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White Mythic Space: Racism, The First World War, and Battlefield 1
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De Gruyter Oldenbourg
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WW1 is regularly depicted in popular culture, with its centenary resulting in a significant increase in movie and videogame representations. Released in 2016, and with reported sales of over 15m, Battlefield 1 offers a potentially crucial space for the public to experience and engage with WW1.

Videogames increasingly claim to offer authentic depictions of and engagements with war. Their gameplay thus offers possibilities for players to experience the brutal reality of conflict as well as to represent places, spaces and weapons featured in WW1. And just as popular culture has increasingly sought to represent all those who fought in WW1, so Battlefield 1 similarly sought to challenge the misconception that WW1 was fought exclusively by 'white' combatants, reminding players of the diversity of soldiers from all sides of the conflict.

This book explores the controversies that unfolded when the games' developers sought to include such representation of the diverse array of combatants in WW1. The book convincingly demonstrates that large numbers of social media users and players were actively hostile to the game and its developers, accusing both of providing inauthentic representations which were actively disrespectful to white combatants.

The book seeks to explain those reactions through the power of the 'white mythic space': 'a pseudo-historical or fictional space that has been reimagined and transformed into a racially homogenous space in which non-white elements have been erased or minimized' (p.30-1). It demonstrates how history, documentary film, factual programming, and popular culture have all effaced people of colour from wars, either making them completely absent or marginalising them to non-combat roles. Such is the power of this erasure that the majority of the population in countries such as the UK and USA imagines WW1 to be a war fought exclusively between white combatants.

This framework enables the author to make a number of key contributions. First, it helps to explain the tentative nature of the developers' efforts to represent people of colour within the game's single player story mode and multiplayer. Despite placing a 'heroic black soldier' at the centre of the promotional focus of the game, black representation in the story mode was limited to the opening 'tutorial'. In the multiplayer mode, only four of 24 characters were non-white, including black British

soldiers and Indian troops. This failure to depict a multi-national/multi-racial war could either stem from a failure of imagination by the developers or anticipation of backlash from players.

Second, perhaps the book's core contribution lies in the value of its framework for analysing players reactions to the game, with the author examining YouTube comments on promotional trailers, posts on developer-hosted websites, and discussions on fan-forums like Reddit. The analysis convincingly demonstrates that large swathes of the public posted comments attacking the developers for providing representations of non-white soldiers. Posters often sought to retain the white mythic space, either out of ignorance of the role that people of colour played in WW1, or due to an active desire to 'defend white supremacy' and/or to enact white nationalism. The book thus demonstrates the value of social media as a site of historical debate in relation to these representations. The book provides strong evidence of deep-seated and highly emotional hostility towards depictions of black representations in war, indicating widespread public ignorance and emphasising the urgent need for improved historical education.

However, while the book convincingly demonstrates the scope of public hostility to the game, the analysis could be strengthened with a greater appreciation of context. Was there, for example, any evidence of 'push back' against these comments, with examples of posters defending the game or challenging the ignorance of earlier posts? The analysis would also benefit from a clearer distinction in relation to the volume of posts which were driven by ignorance, those motivated by a desire to perform a role online, and those advocating values associated with white supremacy. Nuance and context matter.

Overall, this is a valuable book. History comes alive for the public within popular culture, with games increasingly becoming one of the core ways in which people engage with and debate historical events and war. As the centenary of WW1 unfolded, the games industry sought to do more to acknowledge and reflect the diversity of those who fought in WW1. This game, along with other forms of popular culture, are important sites in which historical stories are told and widely engaged with by the public. For historians who seek to keep abreast of this unfolding reality, there is much to consider in this book and the provocations that it offers.

However, as the book clearly evidences, the industry has received considerable pushback (often in highly emotive language driven by ignorance) when trying to offer stories that reflect historical realities - particularly in relation to the diversity of those who fought in WW1. This pushback may be actively shaping the very content that games producers and movie makers produce, precluding the telling of stories that reflect the diversity of those who fought and died in WW1. There is thus considerable value to historians in appreciating the content of - and responses to - popular culture which

seeks to engage with WW1, particularly as it seeks to offer histories which reflect more complex representational realities.

866 words