

'Fortnite's' continued appropriation of culture and lack of diversity

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Video games, like the movie industry, have systemic problems with diversity and inclusion. The main reason these issues exist is because both industries are run by mostly white men. I'm not saying that white men tend to have a bad attitude towards inclusion — but when other perspectives are not included — controversial decisions are made due to lack of input.

The simplest examples of bias in these industries are white males being cast as strong, lead roles and roles of people of color being relegated to white actors.

The most popular game in the world, "Fortnite," whose parent company executives consist of three white men is no exception to these tendencies. "Fortnite" skins are ranked by rarity, with "legendary" being the most valuable, therefor costing players the most amount of real money. All 19 of the skins with the highest worth are either a non-human species, completely covered by clothing or white. The amount of skins representing black people actually increases in price and effort to obtain them decrease.

One may say that because mostly white men play the game, the skins are a reflection of the users. This is a reasonable statement, but to me, this idea is overshadowed by other decisions made by Epic Games.

Every 90 days, users are offered a new battle pass where they can earn skins and other rewards until the next pass comes out. Before releasing the current season (90 day theme), the patch was advertised with a mask closely resembling a Kitsune which is symbolic to the Japanese Shinto religion. The mask, along with viking ships and old carriages being scattered around the map, lead players to believe that the new season would have some sort of historical theme to it. This turned out to be sort of true, as Epic added Stonehenge-esque statues, a Viking style area and a wearable skin of a character wearing the Kitsune-inspired mask.

Unfortunately, they decided not to make historical references accurate, as the character wearing the mask inspired by a Japanese religion was white, along with five of the six unlockable skins.

I'm not here to be an "annoying social justice warrior" but an individual who is worried of how representation affects the psyche of those who are not represented. People tend to have self-confidence issues when their cultural history is swept under the rug, and they are surrounded by popular icons who are all different from themselves. Fortnite is a global video game, yet by the diversity of appearances, you would think that the world is mostly made up of white people.

Another cultural dilemma that "Fortnite" profits off of is selling "emotes" or dances that your character can do whenever they please. When rising hip-hop artist, Blockboy JB popularized the "shoot" dance this year, fans were begging for it to be added to "Fortnite." Eventually Epic added the shoot dance as a reward unlocked by purchasing their battle pass. Even though the song was on the billboard charts, created recently and demanded by the hip-hop audience, they renamed the dance and created their own instrumental to go along with it.

Many hip-hop artists assisted the game's expanding audience as they would play and stream it publicly, helping the game with its cool factor. Now, the company is profiting directly from the buzz that Blockboy JB created, without so much as a tweet to show appreciation or give credit.

Patterns of behavior reveal Epic Game's blind spot that many video game developers are prone to. Whether you want to call it cultural appropriation or just being creative, Epic is green-lighting disproportionate representation and ignoring the accreditation of those who help them profit. I know that not everyone deserves a trophy and video game developers shouldn't have their creativity dulled by politics, but I wish creators would have a bit of empathy for those whose real lives are affected by their decision to highlight white skins and using other cultures as inspiration without giving credit.

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