the right touch. (Hughey 2014, 15).

This is a perfect definition of how the relation between the Wapitis and Arthur is formed. In terms of physical representation, Rains Fall is depicted as a wise old Indigenous man, and Eagle Flies reflects more the image of a young Native American warrior, especially in the mission “My Last Boy” (Rockstar Games 2018). Meanwhile, Arthur is clearly represented as a hyper-masculine white man. He is strong, big, attractive, coarse, feared, and old enough to be authoritative but not old enough to lose such authority. These physical descriptions help establish the basis of the relationship these three characters will have. Rains Fall, (the wise old noble savage) continually begs Arthur (the character male players can project themselves onto) to help him in trying to make Eagle Flies (the ignoble savage) not to be as contentious as he is. Throughout the whole plot, Arthur helps both men. However, Arthur never asks them for help. This creates a dynamic in which these men start depending on Arthur, ultimately portraying an image in which Native American characters can always rely on Arthur (and his whiteness) when confronted by their problems, or what is known as a white savior trope.

To sum up, the game is not interested in Native Americans. The screenwriters knew of the end result Native American people suffered by the US Army, but that was not the story they wanted to portray. The conflict this paper examines is backgrounded because while the screenwriters knew the result of such people, they did not completely understand it. Nor did they study it. The main focus of this video game, of course, is not which side is correct but

whether how the main white protagonist can use such a conflict in his own interest to oppose Dutch's actions, and in doing so, becoming a better person and leaving the world a better place.

4. Eagle Flies, the ignoble savage

As this paper explained in the theoretical framework section, before the advent of the stereotype known as the noble savage, Native American representation was often understood under the umbrella of the ignoble savage. It is important to understand how the game defines Eagle Flies as an "ignoble savage". *Red Dead Redemption 2* takes the most prominent understanding of the relationship between "man of nature" and "civilization" established by Rousseau and explores its characters through it. Rousseau explains in the first part of the discourse that people have an "innate abhorrence to see beings suffer that resemble him" (Rousseau 1754, n.p.) and in the second part that

[t]he first man, who, after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, "This is mine," and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, how many wars, how many murders, how many misfortunes and horrors, would that man have saved the human species, who pulling up the stakes or filling up the ditches should have cried to his fellows: Be sure not to listen to this imposter; you are lost, if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong equally to us all, and the earth itself to nobody! (Rousseau 1754, n.p.).

This depiction of egoist acquisition of commodities (Rousseau's understanding of civilization) corrupting the innate goodness of people is but a representation of the main dynamic behind the development of Eagle Flies in the game. The way Eagle Flies' development is represented in the game, Eagle Flies was following Rains Fall footsteps and begrudgingly signing peace treaties with the US Army. However, when meeting Dutch, this interaction of the "man of nature" being corrupted by "civilization" occurs. Dutch is a representation of civilization because it is his egoism taking ownership of the Wapiti situation what ultimately corrupts Eagle Flies. As he states in "A Rage Unleashed", "some good honest conflict between the Army and the Indians might be just the distraction we need" (Rockstar Games 2018). On the other hand, proof exists that Eagle Flies would have become another example of a noble savage had Dutch not come into his life. The first missions in which Arthur helps him involve purely retrieving assets that have been stolen from the Wapiti community (such as horses). Moreover, in these missions he specifically begs Arthur to avoid conflict, or not to kill anyone (Rockstar Games 2018). It is not until Dutch intervenes that Eagle Flies starts attacking directly the US Army and starts using violence. In the same way the first man taking ownership of a piece of land involves

the creation of many misfortunes according to Rousseau, Dutch taking ownership of the colonialist struggle and using it to carry out his plans leads to many misfortunes for Eagle Flies. However, *Red Dead Redemption 2* fuses this concept with the ideas established by the Western genre in media. That means that Rousseau's corruption applies in a way that transforms the stereotype of the noble savage to that of the ignoble savage. Dutch, symbolizing civilization, corrupts Eagle Flies, who symbolized an example of a noble savage, into an ignoble one.

The game under study does not only provide a representation of what could be considered an ignoble savage, but also classifies it into a pejorative perspective. The only character that represents the noble savage, Rains Fall, categorizes the only character that represents the ignoble savage, Eagle Flies, as "foolish" in the mission "The King's Son" (Rockstar Games 2018). The game presents this stereotype of the ignoble savage in a depreciatory light because the game portrays him as an easily manipulable man, shows his actions as futile, and ultimately punishes his actions. The result of such a representation, however, still pushes a dangerous colonialist idea that harms and jeopardizes any representation of Native American self-preservation.

Eagle Flies' conflict with the US Army is from the very beginning understood as futile by the game, and the plot depicts it as such. The US Army has already signed a treaty with the Wapiti community and has moved them to a reservation. Not only that, but the plot itself also warns the player of how rebelling against the US Army can never be successful. After the mission "Favored Sons" (Rockstar Games 2018), Arthur and Charles Smith are asked to rescue Eagle Flies, who has been captured by the Army. From the moment he is saved until the end of the mission, Eagle Flies is constantly dismissed by both Arthur and Charles. When asking for a gun so that he can help them, Charles simply tells him to keep his head down (Rockstar Games 2018), and, at the final cinematic, Arthur directly tells him that "[y]ou won't win no big fight with them" (Rockstar Games 2018). This whole mission, besides being another example of the abundant usage of the white savior trope, shows to the player that, even before the last mission in the Native American community plot, the Indigenous people had already lost. The game criticizes the ideology behind Eagle Flies' actions not because they are violent (at this point in the game, the player can observe that the game does not have any problem with violence, considering they kill dozens of people throughout it), but because they are doomed to fail, and the fact that Eagle Flies is still fighting is, as his father Rains Fall explains, "foolish" (Rockstar Games 2018).

The most definite proof that the stereotype that Eagle Flies represents is portrayed in a derogatory light, however, is the fact that the game itself ultimately punishes his actions. The

ending of the Wapiti community plot serves as the final clash of ideologies between the pacifism of Rains Fall and the violence of Eagle Flies. The result is the one the game has predicted throughout the entirety of the Native American storyline, the demise of Eagle Flies and the invalidation of his ideals. It is important to note that by the end of the mission, Eagle Flies is portrayed in a positive manner by means of saving Arthur when he is abandoned by Dutch. However, the result of such interaction is his death. This can be seen as an instance of the reverse of the white savior trope, being a Native American character saving a white man. However, the fact that he dies because of it while Arthur leaves the conflicts unharmed still points to the idea that Eagle Flies is not as competent as Arthur when using violence, and hence, worse. Moreover, the main antagonist that is behind the systemic oppression of the Wapiti community, Colonel Favours, is killed not by a Native American, but by Arthur. The main idea behind this interaction is that the same way Dutch first influenced and then left Arthur to his death, has done the same with the whole Wapiti community, Eagle Flies being the focus of his corruption.

Taking into account Eagle Flies' depiction throughout the game, the player is led by the game to the dangerously colonialist idea that the Native American characters should not fight the US Army, and instead resign themselves to their circumstances. As explained beforehand, "my time here is nigh on done" (Rockstar 2018) is the means by which the screenwriters compare Arthur with the Native Americans, to portray him in a position of powerlessness, so that later on he can surpass it. However, the quote also explains to the player that the Native Americans are in a dire situation, and that fighting for their lands will not benefit them in any way. That is important to the study because by doing this, the screenwriters, while not legitimizing the idea of the Manifest Destiny, are depicting the Manifest Destiny as a certainty, and that accepting and adapting to it is the correct path forward. The Manifest Destiny is the idea that "the doctrine or belief that the expansion of the United States throughout the American continents was both justified and inevitable" (Oxford English Dictionary n.d.). It is this inevitability that the game focuses on. Taking into consideration all the points explained before, the player arrives to the conclusion that the US Army is already the victor. While history has shown that the US Army did indeed win the conflict against Native Americans (despite a few losses, such as the Battle of the Little Bighorn), the fact that the game screenwriters (especially considering that they are non-Native Americans) are depicting the efforts of the Native American character who actively fights for the lands that have been taken away from him as fruitless is troublesome, and reflects the idea of the Manifest Destiny as it being actually

beneficial for the Wapitis, because, as it shall be explained, it their only path forward (that or extermination).

5. Rains Fall, the noble savage

While the game, either directly or indirectly, used Rousseau's philosophy to describe the corruption of Eagle Flies, Rains Fall is the quintessential noble savage. Rains Fall serves as the opposite of Eagle Flies, both in terms of ideology and in how the game portrays his attitude when dealing with the US Army intervention. Truthfully, Rains Fall takes a more pacifist approach, and the game represents such a behavior in a more reinforcing way than that of rebellion. Similar to Eagle Flies' case, the game rewards him in terms of how Rains Fall is overall depicted throughout the game, and how the plot recompenses his actions by the end of the game.

It is important to understand the concept of "noble savage" and how it is applied to the game. The stereotype of the noble savage was first introduced by Michel de Montaigne in his essay *Of Cannibals*, written in 1580, on which he states "[t]hose people are wild, just as we call wild the fruits that Nature has produced by herself and in her normal course; whereas really it is those that we have changed artificially and led astray from the common order, that we should rather call wild" (1958, 152). A more modern definition of such stereotype is "a mythic conception of people belonging to non-European cultures as having innate natural simplicity and virtue uncorrupted by European civilization" (Merriam-Webster n.d.). Rains Fall mostly fit these descriptions, but there are several key differences when comparing him with other examples of noble savages in previous literature. The most important one is that Rains Fall is not infantilized (as it was the case, for instance, with Friday from *Robinson Crusoe*). In fact, the game purposefully represents his pacifism and approach to the struggle he is facing as the wise and experienced option. However, Rains Fall does share several elements that ultimately categorize him in such a stereotype. It is not only his aforementioned pacifism which resembles that of the stereotypical noble savage, but also his connection to nature. Rains Fall, being a Native American, belongs to a way of life that the screenwriters have already shown do not understand. As such, he is seen performing several actions that relate to an obtuse knowledge of nature, such as preparing a medicine for Arthur's coughs out of plants. These characteristics lead the player to one clear reasoning, and that is that the game categorizes Rains Fall as a noble savage, but by not having him embrace the totality of the stereotype, he is represented without the pejorative elements, and as such, any critical perspective that could be directed to him is impossible to produce.

Rains Fall, and his ideology, are spotlighted as wiser and more common-sense than Eagle Flies' because the game presents his pacifism as the result of his experience. It is heavily implied throughout the game that Rains Fall was once like Eagle Flies. At the beginning of the final mission of the Native American storyline, "My Last Boy", Rains Fall tells Eagle Flies that "[w]hen I was your age I fought. I saw death. I have killed. The men I knew were slain. My first born, your brother, had his head smashed by a drunken soldier. My wife had her throat slit. [...] Do not mistake my strength for weakness." (Rockstar Games 2018). This quote is misleading. On the one hand, this quote seems to be the oral representation of how Rains Fall ideology and pacifism are the result of experience. He implies that he is strong for taking the choice that will benefit the tribe. However, the game has often glorified violence. This means that the root of the problem is not violence, but the weakness of the Wapiti community. The player has no reason not to believe that were Eagle Flies to have a mean by which he could defend himself, he would still choose pacifism. This is important because it situates the Wapiti community on a position of fragility and powerlessness, and because Eagle Flies' discourse is weaker than that of his son, and yet he is still characterized as the more knowledgeable out of the two.

There are several motives that point to the idea that the plot of the game ultimately rewards Rains Fall's actions. The best way to present Rains Fall as the reasonable and intelligent alternative to solving the colonial struggle is by having the players side with him. As such, the game accomplishes that by having Arthur agreeing more with Rains Fall than Eagle Flies, and by treating him with the due respect. As it has been stated before, Arthur is the best figure for the male player to be represented into. He is a man strong enough to survive the hardships that hurt him, but also honorable enough to act for a better future. By having Arthur actively side with him, the screenwriters encourage the players to take his words more into consideration than those of his son. The other main reason why the game rewards him is represented in the epilogue of the game. At the end of the game, you get to control John Marston (the protagonist of the original *Red Dead Redemption*) and meet with Rains Fall eight years later. In this scene the player gets to see how the Wapiti community has moved to Canada. This may look like the Wapitis have failed, and that it is a punishment, but as stated before, the game treats the advancement of the US Army as an inevitability. The fact that not only did he survive, but also that he saved the remnants of his community by moving them to Canada, serves to promote the idea that it was thanks to his pacifism that Rains Fall avoided the total extermination of the Wapiti community.

Ultimately, the fact that Rains Fall's actions are understood by the screenwriters as constructive serves to reinforce the notion that the Manifest Destiny is inevitable, and that if Manifest Destiny is presented as inevitable, then the Wapiti community need to abandon their land, because it is not theirs any longer. It could be argued that the game is simply examining how the US Army is systemically disowning the land and the effect this has on its people. However, the game does not focus on that issue enough, and the true extent of the characterizations of these stereotypes is more harmful than the possible ameliorating elements there may be. It is true that the US Army is presented as the antagonist, but the game's solution towards colonial struggle is for the Native Americans to surrender, and that fighting for their land is futile, or, better put, "foolish" (Rockstar Games 2018). This is the message written by white settler descendants towards several million of players. By establishing the Manifest Destiny as inevitable, the game diminishes the Native American's agency and relevance in their conflict. This is portrayed as such in the game because the tone of the scene at the epilogue of the Native Americans, while not hopeful, is not presented as something harmful to the Native Americans, but as something that cannot be avoided. As such, the game, while not legitimizing the idea of the Manifest Destiny, is also not criticizing it in any kind, shape or form. This, alongside the stereotyping, ultimately reinforces the Manifest Destiny. The plot of the game pits you against the US government, but does so in the best interest of Arthur and his gang. The Native Americans are just an afterthought to the game, and the usage of the stereotypes of the violent and noble savage are just the understanding of the screenwriters to how Native American population reacted to the US Army, and how, to them, fighting for their lands and their rights was ineffective.

6. Conclusion

This paper has discussed some of the intricacies surrounding *Red Dead Redemption 2*'s depiction and stereotyping of its two main Native American characters in its storyline, which are needed to understand the subtextual acceptance of the Manifest Destiny. Eagle Flies and Rains Fall conform the two main examples contemporary media followed when representing Native American population, that of an ignoble and a noble savage, and it is throughout this representation that the game proposes what the screenwriters consider the only solution to their problem, surrender and leaving their lands. Even though the US Army and government is set as the antagonist of the plotline, the game is not interested in examining its own conflicted history. Instead, it provides an examination of how one's ideology and perspective when facing

colonialist struggle is more valuable than the other, and in doing so, accepts US Army's appropriation of Native American land.

A continuous idea the game has focused on is not the fact that violence is wrong, and that Rains Fall is right in that they should flee, but only because they do not have the strength to face the US Army. Meanwhile, Arthur, who is constantly fighting the US government, is never punished by his actions. This paper leaves open several branches of study to further the understanding of the game from a postcolonial perspective. An analysis on the game's most technical aspects and how they relate to the Native Americans' conflict could be made, such as the honor system, or how is hunting reflected in the game.

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