



Native American Stereotypes in Popular Media: The Case Study of Thunder Hawk Character's Representation in the Street Fighter Video Game

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ABSTRACT

Native American is one of the most stereotyped races in United States, despite being the native to the American Soil. This paper aims to elaborate the Native American stereotypes based on a character in the video game entitled Street Fighter. The character in the video game is named Thunder Hawk and is depicted as a member of a Native American tribe. Thunder Hawk's depiction has been subject to criticism for perpetuating Native American stereotypes. His appearance, featuring traditional Native American attire and war paint, has been seen as reinforcing clichéd representations of indigenous peoples. The depiction of Thunder Hawk in the Street Fighter video game showcases his strengths and fighting abilities, but raises concerns about perpetuating Native American stereotypes. After knowing the existing stereotypes, the authors also compare the representation of the Thunder Hawk character in the video game with stereotypes regarding Native Americans. This research analyzes representations of Native American, or so-called Indian using critical discourse analysis. Based on this research, the author discovered various stereotypes of American Indians that are discriminatory. The stereotypes that the authors found include physical characteristics, culture, and other stereotypes such as the clothes shown in the video game.

Keyword: Native American, Street Fighter, Stereotypes, Street Fighter Video Game.

BACKGROUND

Native Americans are one of the ethnic minorities in America who experience various stereotypes and discrimination in various fields. In building stereotypes in society, popular media has a crucial role. Currently, popular media has many forms, ranging from films, songs, print media, online media and even in the form of video games. Currently video games are very popular in society, both among children and adults. The interesting thing about video games is that the characters tend to take references from certain groups of society. In the Street Fighter video game, there are various characters who have certain cultural and social backgrounds. This can be seen from the names and attributes used, such as the Kung Fu expert character who wears traditional Chinese clothes and has the name Liu, the karateka who wears

typical Japanese karate clothes, to the Native American character named Thunder Hawk who uses Native American tribal attributes.

In various video games, it is rare to find characters who have Native American backgrounds. However, something different is shown by the Street Fighter game where native American characters have appeared in several sequels since 1998. The Street Fighter video game itself is a game that takes place in an international fighting competition called Street Fighter. The game genre presented by this game is head-to-head battles between characters with different backgrounds. Each character in this game has their own reason for taking part in the fighting tournament, so does the Thunder Hawk character.

METHOD

Before analyzing the stereotypes contained in the Thunder Hawk character, the authors will first explain the stereotypes that exist in society towards Native Americans. There are various stereotypes attached to Native American people. These stereotypes are shown through various things, from films, songs, news, comics to video games. In order to explain the stereotypes attached to the Thunder Hawk character in the Street Fighter video game, the authors will use discourse analysis. This will be conducted by showing all the characteristics shown in the video game, such as the physical attributes, apparels used by the character and many other. After showing these characteristics, the authors will then analyze the stereotypes related to those characteristics. While for the data, authors will gather the data from various sources, started from the video game itself, journal and credible websites.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As one of the minorities races that exist in the United States, Native American or so called Indian is one of the races that have some stereotypes. These stereotypes cannot be identified as good or bad, it depends on the perspectives of the perceiver. One of these stereotypes is the assumption that Native Americans are lazy because they receive assistance from the American government, so they can accumulate wealth without having to work like Americans in general. Native American life tends to be depicted closely with casino life. In the view of American society, natives are only experts in running casino businesses and are incapable of running other businesses (McLaurin, 2012).

Native Americans are often depicted as wise and of few words. This is described in Stoic Indian terminology. Native people are often people who have a high level of wisdom. They are depicted as guides for white people. In many films, Native American characters are often depicted as stoic and wise, possessing mystical powers or a deep connection to nature. While these characteristics may be rooted in elements of Native American culture, they are often exaggerated and do not reflect the full spectrum of experiences and identities within indigenous communities. In various films, native people rarely have long scripts and only speak as needed, and often the expressions they show are very flat. Furthermore, the historical and contemporary issues faced by Native Americans, such as marginalization, discrimination, and social justice struggles, are often overlooked in favor of romanticized or outdated portrayals (Nittle, 2018).



The other stereotype is the mystical impression that is often attached to native characters. They are often depicted as having powers beyond reason such as talking to animals, having the power to heal, predicting the future and so on. Apart from that, natives are considered to be people who are still traditional and live in the wild. All indigenous people are considered to have the skills to survive in the wild. Their lives are also considered to still be oriented towards barbarianism, where they are considered bloodthirsty warmongers (Hirschfelder & Molin, 2018).

Even though stereotypes of Native Americans tend to be the same today, based on Ivica Radman's explanation, the representation of Native Americans on screen has experienced various changes that tend to be positive. In the 1940s, natives were depicted as tomahawk-wielding, unintelligent, thieves, dirty, headhunters and rapists of white women. Significant changes occurred in the 1980s, where Hollywood films began to depict indigenous people in a more humanistic way, as loving family, organized and determined to protect their villages and hometowns. Apart from that, natives are also described as people who have feelings, thoughts and values (Radman, 2013). Physically, native men are described as strong, with muscular bodies wearing native attributes such as bird feathers worn as headbands. Apart from that, natives are also described as having strong dexterity, perseverance and stamina compared to whites.

Comparison between the Portrayal of the Thunder Hawk Character in the Street Fighter Video Game and Native American Stereotypes

Thunder Hawk is a character in the street fighter video game who is depicted as coming from a Native American tribe. Thunder Hawk has a tall, big and very sturdy posture. He has shoulder length hair and a square chin. On his face there is a typical native war painting. He also wears a headband with eagle feathers inserted into it. On his large arms, he wears armbands made of steel. The belt he uses resembles a cowboy belt. Apart from that, he also wore leather boots. The interesting thing is that the vest and trousers he wears are made of jeans.

From Thunder Hawk's appearance, we can see that there are general stereotypes of Native Americans attached to it. Hyper-masculine is one of the stereotypes that is clearly visible in Thunder Hawk's appearance. The painting on Thunder Hawk's face seems to show that native people are still very traditional. Because native people's face painting tends to be used for war and traditional ceremonies. The colors in face painting also have their own meaning, such as black which shows that the person is very strong and has proven it on the battlefield. The color used by Thunder Hawk is white, which tends to reflect peace for native people. In the Pawnee tribe, white also symbolizes the wolf which will give them strength. (Paul, 2011)

After playing the Street Fighter video game and using the character Thunder Hawk, the authors discovered several personalities embedded in the character. The character Thunder Hawk first appeared in the game Street Fighter Alpha 3 in 1998. He is a member of the Thunderfoot tribe, led by Arroyo Hawk (Father of Thunder Hawk). At first the Thunderfoot tribe was forced to leave their homeland by a criminal organization called Shadaloo. However, many opposed this and ended up fighting against the Shadaloo organization. After the war ended, many members of the tribe died, including Arroyo Hawk.

Thunder Hawk's debut in this tournament begins with the story of the destruction of his hometown after being attacked by the Shadaloo organization. After that, Thunder Hawk then



fled and lived in Mexico, near the Monte Alban plains. His participation in the Street Fighter tournament is to take revenge against the Shadaloo organization, restore the glory of his tribe and search for one of his tribe members who disappeared during the attack carried out by the Shadaloo organization, namely Julia. Julia herself is a woman who is loved by Thunder Hawk (Nishiyama & Matsumoto, Street Fighter Zero 3 (Playstation Version), 2006).

Based on Thunder Hawk's background, we can see that he is described as someone who really loves his tribe. However, we can also see that Thunder Hawk is a vengeful person. He will do anything to avenge his father's death, including risking his life to take part in the Street Fighter tournament held by the Shadaloo organization. This game depicts that Thunder Hawk is a human who has feelings of love for someone like humans in general. In this case, Julia is a woman who is loved by Thunder Hawk, which is also the reason for his participation in the tournament.

The Stoic Indian stereotype is not very visible in this game, especially with the appearance that Thunder Hawk also has feelings of love. In various films that include native characters, there are rarely depictions of native love stories. Often there is only the native's love for their tribe. According to the authors, the emergence of a native love story in this game is a positive step that can provide a different view of natives. As we know, there are already films that tell native love stories, such as the Disney film Pocahontas. However, in the film Pocahontas is depicted as a native who tends to be inferior to white people. At first, Pocahontas does show the feminist side of native people, but there are also negative things in the story. This can be seen from the impression given by the character of Capt. John Smith who was a guide for Pocahontas in the "right" direction. (New York Essays, 2017)

There are several interesting statements in this game made by Thunder Hawk and these can show the characteristics of Thunder Hawk. One of them is the statement "as long as you are consumed by greed you cannot win" (Nishiyama & Matsumoto, Super Street Fighter IV, 2009). This statement illustrates that Thunder Hawk has a wise nature. The stereotype that develops in society is that natives tend to be wise. This is of course clearly illustrated by Thunder Hawk's statement. Moreover, this statement was made after he defeated his enemy.

Apart from that, there are statements that strengthen the mystical side of Thunder Hawk, namely "The spirits avoid you because you seek only destruction", "Don't think that your powers are your own, the spirits allow you to see things" and "I can hear your voice father, it is carried on the wind" (Nishiyama & Matsumoto, Super Street Fighter IV, 2009). This shows that Thunder Hawk has a strong belief in spirits. Thunder Hawk thinks that spirits can give strength to people of noble heart. Meanwhile, for evil people who desire destruction, the spirit will not approach them. Thunder Hawk's statement that he was able to hear the voice of his dead father also clearly shows that he has the supernatural power to communicate with spirits. As we know, in general natives believe that spirits make a big contribution to human life. This can be seen from various traditional ceremonies that attempt to summon ancestral spirits, such as the Ghost Dance which is considered to be able to provide opportunities for native people to meet dead people, and is also believed to be able to revive native knights (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014).

This game does depict the life of Thunder Hawk who is close to his tribe, but the life of the Thunderfoot tribe itself is not shown in this game. The authors also see the absence of stereotypes regarding casinos. The stereotype about natives being lazy is also not found. The



authors actually found a persistent nature in Thunder Hawk which can be seen from his efforts to restore the glory of his tribe and find Julia.

CONCLUSIONS

In the previous explanation, we can see that in general there are two types of stereotypes, namely "positive" and "negative". For negative stereotypes, we can easily conclude that these stereotypes will have a negative impact on the lives of Native Americans. However, "positive" stereotypes are not only positive, in fact they have the same or even worse impact when compared to negative stereotypes. For negative stereotypes, many ordinary people may have realized that this is not appropriate to attach to native people. However, in the case of stereotypes that are considered positive, society consciously accepts and even spreads these positive stereotypes without realizing the dangers. Stereotypes about Native Americans have been established in American society from an early age through animated films and comics. It has become commonplace for natives to be depicted from two points of view, namely "the good" and "the evil" natives. (McLaurin, 2017)

Stereotypes clearly have an impact on the group that experiences them. According to the book written by Laura L, C., & Christine R., stereotypes will have an impact on the perpetrators and those who experience them. In this article, research on the impact of stereotypes of young people on older people is explained. Older people are considered to have weak memories, besides that they are also susceptible to disease. Based on these stereotypes, various evidence was found that many parents feel they cannot do productive things. With the perception that parents are easily affected by disease and forget quickly, many parents feel that they do not need treatment (Laura L & Christine R, 2006). Apart from that, in research conducted by Jeff Stone and Toni Schmader on two athletes, one white and one black. The stereotype that has developed is that white people have high sports intelligence, while black people have more natural athletic abilities. The results they got were that the two athletes apparently had performances that matched this stereotype. This shows that stereotypes will have an impact on their thinking patterns. (UA News Services, 2003). The same thing also applies to natives, when they are considered as mystical people and they will feel used to this perception, so that it will appear in their minds that there is no need to assimilate into other societies. The same thing also applies to stereotypes that are considered "positive" such as natives being wise people. With this stereotype, there will be a feeling that they have to be wise people, they have to be good at putting together words to look authoritative and so on. This is of course something that is not natural and tends to be forced. When native people try to achieve this "positive" stereotype, of course not all of them can do it. Those who cannot achieve this stereotype will feel depressed, and this can lead to stress and a decline in their performance in society.



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