

Woke Gaming: Digital Challenges to Oppression and Social Injustice

Kishonna L. Gray and

David J. Leonard, eds.

Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2018. Acknowledgments, introduction, list of contributors, and index. 306 pp. \$24 paper. ISBN: 9780295744179

Although gaming is not often associated with challenges to the status quo, to oppression, or to social injustice, the contributors in *Woke Gaming: Digital Challenges to Oppression and Social Injustice* demonstrate that game developers, individual gamers, and communities can use games and game spaces to offer just that. This collection of essays seeks to highlight the role that gaming has in perpetuating violence, racism, and sexism while also celebrating the individuals and games who seek change in the content of gaming and the industry. Ranging from chapters focusing on LGBTQ+ spaces in *World of Warcraft* to the realities of sexism within the current game industry, *Woke Gaming* examines the various ways that video games can be used to challenge social injustices. The work is timely because it examines gaming in a post-Gamergate world. (Gamergate was a 2014 online movement that claimed those involved fought for ethics in gaming journalism, but in reality proved to be a right-wing–driven harassment campaign against women and progressivism in video gaming.) The book is also relevant given the current rise of the alt right, which uses many of the same tactics of Gamergate. Overall, *Woke Gaming* has a

U.S. focus, with the exception of Zixue Tai and Fengbin Hu’s chapter examining perspectives of virtual gold farmers in China and the chapter by Robbie Fordyce, Timothy Neale, and Thomas Apperley about using avatars in games to explore the experience of minorities in Australia.

Woke Gaming is divided into five topical sections—“Ethics, Violence, and Oppositional Gaming,” “Economics of Gaming,” “Feminist Gaming,” “Gaming against the Grain,” and “Empathetic and Inclusive Gaming”—which demonstrate its variety. The title seems careful not to identify the work as about only video gaming, and although most of its chapters do address video games only, one discusses board games as well. There are minor editing errors, such as misidentifying the character Malon from *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* as Princess Zelda in a manga photograph, and such typographical errors can distract from the quality of the work the book offers. The sources for the book, which include oral histories, surveys, articles from gaming websites, and traditional academic scholarship, help provide insight into how gaming can be used for both gatekeeping and inclusivity. Overall, the quality and variety of the chapters lead to a fantastic volume addressing gender, sexuality, and inclusiveness (or exclusiveness) in gaming.

Most interesting are pieces such as “The Post-Feminist Politics of the ‘Everyone Can Make Games Movement.’” Rather than including only a discussion of how gaming can combat inequality, Stephanie Orme also focuses on how the claim that says anyone can make a game harms the most vulnerable, because they do not enjoy the hiring benefits or budgets

of those who follow a more traditional, more white and more masculine, route into the industry. Instead, Orme argues that this “bootstrap” argument that anybody can enter the world of game development through ability and determination overlooks institutional barriers such as sexism and racism within the industry and places a special burden to achieve on the backs of people of color and women. Orme argues that before inclusivity initiatives can truly find success, the industry itself must change its perspective on inclusivity.

Those interested in understanding how gaming could be used to encourage social justice, how gender ties into the current gaming industry, and how to encourage inclusiveness in the industry and culture of gaming should read *Woke Gaming*. Written to make the gaming world accessible to the general public and to academics, *Woke Gaming* is an important contribution to the field of game studies because it investigates the various ways that individuals have navigated the complicated culture of gaming, which is often hostile to the other, and the potential for changing such hostility.

—Anne Ladyem McDivitt, *University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL*

How to Play Video Games

Matthew Thomas Payne and

Nina B. Huntemann, eds.

New York: New York University Press, 2019. Foreword, introduction, acknowledgments, appendix, contributors, and index. 363 pp. \$30.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781479827985

Scholars of games and play who teach the critical study of video games face a few challenges when selecting course texts. First, the most popular and accessible introductory textbooks often conceptualize video games from the game designer’s perspective, which may not be the most useful for theoretical or critical analysis of games or their cultural context. Second, building an introductory course on a single-author text, no matter how broad its scope, might fail to capture the expansive state of contemporary game studies, with its wide array of approaches and lines of inquiry. Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina B. Huntemann, the editors of *How to Play Video Games*, have provided a collection that addresses both these concerns, and the insights within its forty chapters are especially well suited to serve as a foundational text for undergraduate game studies courses.

How to Play Video Games bears similarities to the recent anthology edited by Henry Lowood and Raiford Guins, *Debugging Game History* (2016), as both books build around brief chapters from many contributors that each discuss a single keyword concept in video games such as “immersion,” “platform,” or “narrative.” Many of the contributors to the earlier collection also have chapters in *How to Play Video Games*. However, rather than historiography, this book firmly situates the study of video games within a media and cultural studies framework that foregrounds the subject position of players who engage with video games alongside other media and cultural practices.

The editors aim to address the humanist question of “how players create meaning with and through games” (p. 4),