

Playing the Past: Presenting History Through Games

History 490-001
Fall Term 2016
Tuesdays and Thursdays, Noon to 1:50 pm
GTM 123

Instructor: Robert Whitaker, PhD
Office: GTM 118
Office Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 8:30 to Noon, and by appointment
Email: whitaker@latech.edu

Course Description

History serves as the backdrop for many popular forms of entertainment – especially video games. This digital humanities course will find students considering several historical video games to learn how they approach the past, and to see if video games can encourage accurate historical literacy among players. Topics will include representation, memory, public history, and gaming in the classroom. The class will consider classic games, such as *Oregon Trail*, as well as newer titles, such as *1979 Revolution* and *Valiant Hearts*. The semester will culminate with a project in which students develop their own historical video game based on primary research. Students will finish the course with an awareness and understanding of historical video games, and also with an appreciation for how video games can and cannot be used in the classroom or for their own research.

Course Readings

Readings for this course will be available for free online or download through the course's Moodle page. Assigned readings are listed in the course schedule below.

Course Software

Available for free online:

- *Surviving History: The Fever!*
 - o <http://theappendix.net/special/the-fever/>
- *The Oregon Trail*
 - o https://archive.org/details/msdos_Oregon_Trail_The_1990
- *Civilization* (FreeCiv)
 - o <http://www.freeciv.org/>
- *Minecraft Education Edition* (use latech.edu email)
 - o <http://education.minecraft.net/getstarted/>
 - Great Fire 1666 Map: <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/great-fire-1666>
- Twine
 - o <https://twinery.org/>

Available on iOS or Steam (prices below are from iOS App Store):

- *80 Days*, \$5
- *1979 Revolution*, \$5
- *Valiant Hearts*, \$5 (first episode free)

Grading Criteria

Response Papers (6) – 30%

History Game Lesson Plan – 5%

Prospectus for Final Project – 5%

Demo of Final Project – 10%

Final Project – 30%

Class Participation – 20%

All grades in this course are determined on a 100-point scale.

Students are required to write a 500-word response paper that reviews each of the six historical video games for the class. These response papers will be graded on their overall structure and presentation as well as how well they address the following questions:

- How and why does this game use history?
- How does this game impart historical knowledge (e.g. through text, mechanics, or something else)?
- Does this game have any utility in the history classroom? If so, how would you use it?

Response Papers will be typed in 12-point font, double-spaced, and with one inch margins all around. Response Papers should be sent to my email address (whitaker@latech.edu) as a Word document attachment by the beginning of class on the Thursday we discuss each game.

For the History Game Lesson Plan assignment, students are required to develop a short, two-page lesson plan for using a video game as the basis for an exercise in a history class of 30 people. Students are allowed to base this lesson plan on a game discussed in class or another game of their choosing. The lesson plan should outline the objectives of the assignments, potential learning outcomes, and discussion questions.

The Final Project assignment, along with the Prospectus and Demo, will be detailed in a separate prompt.

Class participation will be based on in-class participation and attendance.

Course Schedule

Week One, September 8: Introduction

- No readings

Week Two, September 13 and 15: Oregon Trail and Edutainment

Tuesday:

- Robert Whitaker, *Not Even Past*, “‘You have died of dysentery’ – History According to Video Games”: <https://notevenpast.org/you-have-died-dysentery-history-according-video-games/>
- Adam Chapman, *Journal of Digital Humanities*, “Privileging Form Over Content: Analyzing Historical Videogames”: <http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-2/privileging-form-over-content-by-adam-chapman/>
- Rachel N. Ponce, *The Appendix*, “Fever to Tell: Interactive Storytelling Online and the History of Philadelphia’s Yellow Fever Outbreak, 1793”: <http://theappendix.net/issues/2014/4/fever-to-tell-interactive-storytelling-online-and-philadelphias-yellow-fever-outbreak>
- Jessica Lussenhop, *City Pages*, “Oregon Trail: How three Minnesotans forged its path”: <http://www.citypages.com/news/oregon-trail-how-three-minnesotans-forged-its-path-6745749>

Thursday:

- Discussion and play through of *Oregon Trail*

Week Three, September 20 and 22: Sid Meier’s History of the World

Tuesday:

- Benj Edwards, *Gamasutra*, “The History of Civilization”: http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/129947/the_history_of_civilization.php?page=1
 - o One-page version here: http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/129947/the_history_of_civilization.php?print=1
- Colin Campbell, *Polygon*, “The Man Who Made a Million Empires”: <http://www.polygon.com/features/2016/3/4/11158134/the-man-who-made-a-million-empires>
- Joshua D. Holdenreid and Nicolas Trépanier, *Playing with the Past*, “Dominance and the Aztec Empire: Representations in *Age of Empires II* and *Medieval II: Total War*”

Thursday:

- Discussion and play through of *Civilization*

Week Four, September 27 and 29: History or window dressing?

Tuesday:

- Keith Stuart, *The Guardian*, “Assassin’s Creed and the appropriation of history”: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/gamesblog/2010/nov/19/assassin-s-creed-brotherhood-history>
- Double Fine Productions, YouTube Video, “Devs Play S2E04: ‘Assassin’s Creed II’ with Patrice Désilets and Greg Rice”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syV2-ZuaxC8>

- Clemens Reisner, *Playing with the Past*, “‘The Reality Behind It All Is Very True’: *Call of Duty: Black Ops* and the Remembrance of the Cold War” (pp 247-261)

Thursday:

- **Prospectus for final project**
- Robert Whitaker and Bryan Glass, YouTube Video, “History Respawned: Assassin’s Creed IV”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9C9h3p5Efa4>
- Robert Whitaker, Christopher Dietrich, and Joseph Parrot, YouTube Video, “History Respawned: Call of Duty: Black Ops 1 and 2”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vIsAto6toE>

Week Five, October 4 and 6: Historians in the gaming industry

Tuesday:

- Chris Plante, *Polygon*, “Assassin’s Creed 3 Team Historian talks inspirations”: <http://www.polygon.com/gaming/2012/9/24/3367434/assassins-creed-3s-team-historian-talks-inspirations>
- Jeff Beer, *Fast Company*, “The (Fun, Violent) History Lesson Inside ‘Assassin’s Creed Unity’”: <https://www.fastcocreate.com/3037212/the-fun-violent-history-lesson-inside-assassins-creed-unity>
- Robert Rath, *Zam*, “No Man’s Sky is a Captain Cook simulator”: <http://www.zam.com/article/953/no-mans-sky-is-a-captain-cook-simulator>
- Joe Dempsey, Daniel Hargreaves, Daniel Peacock, Chelsea Lindsey, Dominic Bell, Luc Fontenoy, and Heather Williams, *Journal of Digital Humanities* (Vol. 3, No.1, Spring 2014), “Pudding Lane: Recreating Seventeenth-Century London”: <http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/3-1/pudding-lane-recreating-seventeenth-century-london/>

Thursday:

- Skype call with Lisa Rosner, historian behind *The Pox Hunter*
- Discussion and play through of *Great Fire 1666* map in *Minecraft*

Week Six, October 11 and 13: “Historical accuracy” and video games

Tuesday:

- Tauriq Moosa, *Polygon*, “Colorblind: On The Witcher 3, Rust, and gaming’s race problem”: <http://www.polygon.com/2015/6/3/8719389/colorblind-on-witcher-3-rust-and-gamings-race-problem>
- Edward Bals, *Kill Screen*, “Meg Jayanth’s Quest to Amplify Marginalized Voices in Videogames”: <https://killscreen.com/articles/meg-jayanth-s-quest-to-amplify-marginalized-voices-in-videogames/>
- Meg Jayanth, GDC Talk, “10 Ways to Make Your Game More Diverse”: www.gdcvault.com/play/1023447/10-Ways-to-Make-Your

Thursday:

- **Update on final project**

- Discussion and play through of *80 Days*

Week Seven, October 18 and 20: Decolonizing the Digital Past

Tuesday:

- Rebecca Mir, *Play the Past*, “Playing at Slavery: Modding Colonization for Authenticity”: <http://www.playthepast.org/?p=2856>
- Evan Narcisse, *Kotaku*, “I’m surprised by How “Black” Assassin’s Creed Liberation Feels”: <http://kotaku.com/5957411/im-surprised-by-how-black-assassins-creed-liberation-feels>
- Daniel Starkey, *Polygon*, “Never Alone and the need for American Indian narratives in games”: <http://www.polygon.com/2015/6/29/8852519/never-alone-american-indian>
- Robert Whitaker and Ishmael Hope, YouTube Video, “History Respawned: Never Alone”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFcQkNIUe1E>

Thursday:

- Discussion and play through of *1979 Revolution*

Week Eight, October 25 and 27: Historical video games and modern memory

Tuesday:

- Jake Muncy, *Wired*, “A first-person shooter set in WWI is maaaybe not the best idea: http://www.wired.com/2016/05/battlefield-1-wwi/?mbid=social_twitter
- Robert Whitaker, *Rock Paper Shotgun*, “Why Battlefield 1 could be the best WWI game”: <https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2016/05/17/best-ww1-game/>
- M. Niclas Heckner, *Immersive Gameplay*, “Deleting Memory Space: The Gaming of History and the Absence of the Holocaust”
- Kabir Chibber, *The Atlantic*, “Let Them Play Asssassin’s Creed?”: <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/11/let-them-play-assassins-creed/382818/>

Thursday:

- **Demo of final project due**
- Discussion and play through of *Valiant Hearts*

Week Nine, November 1 and 3: Gaming in the history classroom

Tuesday:

- Jeremiah McCall, *Teachinghistory.org*, “Using Simulation Games in the History Classroom” [Six Part Series]:
 - o Part 1: <http://teachinghistory.org/nhec-blog/25117>
 - o Part 2: <http://teachinghistory.org/nhec-blog/25225>
 - o Part 3: <http://teachinghistory.org/nhec-blog/25338>
 - o Part 4: <http://teachinghistory.org/nhec-blog/25451>
 - o Part 5: <http://teachinghistory.org/nhec-blog/25523>
 - o Part 6: <http://teachinghistory.org/nhec-blog/25624>

- Nicolas Trépanier, *Perspectives on History*, “The Assassin’s Perspective: Teaching History with Video Games”: <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2014/the-assassins-perspective>

Thursday:

- **Presentation of video game based history lesson plans**

Week Ten, November 8 and 10: Playing the Past Game Fest (Final Projects Due)

- No readings

Week Eleven, November 15 and 17: The Future of the Digital Past

Tuesday:

- **Degree Candidate Grades Due**
- Game Fest Debrief
- Luke Plunkett, *Kotaku*, “Refugee Revisits Her Homeland Via The Oculus Rift”: <http://kotaku.com/refugee-revisits-her-homeland-via-the-oculus-rift-1677024559>

Testing and Disability Services

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning experience that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Louisiana Tech University Testing and Disability Services:

Testing & Disability Services
tds@latech.edu
318 Wyly Tower, P.O. Box 3009
Ruston, LA 71272
Office: 318-257-4221
Fax: 318-257-2969

*In order to receive services from Disability Services, students must provide appropriate documentation to TDS.

Student Conduct and Academic Integrity

Students in this course are responsible for maintaining expected behavior with regard to conduct and academic integrity as outlined in the Louisiana Tech University Student Handbook. Students should familiarize themselves with the University’s conduct and academic integrity policies before taking this course. A copy of the Student Handbook can be found online at the following address: <http://www.latech.edu/students/student-conduct/>

Emergency Notification System

All Louisiana Tech students are strongly encouraged to enroll and update their contact information in the Emergency Notification System. It takes just a few seconds to ensure you're able to receive important text and voice alerts in the event of a campus emergency. For more information on the Emergency Notification System, please visit <http://www.latech.edu/administration/ens.php>