

“Mind your manners amongst your betters”:

A close-up on BioShock Infinite’s environmental storytelling about racism

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Abstract

This study focuses on how the video game BioShock: Infinite uses its environmental storytelling to create a world about racism that reflects the racism in the early 1900's United States. This is achieved by analyzing the in-game collectibles, environments and character interactions the game provides. In addition, the study introduces concepts of racism, its history in video games and the BioShock series itself and why it has earned its reputation as a popular video game series for academic studies. The data was gathered through an extensive playthrough amassing in over 2500 in-game screenshots which are used as examples of the racism in the game. They will be presented, analyzed in its in-game context and then compared to the real-life context that it was inspired by.

Tiivistelmä

Tutkimus tutkii, miten videopeli BioShock Infinite käyttää sen ympärillöllistä tarinankerrontaa luomaan rasistisen maailman, joka heijastaa 1900-luvun alun Yhdysvaltojen rasismia. Tämä saavutetaan analysoimalla pelin keräilyesineitä, ympäristöjä ja hahmosten välisiä vuorovaikutuksia. Sen lisäksi tutkimus esittelee rasismia ja sen roolin videopelien historiassa, BioShock sarjan ja miksi se on ansainnut maineen suosittuna tutkimuskohteena. Data keräämiseksi peli pelattiin laaja-alaisesti läpi, jonka aikana koottiin yli 2500 kuvakaappausta pelistä. Kuvat esittellään ja analysoidaan niiden pelinsisäisessä kontekstissa. Pelissä esiintyvälle rasismille myös etsitään historiallinen konteksti.

1 Introduction

During the 2010s racism has re-emerged as a topic due to the increased exposure of police brutality towards black Americans started popular movements such as Black Lives Matter that try to raise awareness about racism in the United States. Racism has different definitions based on who you ask. Some see racism as prejudice or discrimination of different ethnicities while others associate racism with institutional racism, where the societal behavior promotes discrimination, thus only the ones in power can be racist. Furthermore, institutional racism appears in the everyday life almost seamlessly. Examples of institutional racism are racial profiling such as supposedly randomized stop and frisk programs that actually target minorities or banks refusing to give loans to people in specific city areas that are predominantly black. Institutional racism can be difficult for the beneficiaries to recognize as humans naturally want to credit their successes to their own efforts rather than inherited advantages. For a more refined definition, The International Council on Human Rights Policy defines racism as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.”

Video games are mainstream in the 2010s as well. Video games have been very popular since at least the 1980s with games such as Pacman and Super Mario Bros. still being cherished today but they were viewed as kids' toys that children would grow out of eventually rather than art comparable to books or movies. Often these games had very superficial stories that only existed as an in-game reason to play the game. Super Mario's goal is to rescue the princess whereas the player plays it to have fun. In the 1990s, games with more profound stories started getting released, such as Planescape: Torment, Deus Ex and System Shock II but many of those games did not become mainstream successes. The closest success was Metal Gear Solid, which intertwined gameplay with cinematic narrative utilizing cutscenes. However, Metal Gear Solid did not utilize the player's ability to interact in its narrative, meaning the storytelling was done utilizing movie elements rather than video game. With the advancements in technology, the ability to include more text, videos, visuals, sound et cetera than before have enabled stories to become an integral part of modern gaming. Games have become a multibillion business (ESA 2017a) and a common hobby amongst all ages and genders (ESA 2017b). The Entertainment Software Association conducted a study in which 59% said that an interesting story/premise is an influencing factor in what games they purchase (ESA 2017b).

While many games still rely on the movie formula of noninteractive videos for exposition, some games have fused gameplay and storytelling together. One popular game known for this is the third installment in the BioShock franchise, Bioshock Infinite. BioShock Infinite takes place in a seemingly utopian city Columbia in the 1910s which quickly unravels into a dystopia for minorities. The main story is not about racism, but as a theme, racism is omnipresent in the portrayal of the City of Columbia via the environmental storytelling that the game employs. The goal of this study is to discover how BioShock Infinite portrays its racism as defined by The International Council on Human Rights Policy, how accurately it represents the views and values held in the timeframe it emulates by comparing it to academic and historical works and how it fits in the world of Columbia.

2 Video games and BioShock

This section explains the history of race and racism in video games, the critical reception of the BioShock series and how popular the series has been for academic studies.

2.1 Video Games and Racism

Race in video games is a convoluted subject. Roleplaying video games are heavily rooted in the classic Dragons & Dungeons tabletop games in which players roleplay as their own created characters. This enabled them to create all sorts of fictional characters, such as dwarves and elves. Thus, fictional races are common in gaming and sometimes even a big part of the games' stories. For instance, 2009's Dragon Age: Origins took place in the fictional world of Ferelden where elves either lived isolated in their forests or alongside humans as their slaves. The Polish series of novels turned into a video game franchise The Witcher also has a similar setting. The years of abuse that non-humans suffered under humans resulted in an anti-human rebel group. Sub-plots such as these can easily be classified as stories about racism but since they use fictional races instead of human ethnicities, their message may not have been as impactful as real-life racism related stories and they were not remembered for being games about racism.

However, video games based on real-life settings are less diverse. Most popular video game protagonists are white men. Half-Life's Gordon Freeman, Uncharted's Nathan Drake and the original BioShock's Jack are just a few examples. However, lately there has been a surge in black protagonists. The before-mentioned Uncharted received a spin-off game in 2017 featuring two black women protagonists. Other big titles such as Watch Dogs 2 and Mafia III, both released in 2016, also switched to black protagonists from their previous white protagonists. Finally, 2017's Assassin's Creed: Origins has its first black protagonist in the series as the game takes place in Ancient Egypt as opposed to Italy or the United States like some of the previous games. This phenomenon transcends gaming, though. In 2008, Barack Obama became the United States' first black president. In terms of music and cinema, black-dominated hip hop has surged as the most popular music genre during the past twenty years while Dwayne Johnson became the highest paid actor in 2016 (Guerrasio 2016). Finally, 2018's Black Panther has grossed over a billion dollars in revenue ("Black Panther", 2018). Thus, it could be argued that gaming is merely following a trend of having a less homogenous cast now that there is more demand for it. However, not everyone has been receptive to the change. There are numerous online forums where people accuse the game publishers of pandering to progressives. Mafia III notably received criticism by some fans for the black protagonist during its reveal trailer, as the first two games focused on the Italian-American mafia. However, multiplayer games such as 2011's Battlefield 3, game taking place in the 21st

century, also created controversy. Many official and unofficial forums were filled with threads of people complaining about playing as black soldiers and asking how to turn them white (Ryyaann_Is_Band 2011).

Lately, however, racism has been highlighted more in gaming. When starting Mafia III's single player campaign for the first time, a pop-up window appears warning the player that the game characters are openly racist and this reflects the culture of the 1960s United States where the game takes place in (Makuch 2016). The game uses racial slurs very openly and frequently, and the racism is also connected to the gameplay. For instance, the police will arrive to a crime scene faster if it is a white neighborhood as opposed to a black. Historically, however, games have not been as considerate when it comes to portraying and treating black characters. One of the most popular black characters in gaming, C.J. from Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, fits every criteria of a stereotypical black gangster who is only interested in killing and gang life. While C.J. claims to be fed up with the gang life, he has no issue returning to his gang and taking over the city. The Pokémon Jynx was changed because of controversy regarding her look, being compared to 1800s blackfaces (Pulliam-Moore 2016). Furthermore, Dead Island's Sam B, who Goldberg and Larsson describe "a street-tough, one-hit-wonder rapper whose single has 'Who Do You Voodoo, Bitch'" (2015, p. "The Natural: The Parameters of Afro," para. 11).

2.2 BioShock

BioShock was released August 21, 2007. It was published by 2K Games and developed by Irrational Games. It was a spiritual sequel to 1999's System Shock 2, also being directed by Irrational Games' director Ken Levine. BioShock takes place in 1960 and the player plays as Jack, who has survived a plane crash in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and soon after descends into the submerged city of Rapture. Rapture was founded by Adam Ryan (semi-anagram for philosopher Ayn Rand) and it was founded on the premise of meritocracy, a belief that individuals are responsible and deserving of their accomplishments. Jack survives a plane crash in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and finds a lighthouse. The lighthouse is revealed to be an elevator down to Rapture that has turned into a dystopia. Upon arriving in Rapture, Jack is contacted by Atlas who tells Jack about Andrew Ryan and how he must be eliminated for Jack to return home. Throughout the game Jack learns about the world of Rapture and its inhabitants.

BioShock was released to a critical acclaim. The storyline, audio and visuals were particularly praised. IGN's Charles Onyett stated that "the best aspect of BioShock is how well all the disparate

elements blend together” (2007). Both Onyett and GameSpy’s Allen Rausch and Sal Accardo praise the game’s voice acting, with the latter two describing the game’s collectible audio logs as “a sort of running soundtrack underscoring the game’s brilliant art design” (2007). In his GameSpot review (2007), Jeff Gerstmann calls the game’s environments “amazing and practically beg to be explored”. The GameSpy review expands on the visuals, calling Rapture “a world designed to look like a science fiction story from the heyday of Isaac Asimov - - Rapture is an absolute masterclass of Art Deco design, all brown and gold faux-Egyptian styling mixed with brass-colored accents and oak, teak and other rich dark woods” (2007). Rausch and Accardo call the game’s story and the player’s experience of it as the game’s greatest strength (2007), saying that the storyline runs much deeper despite the initial “kill the big bad guy” impression, referring to the game’s constant references to Ayn Rand’s philosophical theories. Onyett expands on the antagonist, Andrew Ryan, describing his vision for Rapture as “the driving force behind the game – to discover why this man’s alluring vision of an artistic utopia failed so completely and why you’ve stumbled upon it”. Despite the constant Ayn Ryan homages, Gerstmann states that “you don’t need a head full of freshman philosophy to enjoy BioShock” (2007). Nevertheless, BioShock has still been frequently discussed as years have passed and many articles have been written about the game’s philosophies (Robertson 2016; Perrotta 2017).

Unsurprisingly, BioShock has been the focus of some academic studies. For instance, Jessica Aldred and Brian Greenspan’s study made the argument that “BioShock simultaneously celebrates and interrogates utopian notions of technological progress and free will embedded within prevailing industrial and academic conceptions of convergence” (2011 p. 479). Furthermore, Suzannah Biernoff (2012) examined how BioShock used World War 1’s disfigured soldiers’ faces as templates for the Splicers, the enemies the player fights who have gone insane from overconsuming chemicals, and then discussed whether it was ethical to use soldiers’ faces in a commercial product. Daniel Ante-Contreras (2015) explored the gamer itself through BioShock, particularly the “myths and tropes of white male victimization that circulate through video games”. Finally, Felan Parker (2011) argued what made not only the original BioShock but also BioShock Infinite “a required playing among critics and scholars” (p. 1, 17). Thus, BioShock’s successful commercial and critical reception converted into it becoming one of the more academically studied video games of the past decade.

2.3 BioShock Infinite

BioShock Infinite, Ken Levine's sequel to the original BioShock was released March 26th, 2013. Taking place in 1912, the protagonist, a former Pinkerton detective and the Battle of Wounded Knee war veteran Booker DeWitt, has amassed an unsurmountable debt and accepts a job to retrieve a girl from the city of Columbia. Columbia, originally a floating world's fair built by the U.S. Government, has gone rogue. Now a religious white supremacist floating city, Columbia is led by the self-proclaimed prophet Zachary Comstock. Elizabeth, the girl Booker has to rescue, is Comstock's daughter and has been isolated in a tower all her life because of her supernatural ability to travel between different universes. Another key character is Daisy Fitzroy, the leader of the Vox Populi rebel group (Latin for "Voice of the People"). Vox Populi, which started as a pro-colored movement, has gone berserk as the colored citizens have been exploited and abused by the whites. Colored people reside in Columbia because Jeremiah Fink, a businessman with a monopoly over practically everything in Columbia, smuggled the minorities to Columbia for cheap labor to upkeep the utopia for the white citizens to enjoy. Finally, the technology used to make Columbia possible was developed by the mysterious Lutece twins, who finish each other's sentences.

Upon reaching Columbia, Booker finds himself in a church where he is baptized and thus accepted into the utopian paradise. Outside the church are statues of the Founding Fathers who Columbians worship. Soon after leaving the church area, Booker reaches a fairy. The fairy also acts as the game's tutorial. There are many shooting mini-games where Booker gets better rewards based on his shooting performance. One of the mini-games even features Vox Populi rebels as the targets. By this point, all the Columbia citizens have been whites living happy carefree life. Eventually, Booker walks into an audience surrounding a stage. The host, Jeremiah Fink, is holding a raffle which Booker participates in by picking a baseball with number 77 on it and he wins. As his prize, Booker gets to throw the ball at an interracial couple, a white man and a black woman, before anyone else. Upon finding Elizabeth, Booker learns that she possesses an ability to travel between universes. Throughout the game, Elizabeth and Booker go through many universes where they see the horrific conditions that Comstock has caused. Therefore, their goal changes from rescuing Elizabeth to stopping Comstock from ever existing. Booker and Elizabeth learn more about Columbia, its culture and how Elizabeth unlocked her powers during their adventure.

BioShock Infinite received similar critical acclaim to its predecessor and was also praised for its story, visuals and audio. Talking about the game's story, Rev3's Adam Sessler called the game's story brilliant and added that what makes the game extraordinary is how the unique player agency and complicity in the narrative are a part of its commentary, making it "only work as a game"

(2013). However, he also states that what distinguishes BioShock Infinite from other games is how it is conveyed to the player. He describes the art style as “almost numbing in its inventiveness” and how the world of Columbia says so much so effectively. PCGamer’s Tom Francis called Booker’s arriving scene to Columbia as “one of gaming’s truly perfect scenes” and also praised the game’s storytelling although critiquing the ending. He says BioShock Infinite respects the player by letting them keep control, as opposed to “feeling like a game made by frustrated film makers”. He adds: “It feels like a game made by people who know how to make films, and decided to make something else” (2013). Lucas Sullivan from Edge called the game “downright beautiful”, praising how the game’s varied settings are “surprising in all the right ways”, while also calling the game’s pacing excellent. He also added that the game’s numerous racial caricatures are not used for cheap shock value but convince that the citizens of Columbia “think that skin color dictates status” (2013).

While BioShock Infinite has not been studied as much as the original BioShock, Mafe conducted a story about racism in BioShock: Infinite titled “Race and the First-Person Shooter: Challenging the Video Gamer in BioShock Infinite” in 2015. Mafe argues that the game intentionally presents itself as any other “clichéd FPS game” – a young white muscular man standing in the middle with a huge gun while he is surrounded by a burning American flag, a zeppelin and gunfire (p. 94-95). Even the premise of the story can be reduced to rescuing a helpless woman. Yet, half the game is spent exploring areas and despite the damsel-in-distress setup, Booker eventually starts relying on Elizabeth instead.

Mafe’s study focused more on the meta-narrative of video game characters, such as Booker’s role and also Fitzroy’s role as a strong black female character. Finally, Mafe also describes some other racist portrayals of the game, such as the game’s equivalent of the Klu Klux Klan and the Hall of Heroes, a museum Comstock built to gloat about his involvement in the Battle of the Wounded Knee and the Boxer Rebellion.

3 Data and methodology

This section elaborates on how BioShock Infinite does its environmental storytelling and how it has been documented and utilized in the study. The section will also explain the research goals.

3.1 Data

While BioShock Infinite can be played in a very linear fashion, enabling players to head towards the next objective immediately, the game is designed to be explored. The game world contains numerous different objects for the player to interact with. The most notable are the voxophones. Voxophones are collectible audio logs that are found throughout the game in different locations. Usually the voxophones' content is related to where they were found. For instance, a voxophone found in a workers' locker room would feature a worker talking about something related to his work. However, usually they feature Comstock preaching propaganda. The topics vary from main storyline elements, explaining Columbia's history, individual minor character stories and occasionally racism. Another form of collectibles are the kinetoscopes. Kinetoscopes are stationary motion picture players which have a peephole that the user can watch them through (Bellis 2017). Unlike voxophones, which are usually hidden, kinetoscopes are easy to find, as they function as a form of propaganda for the citizens of Columbia to watch. The kinetoscopes are almost entirely focused on explaining the history and foundation of Columbia which also feature racist elements. Furthermore, the player can listen to other characters' dialogues by simply approaching them. Finally, Columbia is abundant in environmental storytelling. The different forms of environmental storytelling include posters, landscapes and other small details, such as hidden pro-black printing machines and graffiti.

Although racism appears throughout the game's plot, the study will focus on the 7th chapter titled Battleship Bay. The game has forty chapters total, which vary from ten to thirty minutes each. Battleship Bay heavily emphasizes exploration, with only one small fight at the end. This section of the game involves all the above-mentioned exploration elements and expands on the social standing and relationship between whites and non-whites. Therefore, Battleship Bay contains enough material about the study topic to justify the focus. The study focus' goes from the start of Battleship Bay to the moment just before the fight starts. The study will largely ignore the main story and all the events of the game excluding Battleship Bay.

Besides portraying the in-game material, the study will also give the real-life context to the game's portrayals. BioShock Infinite is meant to represent aspects of the racism (E. Lahti, Interview: Ken Levine on American history, racism in BioShock Infinite: "I've always believed that gamers were underestimated") that appeared at the turn of the 20th century in the United States so it is important

to distinguish which aspects are the developers' own ideas and which are based on real-life events. The purpose is to give the game events context rather than to delve into the real-life events, as that is a much larger study on its own. The last goal is to expand on the purpose of the racism, as racism should be an integral and believable part of the Columbian culture, as opposed to existing just to shock the player.

3.2 Methodology

The methodology used to obtain the data was an extensive play-through of the game to ensure fully digesting everything the game-world offered. However it is difficult to find absolutely everything collectible in the game without the help of a guide. Using a guide would not only be toilsome but also risk losing the player's immersion of the game if he or she continuously switches between playing the game and following external instructions. Following a guide also risks missing out on the environmental details which the players discover themselves. Fortunately, the game does not require the player to find everything to have a good grasp of the themes and the events. Regardless, the Internet has readily available resources, such as compiled YouTube videos and fan-created Wikis. Regardless, Battleship Bay was explored multiple times with a guide to guarantee nothing significant is disregarded.

The analysis will be conducted using the concept of multimodality. Multimodality is an approach that analyzes communication as more than just language. Instead, communication is formed of different parts, such as sound and text, which need to be analyzed in conjunction with each other (Jewitt 2013). These different parts are also referred to as modes. In his study about ludonarrative models in video games, Toh stated that video games consist of "multiple modes such as the linguistic and the visual to convey the narrative, gameplay and ludonarrative meanings" (2015, p. 3). Ludonarrative combines both interactive gameplay and narrative to tell a story, as opposed to media such as literature which only contain the narrative. According to Jewitt (2013), multimodality has three theoretical assumptions. The first assumption is that all the different modes, such as visual and aural modes, all contribute to the meaning. This means that both the text and the pictures in a poster should signal the same message to the player and thus they both need to be analyzed. The second assumption is that "resources are socially shaped over time to become meaning, making resources that articulate the (social, individual/affective) meanings required by the needs of different communities" (Jewitt 2013). This means that modes develop meaning the more they are used. For instance, redness is associated with stopping in traffic due to the global prevalence of red lights and the big red STOP! sign, so a driver may see a red sign he cannot read yet he assumes to stop. The third assumption is that since the designer intends to create meaning out of their modes, it

is paramount that the modes interact with each other. In other words, the modes are shaped by the norms and rules of the society. The 19th century's presentation of black people is drastically different than the 21st century one. Thus, the modes also tell about the motivations and interests of the creator (Jewitt 2013).

The primary way of documenting the game's content was using screenshots. After the initial play-through there were over 2500 screenshots, some of which will also be showcased in the analysis section. To explain the quantity of screenshots, each line of dialogue demanded its own screenshot. Furthermore, some text transcripts did not fit into one screenshot. Environmental screenshots include not only the, but also the smaller details, such as posters, paintings and store signs. Also, the 2500 screenshots are not exclusively about racism, but everything the game provides. For context, only 80 screenshots were taken during the Battleship Bay chapter. The external, real-life context bits, will be books and scholarly articles and will be sourced when used.

4 Analysis

The Battleship Bay starts with Elizabeth and Booker land on a beach and Elizabeth heads off as she hears music. Booker then must find Elizabeth. After finding Elizabeth, the two leave the beach and go through a small district until they reach the Arcade, a vocational building mostly consisting of the Duke and Dimwit toy franchise which will be expanded on later. An ID is required to enter the Arcade, which Booker and Elizabeth do not have so they sneak in through the workers' section. After going through the workers areas, they finally get to the Arcade where they can interact with different objects until they go to a train station where a fight breaks out.

4.1 The workers

The workers' area has a plethora of signs indicating racism and oppression. Initially, they may not seem to be very noticeable but after being examined and compared to the white-populated Arcade, the differences in living conditions and social status become more apparent.



Figure 1. The posters.

Upon entering the workers' area, Booker and Elizabeth see the posters above displayed in Figure 1. For clarity's sake, the left poster shall be Poster A and the right Poster B. The posters can be interpreted in a few different ways. Firstly, the texts in both are very strict commands. While Poster A's "Always address patrons as 'sir' and 'madame'" is a reasonable expectation, as respectful manners are part of a servant's job, Poster B's command carries a more imperative tone rather than

instructive. “Do not speak to the patrons unless spoken to first!” sets the tone that the servants are not worthy of demanding the patrons’ attention. The posters can be analyzed further by observing the people in the posters. The servants are blacked-out silhouettes which hide all their features. Contrast that with the patrons in Poster A who are much more detailed. Their clothes, facial expressions and skin tone are all clearly visible. The patrons are presented as unique individuals worthy of respect, while the servants are stripped from their individual identities. Their presented identity is that of a servant, existing to please the whites. This is also showcased in Poster A when comparing the figures. The patrons are roughly twice as large as the servants, further highlighting the difference in their status. However, the player may not notice the visual differences between the workers’ and patrons’ sizes and colorings which the game also does not specifically address to the player. Therefore, it is possible that the player interprets the posters as simple and reasonable instructions. Nevertheless, the message gets reinforced with the “Mind your manners amongst your betters” sign that hangs from the door separating the workers’ area and the Arcade.

Soon after the posters, Booker and Elizabeth find a black servant cleaning the floors surrounded by broken junk and machines. Before noticing the protagonists, he can be heard saying “I must take any task with more than the slightest complexity – or they simply leave it in ruins for me to clean up later” but once he notices the protagonists, he says “Oh! Ah.. H’lo, suh... Doan you pay me no nevehmind... Jus’ sum foolish-ness, y’know... ha... Jus’ monkeyshines...”. The content already implies that the white owners running the Arcade are incapable of maintaining it, as they seem to break everything they touch. Thus, all the broken machinery around the servant must be everything that they tried to fix. More importantly, there is a distinct change in his speech. Before, his speech is well-organized and fluent English, whereas after getting caught his sentence structure, pronunciation and vocabulary completely change. The long sentence changes to a series of grunts, such as “Oh!” and “suh” followed by a triple-negative (do not you pay me no never mind). Many of his words’ pronunciations deviate, such as “doan”, “nevehmind” and “jus’”. He also keeps repeating how his behavior is just “foolish-ness” and “monkeyshines”, latter being a synonym for pranking. The servant is intentionally portraying himself as a harmless simpleton. At this point there has not been a definitive reasoning why, but his behavior suggests that blacks are assumed to be stupid compared to the whites and they do not approve blacks being smarter than them. Thus, it might be in the servant’s best interest to seem silly and harmless so they leave him alone.

To understand why the black worker intentionally speaks differently when he sees Booker, one can study Frantz Fanon and his literature. Frantz Fanon was a Martinican psychiatrist born in 1925 and is famous for his 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 1952, p.vii) which analyzed the

effects of colonialism on black people. Martinique was founded in the 1600's by France as a colonialist base and used its inhabitants for slave labor. A Martinican's social status was largely determined by the skin paleness (Zeilig 2016, p. 20). *Black Skin, White Masks* was written in France and is based on his life in Martinique. Even though *BioShock Infinite* is a hyperbole of the 1890s-1910s United States while *Black Skin, White Masks* highlights the racism in Martinique, the book and the game share enough similarities to justify the comparison. Furthermore, it could be argued that it proves that the phenomena of *BioShock Infinite* are not exclusive to the United States. According to Fanon, blacks create multiple identities of themselves depending on what race the person they interact with is (1952, p. 8). While all humans have different identities depending on the context, such as whether they are working or home, that is no longer the case with ethnicities. The worker, on the other hand, portrays one identity for fellow blacks and another for whites. Fanon expands on this by stating that “—this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question—” (p. 8). The different identities have different behavior, such as speech and body language. The servant in *Bioshock Infinite* clearly demonstrates the different behavior in speech. The blacks could have changed their speech of the old evolutionary theories that “the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man” (p. 8). One of the key characteristics that separates humans from other species is intelligence, particularly the ability to speak which involves linguistic aspects such as syntax and morphology. Speech and language is also a part of one's culture, as evidenced by most countries having their own languages unless they were founded under colonialism.



Figure 2. The workers' washroom.

Finally, the workers' section also has two washrooms. Both are labeled colored and Irish washrooms. All the workers seen so far have either been black with the sole exception of one Irish-accented white man, which strongly implies that they are the only people who work in the Arcade. The washroom, as shown in Figure 2 is in a disastrous condition. The floor and wall tiles are cracking and tearing off and are filled with blood splats. The sinks are filthy and leaking, one of the two lights not visible in Figure B does not work and the toilets are messy or downright missing. Men and women do not have their own washrooms and the toilets have no cover, such as curtains or a door. There is hardly even any toilet paper. Furthermore, the color palette is very colorless, consisting of white and gray. It gives the bathroom a very cold and harsh atmosphere, supported by the sign telling the workers it is their job to keep the area clean which pinpoints the blame at them.

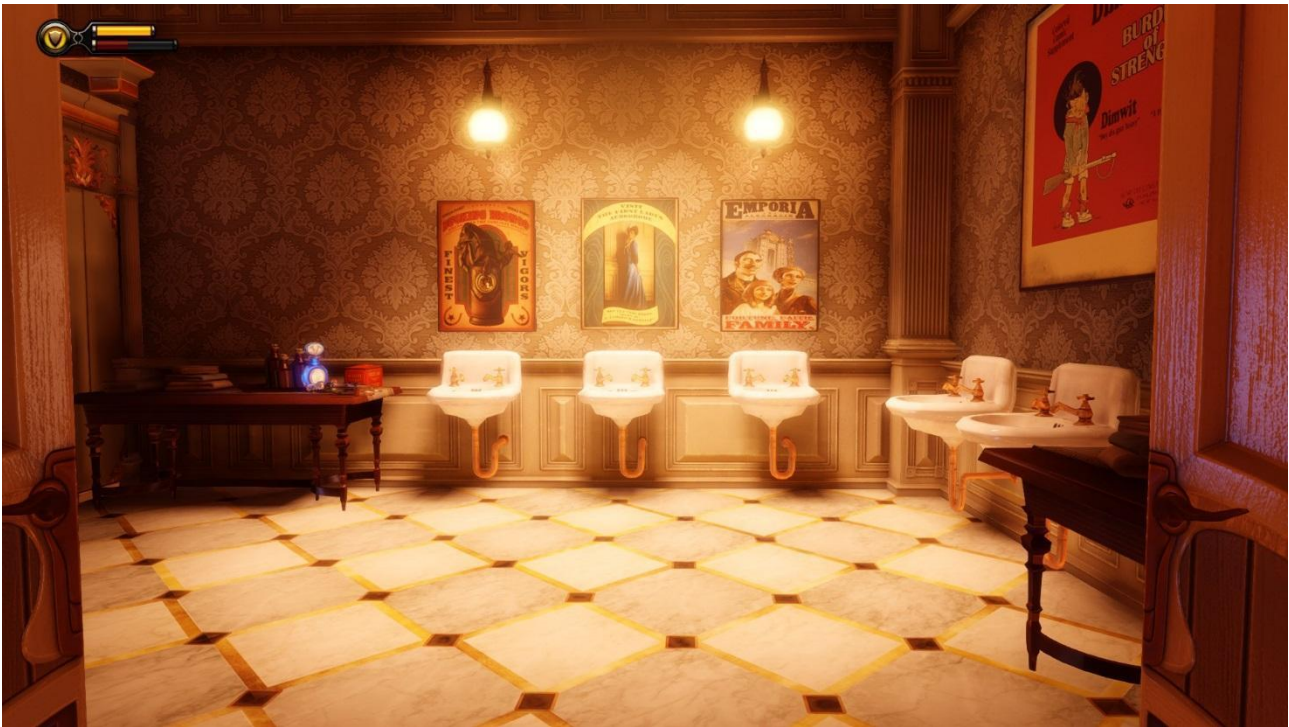


Figure 3 The patrons' washroom

Contrast the workers' bathroom with the white washrooms available in the Arcade. Everything is in perfect condition. Everything works as they are supposed to. The lighting is good, and the floor and walls are well-designed and spotless. It has posters, tables and lavish curtains. It is almost too stylish to be a washroom. The white washrooms have a strong shade of yellow and gold, creating a comfortable and embracing atmosphere. One of the bathrooms has a black servant quietly sitting in a corner, readily waiting to clean up after whoever comes there, maintaining the immaculate condition of the washroom.

The bathrooms are a metaphor for the living conditions of whites and non-whites in Columbia. Columbia was built to be a utopia for the whites who worship the Founding Fathers and the Prophet Comstock. The whites do not have to work or worry about anything, as the Prophet protects them. However, someone must keep the utopia running and the easiest way was to smuggle non-whites for cheap labor who do not get to enjoy any of the benefits. This also gives the people of Columbia an enemy. The washrooms are also a clear reference to segregation, which was relevant all the way until the 1990's in South Africa's apartheid. This gets addressed in a piece of dialogue between Elizabeth and Booker. After seeing the washrooms, Elizabeth asks Booker why there are separate bathrooms for blacks and whites. Booker bluntly answers that there just are which Elizabeth comments as impractical. Booker's indifference can be interpreted as either him not caring about

Columbia's politics as he is there only to do his job or him having some racist thoughts himself. After all, Booker is revealed to be Comstock from another universe and Comstock is undoubtedly either racist or at the very least abuses and exploits minorities for his personal gain. Outside Battleship Bay there are also parts in which Booker uses racist slurs towards other minorities, such as Chinaman and Welsher. Elizabeth, on the other hand, has been isolated from the Columbian culture and instead has been studying, making her one of the most educated people in Columbia. Elizabeth's tolerance can be attributed to either her education, the theory that humans are not inherently racist but learn it from others instead or her being an outsider to Columbia, where racism is taken for granted. From a multimodal perspective, Elizabeth's question clearly signals to the player that there is an intentional disparity between the washrooms that they should notice, giving it an additional mode. The washrooms are also the chapter's most striking example of racism because of the stark difference between the washrooms and how conspicuous and intimate washroom hygiene is to humans.

4.2 The propaganda

Columbia's toy market is monopolized by one brand called Duke and Dimwit. Duke has blonde well-kept hair and clean clothes while Dimwit has messy brown hair and dirty clothes. The Arcade consists of display cabinets where the patrons can interact with them and see different videos depicting the two boys. The display cabinet starts by the narrator asking whether the viewer is a Duke or a Dimwit, presenting a specific scenario and how the two boys respond to it and then the narrator reminds the children not to be a Dimwit. This suggests that Duke's behavior is always the ideal and desirable behavior. For example, one of the display cabinets shows the two boys holding guns, but Dimwit is closing the eye he aims with and holding the gun the wrong way, showing how dumb Dimwit is. After the introduction phase, the narrator states: "Duke cleans his father's rifle every Sunday, without being asked. Dimwit shoots mice every afternoon and puts the old man's rifle back dirty." Duke, a good citizen, does not kill animals with a gun but instead cleans it weekly, whereas Dimwit, a bad citizen, shoots daily, causes a carcass problem and does not even bother cleaning the gun afterwards. Duke also refers to his dad as father compared to Dimwit's more disrespectful old man moniker. Other cabinets present different scenarios, such as whether to stand up for the national anthem and whether to alert suspicious figures to the authorities. Naturally, Duke stands for the anthem and reports people to the authorities, while Dimwit finds anthems boring and minds his own business. Citizens can also purchase toys of the two boys with the idea that children get the toy that matches their behavior, similar to how the Santa Clause gives either presents or

coal. Good kids get Duke, whereas misbehaving kids get Dimwit. Thus, Duke and Dimwit are propaganda disguised as seemingly innocent toys to guide children towards becoming obedient, well-behaved patriots. Duke and Dimwit are officially sponsored by Columbia's Police Department, whose slogan is "Protecting Our Race", which finally connects the toy brand's propaganda to promoting racism.



Figure 4. Dimwit & Duke.

Figure 4 is another poster but this time it is displayed in one of the patrons' washrooms shown in 4.1 so the target audience is the white patrons, presumably boys. This time the poster teaches kids how to behave during guard duty. Dimwit has untied shoelaces and has no gun anywhere near and he is busy sleeping, digging his nose. Duke, on the other hand, stands straight and shoots at a person. the target is supposed to be identified as Jewish which can be inferred from the details of the figure, such as the Star of David necklace and the *kippah*. However, there are also other more demeaning features. The hair curls are a Jewish stereotype as is the big nose (Patai & Patai, 1989, p. 206-208) There is also a pile of money next to him, a reference to Jews being greedy and rich. The Jews have been oppressed for millennia and anti-Semitism was also a movement in the United States (Dinnerstein 1995, 58). In 1914, the professor of sociology in the University of Wisconsin Edward Alsworth Ross wrote an article titled "The Hebrews of Eastern Europe in America" in which he expanded on the notion of Jews and what they were like as a race. The most recurring theme in the article is money. According to Ross, the Jews have an inborn love of money-making

and are unbeatable at a bargain, with an ability to “scent his profit”, possibly alluding to why Jews supposedly have big noses like the character in Figure 4. The character is also holding money in his hand. Ross also describes them as greedy and willing to break the law for money, which may be why Duke is supposed to shoot the Jew in the poster.

Duke and Dimwit is a versatile exhibition of multimodality. Firstly, the cabinets use both aural and visual modes to enhance the message. In addition to the physical appearance, the boys also move during the cabinet presentation. Duke stands up with good posture while Dimwit stands with his head low. Additionally, when introduced, Duke is accompanied by a sharp clean gong whereas Dimwit is accompanied by bells crashing. The cabinets emphasize how much better Duke is. Figure 4 then includes textual and more visual modes. However, it is possible that the player does not identify the target as Jew and therefore may miss the antisemitism.

Columbia also discriminates against the Irish. One of the kinetoscopes in *The Arcade* titled “Solving The Irish Problem” shows a drunken man asleep on a bar counter with bottles next to him. He is introduced as “THE DRUNK! THE LAGGARD!”, meaning he is a lazy drunkard. The next photo shows a room with a mother doing laundry surrounded by a handful of children. She is also cooking something on a stove, presumably potatoes. She is declared “THE STRUMPET! His BROOD MARE!”. Strumpet is a synonym for a prostitute while brood mares are female horses used for breeding. These two slides already set the standard that Irish men are dysfunctional parts of society and the women only exist to pleasure the men or are considered sexually immoral and breed even more Irish men and women, causing an “Irish problem”. The third slide shows a group of men protesting something. The slide is followed by “Together, they manufacture future VOX POPULI recruits!”. As mentioned in 2.3, Vox Populi is a rebel group fighting against the white supremacy of Columbia, yet the Irish are also demonized for supporting them. The next few slides show Jeremiah Fink and his Finkton, which is an isolated section of Columbia where the minorities live and work isolated from the whites. Fink promises that if the Irish get forced to Finkton, he would whip them into shape. By labeling the Irish as troublemakers and drunks, Columbia justifies segregating and practically enslaving the Irish.

Despite being white, the Irish have been oppressed for centuries. While some, such as the conspiracy theorist and Holocaust denier Michael A. Hoffman II, have claimed that the Irish were used as slave labor in the United States despite the lack of historical evidence, the Irish have still been oppressed and looked down upon. Philosopher George Berkeley (as cited in Giemza 2012, p 3) said that the black slaves in plantations had a saying “If negro was no negro, Irishman would be negro”. Furthermore, in the 1800s, the Irish were jokingly referred to as “niggers turned inside out”,

while blacks were “smoked Irishmen” (Duffy 2013, p. 61). During the 19th century, The Irish and the blacks shared similar lifestyles. They worked similar jobs, lived in the same neighborhoods and shared their culture. They even got close enough to share beds and organize households together (Duffy 2013 p.61). The Irish were despised for intertwining with the non-whites, which eventually resulted in the Irish turning against them to win the white Americans over. Unlike the Great Britain, where one’s status was dependent on his heritage, the American law had to take ethnicity and skin color into account when declaring who qualifies as an American citizen because the American whites came from all over Europe (Duffy 2013 p. 63). As opposed to England, where having English family roots was paramount, whiteness was the main requirement to citizenship in the 1800s. Unlike the blacks and Asians, the Irish were granted citizenships. However, they had to prove themselves to the Americans by supporting their race-based class system. Not only did the Irish oppose the abolishment of slavery, they also attacked blacks and refused to work with them (Duffy 2013 p. 63). Eventually, the Irish also had to fight against the stereotypes, such as drunkenness, to be accepted as equal to the whites (Duffy 2013, p. 64).

The typical defining physical difference in racism is the skin color. However, since the Irish were also white, they were given other physical traits, such as retreating foreheads, large mouths and thick lips according to Duffy (2013, p. 53). Naturally, the Irish were also given stereotypical personality traits. The Irish were thought to live in dirty homes. The women were considered disorderly, whereas the men were described as lazy drunks (Duffy 2013, p. 53). These stereotypes started in Britain, but also found their way to the United States. The Americans also had their stereotypes about the Irish. In the 19th century United States, the Irish primarily worked unskilled manual jobs (Kenny 2014) and were considered troublemakers in the mid-1800s. They partook in many violent protests, such as protesting the Irish-Scots Protestants celebrating a war which the Catholic Irish lost. The Irish canal and railroad worker also revolted for better wages and contracts (Duffy 2013, p. 58). As a result, the Irish were considered lazy workers and agitators in the United States. Near the end of the 19th century, the United States became more industrialized and the gap between the wealthy and the poor increased. Yet, according to Duffy (p. 58), the wealth gap was attributed to the poor workers lacking work ethic and savings, using their money on alcohol instead. In the early 1800s, workplace drinking and paying workers with alcohol was common (p. 59), but by the end of the century that was no longer the case. Despite the increased regulations, the low-class workers kept drinking and fighting on the job, as that was their way of expressing their pride (Duffy 2013, p. 59). Nuclear families were also a huge concern for the Americans (p. 59). They feared that the overpopulated Irish would grow into a big political movement if left untended. The

women were characterized as very fertile breeders who often were the head of the large family, because the Irish men either died in low-paying work accidents or deserted their families. Thus, the Irish were seen as drunk, rebellious and overpopulating community which is similar to how BioShock Infinite portrayed them in “The Irish Problem” kinetoscope.

Finally, the third piece of Columbian propaganda is the voxophone titled “A Dog’s Loyalty” which can be found in the patrons’ bathroom as well. The voxophone is dated December 18th, 1899 and is by Zachary Comstock. The transcript of the voxophone states:

As a boy, I had a dog named Bill. And like all dogs, Bill was a loyal friend. If we had not fed him, Bill would have been loyal. If we had struck him, Bill would have been loyal. Only when the colored man can make that claim will he take his place in society.

Bill was already given more individual traits than the minorities by the sheer fact he is referred to by his name. For comparison, the Irish man and woman in the previous kinetoscope were referred to as a mass rather than individuals and were given degrading collective labels. Comstock blatantly admits that he does not think that ethnic minorities are equal to the white population, but he goes further than that. By arguing that Bill the Dog’s behavior was more suitable for a society than a colored man’s, not only is he comparing humans to dogs, he also portrays dogs as superior to ethnic minorities, further dehumanizing them. Even though it is presented as a way for the minorities to become equal, it can be inferred that the real purpose is to justify the physical abuse and starvation the minorities suffer, resistance to this would only assure the whites that their actions against blacks are justified. The whites can indefinitely abuse blacks, claiming that they are testing whether they are suitable for the society and if they ever resist it proves the whites “right” about them not fitting.

Comparing humans to animals is a common phenomenon. For instance, blacks have been historically called monkeys. The insult derives from the supposed visual similarity and the simplified concept of evolution, where species evolve from a simpler form into a more advanced form, such as from apes to mankind. The logic is that blacks are in-between the apes and the whites. Blacks’ status as humans has also been discussed throughout history. Notably, American slaves in the late 1700s were considered only three fifths of a human when calculating populations. However, there does not seem to be any concrete real-life context for Bill the Dog. The closest examples are comparing blacks to animals in other contexts. For instance, when asked about his slave days, Fountain Hughes described how the servants were “nothing but a dog to them” (1949). Thus, Bill the Dog may be one of the instances where the developers created new material themselves rather

than using real-life historical context as a reference point. While “A Dog’s Loyalty” has an aural part to it, it does not add much to the meaning of the message.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The aim of the research was to examine how racism was depicted in BioShock Infinite. To give the in-game racism more credence, the racism in BioShock Infinite is mostly based on real-life events and experiences that occurred in both the United States and European colonial countries rather than the game developers' own ideas of what racism was like. Therefore, if the player was disturbed or bothered by the in-game content, they can study and learn that similar things really happened.

While the original intention was to focus exclusively on the American history of the 1890s-1910s, the acts of racism can be generalized past the geographical location and timeline. The Irish were labeled rowdy drunkards in both England and the United States. Similarly, Jews have been discriminated and stereotyped for millennia. The study used numerous examples, as BioShock Infinite is a dozen-hour-long game that is littered with exposition that the player only sees for a few seconds then moves onto the next one. They were not intended for the player to stop in his tracks and think about each of them in great depth. Instead, they are small pieces that form a big picture. Similarly, institutional racism is always there with constant reminders of its existence that nobody can escape from.

Even though BioShock Infinite focuses heavily on racism, it is not particularly remembered for it. The limelight was stolen by the multiverse-focused story and its possible plot inconsistencies due to the nature of multiverse stories and the visual and aural presentation. Naturally, BioShock Infinite is also often compared to the now-classic BioShock, which takes attention further away from the theme of racism. One additional factor may be what Vox Populi turned out to really be like. The present study only focused on how the minorities have been oppressed and how Vox Populi is a rebel group fighting against that. This phrasing presents them as noble heroes fighting against an evil tyranny. What was left out of the study, however, is that at one point in the story the protagonists go to an alternative universe where the Vox Populi wins and becomes just as bad as Comstock. The leader, Daisy Fitzroy, even goes as far as to say that eliminating the current rulers is not enough but that to truly eliminate the problem the whole white race has to be purged. This caused controversy, as the fans hoped that Fitzroy would be a benevolent hero (Suellentrop 2016). The racism story may have been remembered more fondly if Vox Populi triumphed, stopped Comstock and ended the white supremacy.

The study results can also be interpreted as not just a study about racism, but also as a study about what goes into building a comprehensive and believable video game world. The one consistent praise both BioShock games received was the environmental storytelling and this study showcased how much there is to digest from just one thirty-minute section of the game. This is different from

the average video game, where environments mostly exist as a physical environment for the player to exist in. As the multimodal analyses suggested, the game is not extremely direct with its worldbuilding. While some players could potentially miss a lot of the details because of it, some games can go too far in the other direction and not leave the player any room for discovery. Further studies could analyze the series more extensively or from different angles, such as comparing how BioShock and BioShock Infinite handle religion. Alternatively, they could be a part of a bigger study to analyze how different video games do worldbuilding differently. One potential study could be how BioShock Infinite's racism in a fictional world compares to Mafia III's more grounded and realistic world that is also racist.

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