

A Postcolonial Study of Native American Marginalization in Wapiti Reservation, Red Dead Redemption 2

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ABSTRACT

Although Red Dead Redemption 2 has been widely praised for its historical realism and narrative depth, limited studies have critically examined how Indigenous voices are represented and whether they can truly “speak” within its narrative framework. This study analyzes the representation of Indigenous oppression through the fictional Wapiti tribe in the video game Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2). The tribe mirrors real Native American experiences of forced displacement, military violence, and cultural erasure. Using Gayatri Spivak’s postcolonial concept of the subaltern and a qualitative descriptive method, the research examines six key missions depicting the Wapiti tribe’s suffering and resistance. Data were collected through gameplay observation, including screenshots, dialogue transcripts, and narrative field notes. The analysis applies Spivak’s question of whether the subaltern can truly “speak” to explore how Indigenous voices are mediated and silenced within the game’s narrative framework. The findings reveal that RDR2 portrays both structural and symbolic oppression, where the Wapiti Reservation operates as a postcolonial space of erasure, surveillance, and control. Overall, this study contributes to American Studies by highlighting how digital media reproduces colonial ideologies and marginalizes Indigenous identity within contemporary popular culture.

Keywords: *Postcolonial, Red Dead Redemption 2, Indigenous Representation, Native American, Indian American*

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INTRODUCTION

The history of the United States is inseparable from the legacy of settler colonialism, territorial expansion, and the systematic displacement of Indigenous peoples. Since the arrival of European colonizers, Native American communities have endured centuries of forced removal, warfare, and cultural erasure. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Indigenous tribes were subjected to violent assimilation policies and widespread land dispossession under the banner of “civilization” and “progress.” By the late nineteenth century, the U.S. government confined most tribes to reservations located on infertile and marginal lands, effectively severing their ancestral ties and autonomy. Events such as the Trail of Tears in the 1830s and the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 exemplified the brutality of settler expansion, while legislative acts such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the Dawes Act of 1887 institutionalized the fragmentation of Native identity through cultural assimilation and land allotment. These historical traumas, rooted in colonial exploitation and racial hierarchy, continue to shape how Indigenous peoples are represented and perceived in contemporary media (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, 2024)

In popular culture, Native American representation has often been filtered through colonial imagination. As (Hall, 1989) asserts, representation is a system that constructs meaning through power and discourse. The colonial archive frequently depicted Indigenous peoples as noble savages, tragic victims, or vanishing remnants of a lost world, reinforcing hierarchies between civilization and primitiveness (Said, 1977a; Young, 2016). These depictions romanticize Indigenous suffering while silencing their voices within dominant Western frameworks. Gayatri Spivak’s essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) remains central

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to postcolonial studies, questioning whether marginalized voices can truly be heard when mediated through colonial discourse. Her concept of epistemic violence continues to inform modern critiques of silencing in cultural and digital media (Cipriani, 2019)

Video games, as modern cultural texts, possess narrative and visual power capable of reproducing or contesting hegemonic ideologies (Lister et al., 2009; Shaw, 2014). Recent scholarship in postcolonial game studies emphasizes that digital games not only reflect social realities but also construct ideological worlds that influence historical consciousness and cultural empathy (Souvik Mukherjee, 2016; "Woke Gaming," n.d.). Among these, *Red Dead Redemption 2* (RDR2), developed by Rockstar Games (2018), stands as a milestone for its historical realism and narrative depth. Set in 1899 during America's industrial transformation, the game follows Arthur Morgan, an outlaw and member of the Van der Linde gang, navigating a world on the brink of modernity.

Gameplay in RDR2 combines open-world exploration, moral decision-making, and mission-based storytelling. Players hunt, trade, and interact with dynamic environments that respond to ethical choices and social behaviour. This immersive structure allows players to experience the complexity of moral and cultural conflict in late nineteenth century America. Within this world, the Wapiti tribe a fictional Indigenous group symbolizes the historical struggles of Native Americans during colonial expansion. The Wapiti's forced removal, loss of land, and spiritual despair mirror real histories of Indigenous dispossession. Through characters like Chief Rains Fall and Eagle Flies, the game presents Indigenous resistance and tragedy filtered through the moral lens of its white protagonist, echoing Spivak's argument about representational hierarchy and the subaltern's inability to speak for themselves (Cipriani, 2019; Souvik Mukherjee, 2016)

Although *Red Dead Redemption 2* has been celebrated for its realism and narrative sophistication, its portrayal of Indigenous people raises critical questions about representation, authorship, and voice. Previous studies have revealed how digital games often reproduce imperial ideologies and racial hierarchies, even while claiming historical authenticity (S. Mukherjee, 2017; Reyes, 2017; "Woke Gaming," n.d.). However, more recent works in Indigenous media and decolonial game studies (Byrd, 2025) emphasize that the narrative framing of Indigenous characters often remains bound to Western epistemological control. Studies such as *Gaming from the Margins* (2021) and *Appropriation or Erasure?* (2023) reveal that Indigenous representation in popular games tends to oscillate between symbolic inclusion and systemic erasure. However, existing studies on *Red Dead Redemption 2* tend to focus on historical realism, violence, or capitalism in the game, while paying limited attention to how Indigenous voices are structurally mediated within its narrative framework. Although several scholars discuss representation and colonial imagery, there remains a lack of systematic analysis that applies Spivak's concept of the subaltern and Said's *Orientalism* to examine whether Indigenous characters are granted narrative agency or remain confined within Western epistemological control. Thus, the question of whether the Indigenous subject in RDR2 can truly "speak" within the game's narrative structure remains insufficiently addressed.

This research aims to fill that gap by situating *Red Dead Redemption 2* within postcolonial discourse and examining how it mediates Indigenous identity, silence, and representation through Western narrative structures. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's theory of the subaltern and Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism*, the study explores how RDR2 illustrates the silencing and marginalization of Indigenous voices through mechanisms of epistemic violence, and how it represents Native Americans as "the Other" within its visual and narrative composition. The analysis interprets the Wapiti tribe's displacement as a metaphor for historical erasure, while examining how the game aestheticizes Indigenous resistance as a form of narrative containment rather than liberation. By integrating both frameworks, this study contributes to postcolonial game studies by uncovering how RDR2 functions simultaneously as a critique and reproduction of colonial ideology. The analysis positions the Wapiti Reservation as a symbolic postcolonial space one of loss, resistance, and

cultural memory where Indigenous experiences are acknowledged yet constrained within Western storytelling (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, 2024).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method by Creswell to explain the visual data and understanding the dialogue (Creswell et al., 2007), that integrates two main approaches: the postcolonial approach and the cultural approach. The postcolonial approach is used to examine how colonial power relations shape the discourse and representation of Indigenous peoples, while the cultural approach is employed to interpret the symbolic and narrative meanings that construct Indigenous identity within popular culture. The combination of these approaches allows for a comprehensive analysis of the video game as an ideological text that simultaneously reproduces and challenges colonial legacies (Cipriani, 2019; Hall, 1989; Said, 1977b).

In this research, *Red Dead Redemption 2* (RDR2) is treated as a cultural artifact that fictionally represents Indigenous experiences through the story of the Wapiti tribe. The game's narrative mirrors historical realities of forced displacement, systemic violence, and cultural erasure experienced by Native American communities across the United States. Data were collected through direct observation and documentation from the researcher's own gameplay sessions on *Red Dead Redemption 2: Standard Edition* (Rockstar Games, 2018). The observation focused on Chapter VI, which contains the Wapiti storyline. Documentation consisted of high-resolution screenshots of key visuals, full transcriptions of in-game dialogues, narrative field notes on mission progression, and video clips of cutscenes for contextual analysis.

The research corpus comprises six main story missions directly related to the Wapiti narrative and the broader representation of Indigenous peoples, namely *American Fathers I*, *American Fathers II*, *The Archaeology for Beginners*, *A Rage Unleashed*, *The King's Son*, and *My Last Boy* (Rockstar Games, 2018). These six missions were selected because they form the complete narrative arc of the Wapiti storyline in Chapter VI and contain the most explicit depictions of Indigenous displacement, resistance, and interaction with colonial authority. The selection was further guided by three analytical criteria derived from the theoretical frameworks of Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said: (1) the direct involvement of Indigenous characters, (2) the depiction of silencing and marginalization mechanisms, and (3) the construction of the reservation as a symbolic site of colonial control and representation of "the Other." These criteria allow the researcher to identify how the game constructs the relationship between subaltern voice and colonial gaze, reflecting the tension between visibility and erasure. The collected data were analysed using postcolonial discourse analysis, focusing on symbols of domination, stereotypes, colonial spaces, and acts of resistance within the game's text. The analysis draws upon two main theoretical frameworks

. Gayatri Spivak's Subaltern theory (1988) is used to explore how the game illustrates silencing, epistemic violence, and limited agency among Indigenous characters, particularly through *Rains Fall* and *Eagle Flies*, who embody the contradictions of resistance and voicelessness. Meanwhile, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) provides the foundation for examining how RDR2 constructs Native Americans as "the Other" through the colonial gaze and how visual and narrative symbols reinforce Western cultural dominance. All findings were categorized into three major themes: representation, oppression, and spatial exile. Data validity was ensured through theoretical consistency, using both frameworks complementarily, and through the triangulation of visual documentation, dialogue transcripts, and narrative notes. This approach guarantees that interpretations remain objective, contextually grounded, and scientifically accountable.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from narrative analysis in the video game Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2) regarding the representation of suffering and oppression of the fictional Wapiti tribe. Although this tribe is fictional, they symbolically reflect the real conditions of Native Americans who experienced systemic violence due to colonialism, expansion, and military oppression in the late 19th century. The results in this section were obtained through careful observation of several main missions, as well as fragments of scenes and conversations between characters, particularly those involving the characters Arthur Morgans, Rains Fall and Eagle Flies. This section of the results will be divided into chapters and main missions in the game, highlighting the dynamics of oppression, resistance, and the symbolization of indigenous peoples' suffering. Each finding will be supported by evidence in the form of dialogue fragments, environmental visualizations, and narrative directions that demonstrate how colonial power operates in a fictional space heavily influenced by the real history of American colonialism.

Silencing the Wapiti People: Postcolonial Reflection on the Subaltern's Voice

In Red Dead Redemption 2, the representation of the Wapiti people reflects the postcolonial condition of the subaltern, a group marginalized and silenced within dominant structures of power. The following discussion interprets these findings through Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's argument in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), this section explores how the voices of the Wapiti tribe are systematically muted, both narratively and ideologically, through the game's colonial framework. The Wapiti do not exist as active subjects of their own history; instead, they are portrayed as background figures whose suffering and displacement serve to emphasize the moral journey of the white protagonist, Arthur Morgan. Through Spivak's lens, this silencing is not a matter of literal muteness but rather a result of epistemic violence a process in which dominant colonial discourse defines what counts as "knowledge" and who is allowed to speak. The Wapiti people, therefore, occupy the position of the subaltern: those whose experiences cannot be fully articulated within the structures of Western representation. In RDR2, their stories are mediated, reinterpreted, or even erased by external agents such as Arthur, Dutch, or the U.S. government.

Representation and Absence of Voice

The representation of the Wapiti people in Red Dead Redemption 2 reveals a clear pattern of silencing through the absence of their narrative voice. While the game acknowledges their suffering and displacement, it simultaneously denies them the agency to express their own perspectives. This mirrors Gayatri Spivak's notion that the subaltern cannot speak, not because they are incapable of speech, but because the dominant colonial discourse does not allow their voices to be heard within accepted systems of meaning. In RDR2, the Wapiti tribe functions primarily as a symbolic reminder of colonial violence rather than as active participants in the story. Their dialogue is limited, their actions are constrained by the game's narrative structure and their fate is determined by external forces most notably, the U.S. government and the moral awakening of Arthur Morgan. Even when the Wapiti speak, their words are filtered through Arthur's journal entries or the player's interpretation, thereby transforming their authentic voice into a mediated narrative.

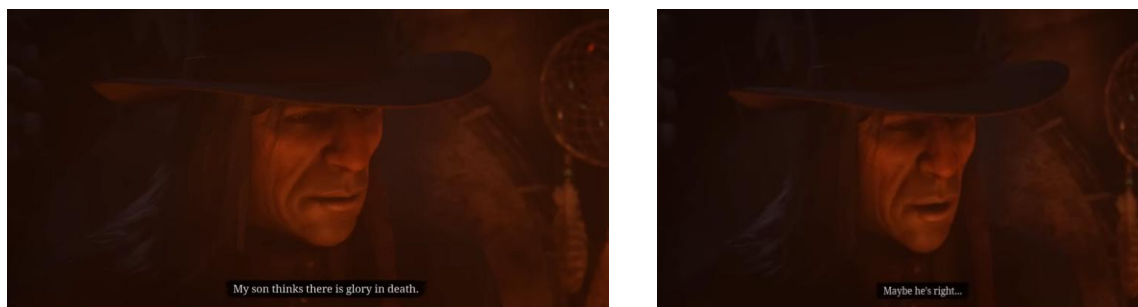


Figure 1 Rains Fall's Reflection on Generational Conflict and Colonial Despair in "Archaeology for Beginners" Mission

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Rains Fall: "My son thinks there is glory in death, maybe he's right."

In the mission *Archelogy for Beginners*, Rains Fall speaks with Arthur Morgan about the suffering of his tribe the Wapiti, who have been oppressed and deceived by the American government. At this point, Rains Fall has lost hope, realizing that violence and war only worsen their situation. When he says, "My son thinks there is glory in death. Maybe he's right," he expresses his sorrow and resignation over the ideological divide between himself and his son Eagle Flies. Rains Fall seeks peace, yet he knows his voice will never truly be heard while Eagle Flies chooses to fight even if it means dying for a cause that the colonial power will never acknowledge. The paragraph above presents the narrative findings observed in the mission.

The following discussion interprets these findings through Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern. This contrast illustrates the internal struggle of the subaltern those living within a colonial system whose voices exist but are constrained by dominant discourse. Whether they choose peace or resistance, both paths are defined and judged through the lens of colonial authority. This scene aligns with Gayatri Spivak's concept in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" where she argues that the subaltern cannot truly speak, because their voices are always mediated, filtered, or silenced by structures of power. Rains Fall speaks eloquently and with pain, yet his words carry no political effect Colonel Favours proceeds with the assault regardless. Thus, even within moments of apparent empathy, the game reproduces the same structures of silencing that it seeks to critique.

As Spivak (1988) argues in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* the subaltern's voice is often rendered inaudible within dominant epistemic structures. This idea resonates with Rizvi and (S. Mukherjee, 2017) claim that "the codified, hyper peripheral, spectral and anti-locale Subaltern is both a remnant and a function of the traditional global power asymmetries that need to be challenged." Within *Red Dead Redemption 2*, the Wapiti people embody this condition of silence; their existence is acknowledged yet stripped of agency, mediated through Arthur Morgan's perspective. In this sense, their voice will never truly be heard, trapped within the colonial narrative that defines what can and cannot be spoken.

Colonial Displacement and Exploitation



Figure 2 Rains Fall Expresses the Displacement of the Wapiti People in "My Last Boy" Mission
Rains Fall: "My people aren't really a tribe, we're just a..."

Bunch of families, I suppose...

But we're in Canada now."

In the *My Last Boy* cutscene of *Red Dead Redemption 2*, Rains Falls and John Marton, who knows that Rains Fall is Arthur Friend, had dialogue, "My people aren't really a tribe, we're just a... Bunch of families, I suppose... But we're in Canada now," carries profound meaning regarding the displacement and marginalization of the Wapiti people. By stating that they are "not really a tribe anymore, just a few families," Rains Fall emphasizes the disintegration of the Wapiti's social structure and collective identity due to colonial pressures. The following line, "we're in Canada now," indicates that their migration was not a voluntary choice but a consequence of forced displacement and the exploitation of their land by the government and European settlers, resulting in deep sorrow and a sense of loss. The paragraph above presents the narrative findings observed in this mission.

In this discussion, the condition described above can be understood through Spivak's concept of the subaltern. From the perspective of Gayatri Spivak's theory, the Wapiti represent a subaltern group who often lack access to voice within dominant power structures. This dialogue can be interpreted as an attempt of the subaltern to "speak," where Rains Fall expresses the experience of losing land and identity, yet remains constrained by colonial forces that continue to silence them politically, reflecting Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?". The visuals in the cutscene reinforce the meaning of this dialogue: vast but empty landscapes, the Wapiti walking away from their ancestral lands, and camera focus on Rains Fall and his children highlight the burden of leadership and the colonial pressures on the younger generation.

The Wapiti people's forced migration in *Red Dead Redemption 2* symbolizes what Spivak (1988) terms as the subaltern's condition of epistemic violence, where their voices are systematically excluded from historical discourse. Their displacement from ancestral lands reflects what (MORETON-ROBINSON, 2015) calls the colonial imagination of *Terra Nullius*, a process that renders Indigenous territories "devoid of history" and silences their connection to memory and place. Within the same framework, Said's (1978) notion of Orientalism elucidates how Western narratives construct Indigenous existence as static and vanishing an emblem of the past rather than an active subject of history. Consequently, the Wapiti became doubly silenced spatially through dispossession and discursively through their erasure from the colonial narrative.

Silencing Change the Historical

In *Red Dead Redemption 2*, the silencing of the Wapiti tribe reflects what Gayatri Spivak (1988) defines as the subaltern's condition: a state where marginalized groups are deprived of the capacity to speak within dominant structures of power. Spivak argues that silencing is not simply the absence of speech, but an epistemic violence a form of knowledge-making that erases, filters, or reinterprets the subaltern's voice through colonial discourse. This silencing extends beyond individual expression; it transforms history itself. When the Wapiti are displaced from their land and reduced to a fading people, their historical narrative is overwritten by the colonial version of progress. The game presents their suffering as part of a bygone era, an inevitable tragedy rather than an ongoing resistance. In this sense, silencing changes the historical by fixing the subaltern in a static past, denying them agency in shaping their own story.



Figure 3 Rains Fall's Reflection on the Loss of Sacred Meaning in "Archeology for Beginners" Mission
Rains Fall: "Even sacred things... are only things."

The scene presents a moment of reflection in which sacred objects are reduced to material artifacts, signalling a transformation in how Indigenous culture is perceived within the colonial world. In the mission "Archeology for Beginners," Rains Fall's said "Even sacred things, are only things," reflects the subaltern's awareness of how colonialism has stripped Indigenous artifacts of their sacred and historical significance. In this discussion, this moment can be understood through Spivak's notion of epistemic violence. Once symbols of the Wapiti's spiritual and cultural identity, these sacred objects are reduced to mere material possessions within the logic of the colonial world. This transformation illustrates what Spivak (1988) terms epistemic violence the process by which colonial knowledge systems redefine

Indigenous reality, forcing the subaltern to perceive their own heritage through the lens of Western materialism. In this moment, silencing operates not simply through the suppression of voice, but through the erasure of meaning itself.

The sacred becomes secular, the spiritual becomes collectible, and history becomes an objectified narrative controlled by colonial authority. As Rains Fall laments the futility of reclaiming what has already lost its essence, the scene reveals a deeper form of dispossession: the loss of interpretive power over one's own past. This aligns with (MORETON-ROBINSON, 2015) discussion of Terra Nullius, the colonial ideology that renders Indigenous land and culture as "empty" and ahistorical, available to be redefined through Western epistemology. Thus, Rains Fall's resignation encapsulates the postcolonial condition of the subaltern one who recognizes the theft of meaning yet remains bound within the very discourse that perpetuates it.

A similar silencing unfolds in "My Last Boy," when Eagle Flies seeks to wage war against the United States Army, only to be stopped by his father, Rains Fall. This moment reflects the subaltern's historical dilemma between resistance and survival where every act of defiance is pre-scripted within the colonial structure that ensures its failure. Rains Fall's plea for peace is not a sign of weakness but an acknowledgment of the futility of resistance in a world already rewritten by colonial power.



Figure 4 Rains Fall trying to stop Eagle Flies war in "My Last Boy."

Rains Fall: "Maybe a world in which they came to us, is the world that we cannot endure."

In the mission "My Last Boy," Rains Fall's reflection, "Maybe a world in which they came to us is a world that we cannot endure," reveals the ultimate stage of colonial silencing as described by Spivak (1988). This line is not merely an expression of despair but a profound recognition of how colonialism has inverted the order of the world. Before colonial contact, the Wapiti inhabited a space of sovereignty, spirituality, and meaning a world constructed through their own systems of knowledge and temporal rhythm. However, with the arrival of the colonizers, this world was transformed; they ceased to be subjects of their own history and instead became objects within the history of others. This inversion exemplifies Spivak's concept of epistemic violence, wherein colonial power seizes control not only over land but also over the very structure of meaning and knowledge, redefining what counts as truth, progress, and civilization.

The phrase "a world we cannot endure" signifies the subaltern's total displacement from history, a condition where existence itself becomes untenable under colonial domination. The modern world, as built by colonial logic, offers no space for Indigenous people to survive as themselves. It is not merely the loss of territory, but the loss of historical presence: a rewriting of the past that casts the Wapiti as remnants of a dying era rather than as active participants in the present. Thus, "we cannot endure" does not denote weakness; rather, it exposes how the very structure of this new world has been designed to erase and marginalize them. This is the culmination of what can be termed historical silencing, a process where survival becomes impossible within a world whose foundations are built upon their exclusion.

In this discussion, the scene reveals the deeper structure of colonial silencing as conceptualized by Spivak. Philosophically, this line stands at the intersection between a lost

past and an impossible future. It marks the end of Indigenous temporality, where time itself has been colonized, and the Wapiti's cyclical sense of history replaced by the linear progress narrative of the West. In this sense, colonialism performs what Spivak identifies as epistemic rewriting the erasure of a people not through overt destruction, but through the redefinition of the world's meaning. Rains Fall's realization is therefore not simply a lamentation but a diagnosis of the postcolonial condition, a recognition that the subaltern cannot endure in a world whose history no longer belongs to them.

This aligns with the book *Indigenomicon: American Indians, Video Games, and the Structures of Dispossession* by (Byrd, 2025), which explains that "games and play might reveal histories of slavery, genocide, and theft of Indigenous lands even as their structures obscure Indigenous spatial and embodied practices that prioritize relationships with land, water, plants, and spirits." Byrd's perspective reinforces the idea that video games not only depict colonial history but also reproduce the same structures of dispossession through their narrative and spatial mechanisms. In the context of *Red Dead Redemption 2*, the Wapiti tribe's relationship with their land and spiritual space is transformed into part of a colonial landscape one they no longer recognize as their own. Thus, the feeling of being "uncomfortable with their own land" reflects the form of epistemic violence described by Spivak (1988), wherein the subaltern is forced to perceive and interpret their world through a colonial lens that erases the historical and spiritual meaning of their existence.

The Representation of Native Americans as "the Other" in *Red Dead Redemption 2*

The representation of Native Americans in *Red Dead Redemption 2* can be understood through the lens of Edward Said's (1978) concept of Orientalism, which describes how Western culture constructs the "Other" through systems of representation that justify domination and control. Within the framework of cultural studies, this process operates not merely as an act of storytelling but as a production of meaning where narrative, visual imagery, and ideology intersect to define who belongs within civilization and who exists outside of it. Applying a cultural approach allows this study to examine how *Red Dead Redemption 2* participates in the continuation of colonial discourse by shaping the Wapiti people as the "Other": a people defined by loss, tragedy, and moral symbolism rather than by agency or individuality.

Through Said's theory, this section investigates how the game's narrative and visual composition reproduce a hierarchy between the Western self and the Indigenous Other. The Wapiti are depicted as noble yet doomed, spiritual yet powerless, a reflection of the Western imagination that romanticizes their suffering while erasing their complexity. The research question, "How does *Red Dead Redemption 2* represent Native Americans as 'the Other' within its narrative and visual portrayal?" guides this analysis by focusing on how visual framing, dialogue, and storyline construct Native identity not as a living presence but as a cultural artifact that reinforces the moral authority of the colonial perspective.

Exoticization and Romanticization of the Other.

In *Red Dead Redemption 2*, Rains Fall is portrayed as a calm and spiritual leader who consistently advocates peace over violence. His dialogue is poetic and reflective, and his demeanor contrasts sharply with the violent colonial world surrounding him. The character of Rains Fall in *Red Dead Redemption 2* exemplifies Edward Said's (1978) concept of the Other, a figure constructed through Western romanticism that both venerates and marginalizes Indigenous identity. Within the game's narrative and visual framing, Rains Fall is portrayed as the embodiment of wisdom, peace, and spiritual restraint, characteristics that align with the colonial trope of the "noble savage." His calm demeanor, poetic dialogue, and moral clarity distinguish him from the chaos of the Western world, yet these same traits render him passive and powerless within the colonial order. Through this exoticized portrayal, the game invites admiration for Rains Fall's dignity while simultaneously reinforcing his distance from agency and change. The player is positioned to empathize with his sorrow, but never to witness his resistance transforming his humanity into a moral symbol that exists primarily to validate the redemption arc of the white protagonist, Arthur Morgan.



Figure 5. Picture of Rains Fall in Red Dead Redemption 2

The visual representation of Rains Fall, as shown in Figure 9, highlights the calm yet sorrowful demeanor that defines his character throughout *Red Dead Redemption 2*. His slightly parted lips, soft gaze, and subtle frown construct an image of emotional depth and quiet suffering. In this discussion, this visual framing can be understood through Edward Said's idea of the exoticized Other. This expression embodies what Edward Said (1978) identifies as the "exoticized Other", a figure who is admired for spiritual wisdom and moral purity, yet confined within an image of passivity and melancholy. The wrinkles and lowered gaze emphasize not weakness but historical burden, suggesting a life shaped by loss, colonization, and silence. In cultural terms, this facial portrayal functions as a semiotic code of colonized virtue: restraint, humility, and pain. The calm tone of his features visually communicates his internal conflict, the desire for peace amid inevitable destruction thus reinforcing the game's romanticization of Native identity. Through this subtle facial construction, Rains Fall becomes a symbolic representation of how Western narratives transform the Indigenous subject into an object of admiration and pity, rather than agency and resistance.

This interpretation aligns with *Gaming from the Margins: Indigenous Representation and Critical Game Studies* (2021), which argues that mainstream video games often construct Indigenous figures as moral or spiritual archetypes, admired for their wisdom yet stripped of political agency. Such portrayals, while seemingly respectful, reinforce colonial hierarchies by confining Indigenous identity within a framework of passivity and idealized virtue. One of the most striking representations of Rains Fall's wisdom and pacifism appears in a key cutscene from *Red Dead Redemption 2*, where he converses with his son, Eagle Flies. In this moment, Rains Fall embodies the archetype of the peaceful leader, a man burdened by history yet steadfast in his belief that violence only perpetuates the suffering of his people. His calm demeanor and measured response to his son's anger reflect a deep moral understanding shaped by years of loss and colonial injustice. This scene visually and thematically reinforces his role as a moral anchor within the chaos of the colonial world, illustrating how wisdom and restraint become forms of resistance against domination.

But when we look at him through Edward Said's idea of exoticization and romanticization of the Other, we can see another layer. The game shows Rains Fall not only as a person, but as a symbol the "noble savage" who is good, wise, and pure, unlike the violent Western world around him. People respect him, but they also see him as different and distant. The game makes him look beautiful and peaceful, but also sad and helpless. This is what Edward Said calls a kind of Orientalism. It means that Western stories sometimes show non-Western people as strange or special, not as real humans with full lives and choices. In the game, Rains Fall is very wise, but he cannot change his people's future. His calm and peace

are shown as beautiful ideas, not as real power. He becomes a mirror for Arthur Morgan's change, helping the white hero grow, instead of being the hero of his own story.

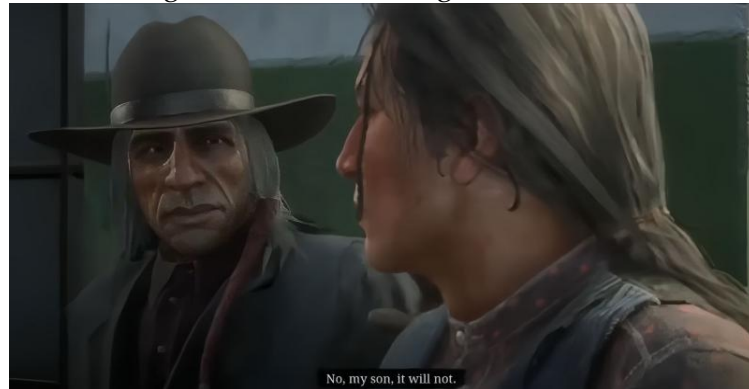


Figure 6 Rains Fall rejects violence as a form of wisdom in "American Fathers II."

Eagle Flies: "This will lead to war."

Rains Fall: "No my son, it will not."

In the missions "American Fathers I" and "American Fathers II", the conversation between Rains Fall, Eagle Flies, and Arthur Morgan encapsulates the ideological divide between peace and violence within the colonial context. When Eagle Flies insists, "This will lead to war," Rains Fall's calm yet firm response, "No, my son, it will not," demonstrates his commitment to peace despite unbearable injustice. His restraint is not born from weakness but from wisdom and awareness that responding to violence with more violence only deepens the wounds of oppression. The scene portrays Rains Fall as composed and reflective, even in the face of injustice and escalating conflict. His measured tone and restrained posture emphasize his consistent refusal to respond to violence with aggression.

In this discussion, Rains Fall's rejection of violence can be examined through Edward Said's concept of the exoticized Other. Through Edward Said's postcolonial lens, Rains Fall embodies the "exoticized Other", a figure admired for spiritual morality but marginalized from historical agency. His rejection of war mirrors the colonial narrative's framing of the Indigenous leader as noble yet passive, a man who understands too much to fight but is given no power to change his fate.

In this way, the game shows both truth and problem. Rains Fall's peace makes him a strong and moral man, but the story also uses his calmness to make him look like someone who only accepts pain. He becomes a symbol of goodness, not a man with full control of his life. Still, his choice to stay peaceful gives the story hope it shows that even in a cruel world, kindness and wisdom can be a quiet form of resistance. This portrayal both humanizes and confines him within the boundaries of Western romanticism. In cultural terms, the scene illustrates what Gaming from the Margins: Indigenous Representation and Critical Game Studies (2021) identify as the paradox of representation, where Indigenous figures are depicted as moral compasses but denied narrative authority. Rains Fall's decision to reject conflict symbolizes resistance through endurance, aligning with Gayatri Spivak's notion of epistemic silence, the subaltern who speaks through moral integrity, yet whose wisdom remains unheard by colonial structures.

This interpretation is further reinforced by Appropriation or Erasure? Imagining Indigenous Futures in Games (2023), which notes that mainstream video games frequently idealize Indigenous characters as embodiments of peace and spirituality while simultaneously erasing their political agency and historical voice. In this light, Rains Fall's calm insistence on peace becomes both a testament to his moral strength and a reflection of the colonial system that frames his virtue as passivity. The scene thus exposes the double bind of postcolonial representation where Indigenous wisdom is admired aesthetically but stripped of transformative power within the narrative world.

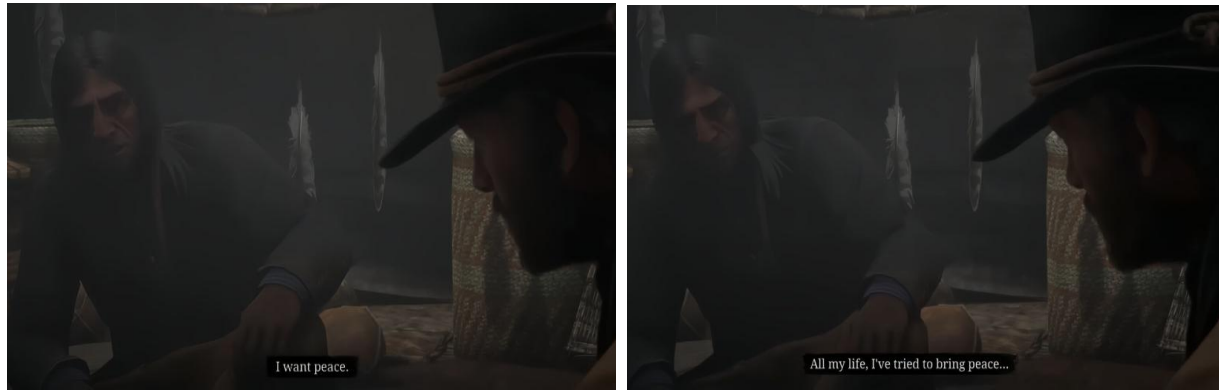


Figure 7 Rains Fall's plea for peace as a representation of the exoticized and moralized "Other" in Red Dead Redemption 2.

*Rains Fall: "I want peace, I need my people to be safe.
All my life, I've tried to bring peace..."*

The visual composition in this scene Figure 11 and 12 presents Rains Fall enveloped in dim, earthy lighting, emphasizing serenity and sorrow. His seated position, lowered posture, and calm tone when saying "I want peace" and "All my life, I've tried to bring peace" frame him as a figure of moral endurance rather than resistance. This subdued representation constructs the archetype of the "noble savage", the Indigenous character whose virtue is defined through suffering and non-violence.

In this discussion, the scene can be interpreted through Edward Said's concept of Orientalism and the romanticization of the Other, according to Edward Said's concept of Orientalism (1978), this portrayal fits within the Western logic of exoticization: the colonized subject is admired for their spirituality and purity, yet this admiration simultaneously confines them within a framework of passivity. The scene invites empathy but denies agency; peace becomes an aesthetic, not a political, statement. Rains Fall's yearning for harmony thus serves to elevate Western guilt while reinforcing colonial order, where Indigenous virtue is recognized only through submission.

This romanticized image also aligns with what Gaming from the Margins: Indigenous Representation and Critical Game Studies (2021) identify as the paradox of Indigenous representation figures like Rains Fall are idealized as moral anchors, but their voices remain limited to emotional appeal rather than decisive action. Similarly, Appropriation or Erasure? Imagining Indigenous Futures in Games (2023) notes that such portrayals construct Indigenous peace as symbolic redemption for colonial violence, not as a means of reclaiming agency. Through these visual and narrative elements, Rockstar's depiction of Rains Fall transforms him into a cinematic emblem of dignified despair, a man who desires peace in a world structured to deny it. His restraint becomes the aesthetic of otherness of beautiful, tragic, and forever silent.

The Colonial Gaze and the Politics of Representation

In several scenes of Red Dead Redemption 2, Indigenous characters are framed through interactions with powerful Western figures such as Angelo Bronte and Arthur Morgan. These encounters highlight how authority, voice, and agency are structured within the game's narrative. After the romanticized portrayal of Rains Fall as a noble yet passive figure, Red Dead Redemption 2 also exposes another layer of colonial representation through the lens of power embedded in the colonial gaze. If the previous section illustrated how the Indigenous Other is admired yet silenced, this part reveals how Western authority continues to define, frame, and legitimize that silence through visual and ideological dominance.

The game's cinematic framing, camera perspectives, and narrative sequencing reinforce this power dynamic, positioning the player's viewpoint as aligned with the white protagonist's moral universe. Through this gaze, Indigenous suffering becomes aestheticized transformed into a spectacle of tragedy that invites sympathy without dismantling the colonial

structures that produce it. Consequently, the representation of Rains Fall and the Wapiti tribe reflects the persistence of colonial epistemology, where Indigenous identity is not allowed autonomy but remains mediated through Western interpretation and control.



Figure 8 Angelo Bronte and Saint Denis elites illustrating the colonial gaze in Red Dead Redemption 2.

Angelo Bronte: "Oh, the Redskins."

" I have no sympathy for them because whoever is stupid enough to be tricked by the Americans."

Angelo Bronte's statement "Oh, the Redskins, I have no sympathy for them because whoever is stupid enough to be tricked by the Americans". In this scene, Angelo Bronte refers to Native Americans as "Redskins" and states that he has no sympathy for them. He frames them as foolish and responsible for their own suffering. The dialogue occurs within a setting that emphasizes Bronte's wealth, authority, and social dominance in Saint Denis. In this discussion, Bronte's statement can be examined through Edward Said's concept of the colonial gaze. Angelo Bronte's statement reflects three main features of colonial representation described by Edward Said: othering, the gaze of power, and moral inversion. The word Redskins functions as a racial slur that dehumanizes Native Americans and positions them as objects rather than agents of history. According to ICT News (2020), the term is widely recognized as highly offensive toward Indigenous communities.

Bronte speaks from a position of authority, representing what Said (1978) calls the colonial gaze, where Western figures assume the right to define and judge others. In this perspective, the colonized cannot represent themselves because they are spoken for by those who hold social and political power. His remark also performs an act of victim blaming, suggesting that Indigenous people are responsible for their own oppression. This transforms colonial exploitation into a moral failure of the victims and reinforces the Western view of itself as rational and superior.

Studies such as *Gaming from the Margins: Indigenous Representation and Critical Game Studies* (2021) and *Appropriation or Erasure? Imagining Indigenous Futures in Games* (2023) show that video games often reproduce this pattern. Indigenous figures are presented as spiritual or symbolic characters, admired for their morality but denied real agency. Bronte's dialogue exemplifies this system of representation, where Indigenous identity in Red Dead Redemption 2 exists through the voice of others and within the boundaries of colonial discourse.



Figure 9 Rains Fall Pleads for Arthur's Help in "Archeology for Beginners" Mission.

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Rains Fall: "We have lost. These young men will be annihilated. Please."

Arthur Morgan: "I'll see what I can do."

In the mission "Archeology for Beginners," Rains Fall pleads, "We have lost. These young men will be annihilated. Please." Arthur responds, "I'll see what I can do." The scene visually emphasizes Rains Fall's lowered posture and restrained tone, while Arthur stands as the active decision-maker. In this discussion, this exchange reveals the politics of representation embedded in the colonial gaze. This moment exemplifies the colonial mediation that Edward Said (1978) identifies as part of the politics of representation. Rains Fall's plea, expressed simply through the word "Please", visually conveys the subordination of Indigenous authority to Western power. He must rely on Arthur Morgan, a white outlaw, to act on behalf of his people. The framing reinforces this hierarchy: the camera lingers on Rains Fall's lowered face in shadow, while Arthur is bathed in softer light, symbolizing moral authority and agency.

As Tuck & Yang (2012) explain in *Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor*, colonial narratives often maintain dominance by centering the settler as the mediator of justice and morality. Similarly, *Red Dead Redemption 2* places the Indigenous voice within a structure that requires validation by a white protagonist. Rains Fall's restrained tone and sorrowful expression are coded as "noble submission," aligning with Said's observation that the colonized are often represented through passivity and moral endurance rather than autonomy. This dynamic reproduces the colonial gaze: Rains Fall's moral worth is acknowledged only when Arthur chooses to act on it. The subaltern's request becomes meaningful solely through the colonizer's recognition, illustrating how the game's narrative empathy still depends on Western perspective and control.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that *Red Dead Redemption 2* serves as a digital reflection of postcolonial realities, particularly concerning the marginalization of Indigenous peoples represented through the fictional Wapiti tribe. Using Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern, the analysis shows how the Wapiti characters, especially Rains Fall and Eagle Flies, symbolize the silencing of Indigenous voices within a colonial framework that dictates who can speak and whose voices are heard. Although the game portrays their suffering and displacement with emotional depth, it ultimately reaffirms the structures of epistemic violence and narrative mediation that limit Indigenous agency. Through the combination of Spivak's postcolonial theory and Said's Orientalism, the study demonstrates that *Red Dead Redemption 2* constructs Native Americans as "the Other," simultaneously romanticized and marginalized. Characters such as Rains Fall are represented as wise and spiritual, yet remain confined within colonial narratives that restrict their political and historical presence. Their silencing extends beyond dialogue to the structure of representation itself, where the white protagonist becomes the moral center and Indigenous voices depend on his recognition. The findings indicate that *Red Dead Redemption 2* both critiques and perpetuates colonial ideology. While it exposes injustice and invites empathy, it does so through a Western narrative lens that maintains control over the Indigenous story. Ultimately, this study concludes that the Wapiti Reservation functions as a symbolic postcolonial space of loss, resistance, and epistemic erasure, illustrating how the game reproduces the silencing mechanisms embedded within colonial discourse.

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