

# THE DISCRIMINATORY REPRESENTATION OF AMERICAN JEWISH PRISONERS OF WAR IN VIDEO GAME CALL OF DUTY: WWII

Julio Gilang Fernanda

English Literature Department

Faculty of Literature, Culture, and Communication

Universitas Ahmad Dahlan

[julio2000026018@webmail.uad.ac.id](mailto:julio2000026018@webmail.uad.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

The portrayal of minority groups in video games significantly influences public perception and understanding of historical events. This thesis investigates the discriminatory representation of American Jewish prisoners of war in the video game "*Call of Duty: WWII*". The research problem centres on how these portrayals perpetuate stereotypes and historical inaccuracies. The primary objective is to analyse the depiction of Jewish characters and assess the extent to which these representations align with or diverge from historical realities.

A qualitative content analysis was conducted, examining character dialogues, storylines, and visual representations within the game. Narrative analysis was employed to understand the broader context and implications of these portrayals. The study found that Jewish characters were often depicted in a one-dimensional manner, lacking depth and complexity. These representations frequently relied on stereotypical traits and did not accurately reflect the diverse experiences of Jewish POWs during World War II.

The findings suggest that "*Call of Duty: WWII*" contributes to a problematic and oversimplified view of Jewish POWs, potentially reinforcing negative stereotypes and undermining the educational value of the game. These portrayals can shape players' perceptions, leading to a distorted understanding of Jewish experiences during the war. The study underscores the need for game developers to engage in more nuanced and historically accurate storytelling. Future research should focus on other side perspective for example from Nazi Germany perspective and the development of guidelines for more inclusive and accurate portrayals.

**Keyword:** *World War II, Discrimination, Historical, Call of Duty: WWII, Jewish.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Video games are a form of interactive digital entertainment that can be engaged with through a computer, a gaming console such as the Xbox or PlayStation, or a mobile device. (Owen, 2016). Digital entertainment is experiencing rapid development (Hakim, 2021). The increasingly rapid development of digital entertainment has led to the creation of video games with various genres (Pavlovic, 2020). The genre that gamers are most interested in at the moment is the action shooter war genre (Clement, 2023). Action shooter war games have become a very significant genre in the gaming world in the past couple of years, this causes video game developers to compete to create war action games (GameRefinery, 2022).

*Call of Duty: WWII 2* is a video game developed by Sledgehammer Games and published by Activision Games in 2017. Activision released this video game as the successor to the *Call of Duty World at War* series. Unlike the previous series which focused on the Pacific battles and the Eastern European front, this second series tells the perspective of the United States in liberating Western Europe from the shackles of Nazi Germany. *Call of Duty: WWII* narrates the story of a soldier named Ronald Daniels who is deployed from the beginning of the battle on the Western European front to the end of the battle. Along his journey, he meets several friends, including Drew Stiles, Frank Aiello, Joseph Turner, and Robert Zussman.

Robert Zussman is a side character who assists Daniels in his missions. In this video game, it is told that Zussman is an American soldier of Jewish faith. In one mission titled "Ambush," the mission does not go according to plan, and Zussman is captured by German Nazi soldiers. Before the prisoners are taken to prison, the German Nazi soldiers segregate the prisoners based on their religion. Zussman and some Jewish prisoners feel discrimination, oppression, and violence from the German Nazi soldiers, and from then on, the suffering of Zussman and the Jewish prisoners begins.

The mission "Epilogue" tells the story of Daniels searching for his friend Zussman. Daniels searches through various German Nazi prisoner camps and concentration camps. In these camps, there is ample evidence of the cruelty of the

German Nazis towards the prisoners, especially those of Jewish faith. Jewish people are killed, tortured, and hanged, resulting in horrific scenes. While inspecting these camps, Daniels eventually finds Zussman, who is nearly killed by a German Nazi soldier but is rescued by Daniels just in time. Zussman's condition is very concerning. After the war ends, Zussman tells Daniels how hopeless he and other Jewish prisoners felt inside the German Nazi concentration camps. The horrifying experience leaves Zussman traumatized and proves how cruel the German Nazis were in discriminating against the Jewish people.

In this study, researchers will analyse the representation of American Jewish prisoner of war discrimination in the *Call of Duty WWII* video game. To help researchers analyse the representation of American Jewish prisoner of war discrimination in the video game *Call of Duty WWII*, researchers will use sociological and semiotic approaches and will use critical race and semiotic theory.

The researcher provides a disclaimer that the researcher do not directly support the human crimes committed by Zionist Israelis against Palestinians. All forms of colonialism and violence in the world must be eradicated because freedom is the right of all nations. The researcher fully supports the independence of Palestine.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

In this research, researchers used qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is a systematic and flexible research approach that aims to understand, interpret, and describe complex social phenomena by gathering and analysing non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, documents, or artifacts. It emphasizes context, context-specific meanings, and the exploration of multiple perspectives to generate rich, in-depth insights into the subject of study (Yin, 2016).

### **1. Data and Source of Data**

The main data of this research is scenes and dialogues from *Call of Duty: WWII* (2017). Secondary data sources include information obtained through research articles, journals, and online articles that are directly related to the topic to be discussed.

### **2. Method and Technique of Collecting Data**

In this study, the data was collected from the *Call of Duty: WWII* (2017). The data were collected in some steps below:

- a. Playing the video game.
- b. Observe the discrimination elements that related.
- c. Screen capture the scene that become the object of this research.
- d. Analyze the data by implementing the theories of this research.

### **3. Method of Analyzing Data**

Analysing qualitative data, according to Robert K. Yin, can be defined as the systematic process of examining and interpreting non-numerical information and evidence gathered through various qualitative research methods. This analysis aims to uncover patterns, themes, and insights within the data, with a focus on understanding the underlying context, relationships, and the meaning attributed to the phenomena under investigation. (Yin, 2016: 184-185).


## **III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

## A. Character Portrayals That Depicted the Theme of Jewish Discrimination

### 1. Color Blindness

The construction of colour blindness consists of several concepts including abstract liberalism, neutralization of race, cultural racism, and minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2022). In the video game *Call of Duty: WWII*, there are several scenes or dialogues that enter the concept of colour blindness.

Table 1.1: *German officer give orders to their men*


Scene	Denotative
 <p data-bbox="268 987 735 1099"><i>'m looking for workers. Separate the Jews"</i></p>	<p data-bbox="815 703 1332 1037">Nazi soldiers captured Zussman in an ambush, sending him to a concentration camp with other prisoners of war. A Nazi officer then segregated Jewish prisoners.</p>

In the initial scene during the "ambush" mission, Zussman is apprehended by German Nazis and grouped with other prisoners of war for transportation to a camp. In real history, the Nazis implemented forced labour as a brutal tool of oppression, subjecting millions of Jews to harsh and degrading conditions. (The Wiener Holocaust Library, 2010). In this video game scene, the naturalization of race and class is depicted through the segregation of prisoners based on their racial or ethnic backgrounds. The grouping highlights societal norms of hierarchy. (Call of Duty: WWII, 2017).

### 2. Racism

The construction of racism consists of several concepts including ethnicity, ideology, and white privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2022). In the video game *Call of Duty: WWII*, there are several scenes or dialogues that enter the concept of racism.

Table 1.2: *Jewish detention camps were segregated*


Scene	Denotative
 <p data-bbox="274 577 788 757"><i>“Survivors said that the others POW’s including’ Zussman, had been taken to a smaller camp three hours east”.</i></p>	<p data-bbox="815 293 1324 472">this portrayal, Daniel notes that Zussmann and other prisoners of war are isolated from a Gentile camp.</p>

In this depiction, Daniel observes that Zussman and other prisoners of war have been segregated from the Gentile prisoner camp, relocated to a distant and smaller facility. During World War II, German Nazi authorities endeavored to segregate Jewish American prisoners of war (POWs), notably at Stalag IXB in January 1945. Despite German orders to identify Jewish American men, non-Jewish officers and fellow prisoners demonstrated solidarity by refusing to comply, thereby shielding those targeted from discrimination (Guise, 2021). This video game scene vividly portrays the concept of white privilege, as non-Jewish prisoners, perceived as part of the white side, remain unaffected by the relocation to a remote and smaller camp (Call of Duty: 2017).

### 3. Intersectionality

The construction of intersectionality consists of several concepts including race, class, ability, and ethnicity (Bonilla-Silva, 2022). In the video game *Call of Duty: WWII*, there are several scenes or dialogues that enter the concept of racism.

Table 1.3: *photos of bodies and places of execution of prisoners*

Scene	Denotative
	<p data-bbox="815 1937 1324 2116">The execution site, marked by gallows and posts for shooting prisoners, features numerous corpses hanging or</p>



*“They’d slaughtered the weakest.  
Anyone that was slowin’ them down”.*

shot dead, discarded without dignity,  
highlighting the perpetrators'  
ruthlessness, the victims'  
dehumanization, and the callousness  
of those in power.

The horrific execution site is marked by gallows for hanging and posts for shooting prisoners' bodies. Numerous corpses dangle from the gallows or lie shot dead, discarded without dignity. In real life, in numerous concentration camps, the Nazi SS either constructed or planned to construct gas chambers to facilitate their routine practice of exterminating prisoners who were too debilitated or ailing to labor. Before the widespread implementation of gas chambers in these camps, infirm, sick, and exhausted prisoners, identified by camp physicians, were systematically murdered through a clandestine program known as 14f13, operating within "euthanasia" (T4) facilities from 1941 to 1943 (Guise, 2021). These video game scenes and dialogues serve as potent examples of the concept of ability, showcasing how Nazi Germany possessed the capability to ruthlessly oppress Jewish individuals and the most vulnerable groups. Their unchecked power enabled them to perpetrate atrocities with impunity, demonstrating the dire consequences when authoritarian regimes wield unchecked authority.

## **B. Connotative and Denotative Elements of Discrimination Against Jews**

In Table 1.1's scene and dialogue, As Zussman and his fellow prisoners of war found themselves captured by Nazi soldiers, they were soon bound for a concentration camp. Upon arrival, a Nazi officer separated the Jewish prisoners from the others, enforcing segregation based on religion. This division signified the antisemitic policies of the Nazi regime and their targeted persecution of Jewish individuals.

This stark directive paints a grim picture of oppression and dehumanization, mirroring the historical reality of the Holocaust. The forced separation and categorization of Jews as inferior underscore the systemic discrimination and exploitation they endured during World War II. This portrayal evokes an atmosphere of suffering and injustice, highlighting the atrocities committed against Jewish people under Nazi rule. It serves as a poignant reminder of the profound cruelty and inhumanity inflicted upon innocent individuals solely because of their ethnicity or religious beliefs.

In the scene portrayed in Table 1.2, American soldiers liberating Nazi German camps uncover the stark reality of segregation, with Jewish prisoners of war distinctively separated from their non-Jewish counterparts. This revelation exposes the discriminatory practices employed by Nazi Germany, where camps are organized based on the status of detainees, resulting in Jewish prisoners enduring harsher treatment.

The scene evokes themes of discrimination, isolation, and control, illustrating the vulnerability of prisoners subjected to arbitrary segregation and relocation by their captors. It serves as a poignant reminder of the systematic oppression and dehumanization inflicted upon Jewish prisoners during World War II, underscoring the profound impact of institutionalized discrimination and the need for vigilance against such atrocities. Through this portrayal, the scene prompts reflection on the enduring legacy of segregation and the importance of confronting discrimination to ensure justice and equality for all.

In Table 1.3, the subsequent scene unveils the grim reality of the execution site at the camp, where prisoners are ruthlessly killed through hanging and shooting. The scene depicts numerous corpses strewn about, left unattended and forsaken. This portrayal paints a bleak picture of the camp's brutality, showcasing the callousness and disregard for human life under Nazi rule.

It conveys themes of terror, dehumanization, and trauma, emphasizing the harrowing experiences endured by prisoners subjected to state-sanctioned violence. Through this scene, the stark realities of oppression and cruelty are laid bare, serving as a poignant reminder of the atrocities inflicted upon innocent individuals during this dark period of history.



#### **IV. Conclusion**

The research titled “*The Representation of Jewish Discrimination in Video Game Call of Duty: WWII*”. This research is descriptive qualitative research that aims to describe how discrimination against American Jewish prisoner of war are represented in video game as seen in the *Call of Duty: WWII*. Data was obtained by playing, collecting, and observing from mission in *Call of Duty: WWII* as primary data. The data also collected from books, journals, and online website as secondary data.

Researchers used the video game *Call of Duty: WWII* to reveal how discrimination against Jews is represented as the community most affected during World War II through historically depictions. This demonstrates that video games can be used as a medium to raise awareness of or portray social issues occurring in the real world, allowing players to understand the social issues the game developers aim to highlight.

## Works Cited

- Aida, A. N. (2023). analisis Roland Barthes Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes pada Prosesi Pernikahan Adat Sunda “Sawer Pengantin”: Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes pada Prosesi Pernikahan Adat Sunda “Sawer Pengantin.” *Jurnal Bimas Islam*, 16(1), 149–170. <https://doi.org/10.37302/jbi.v16i1.880>
- Beyer, H., & Liebe, U. (2020). Diskriminierungserfahrungen und Bedrohungswahrnehmungen von in Deutschland lebenden Juden. *Zeitschrift Für Religion, Gesellschaft Und Politik*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41682-020-00056-8>
- [Blakemore, E. \(2023, January 27\). How the Holocaust happened in plain sight. National Geographic. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/holocaust-adolf-hitler-history-genocide-denial](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/holocaust-adolf-hitler-history-genocide-denial)
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2022). *Racism without racists : color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics: The Basics*. Routledge.
- Clement, J (2023, September 3). *Top video game genres worldwide by age 2022 | Statista*. (2023, September 7). Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1263585/top-video-game-genres-worldwide-by-age/>
- Collings, E. (2017, January 4). *How have video games been used to counter real world problems?* Medium; winchester games. <https://medium.com/winchester-games/how-have-video-games-been-used-to-counter-real-world-problems-1c6661b1ce21>
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory : an introduction*. New York University Press.
- Dwiningtyas. (2014). *Pengantar Ilmu Komunikasi / John Fiske*. Rajawali Pers.
- Émile Durkheim, Lukes, S., & Wilfred Douglas Halls. (1982). *The rules of sociological method*. Free Press.
- GameRefinery (2022, August 10). *Shooter Genre Snapshot Report: September 2021 - GameRefinery*. <https://www.gamerefinery.com/shooter-genre-snapshot-report-september-2021/>
- Griffin, E. A., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. G. (2019). *A first Look at Communication theory* (10th ed.). Mcgraw-Hill Education.
- Guise, K. (2021, May 26). *Pride and Peril: Jewish American POWs in Europe*. The National WWII Museum | New Orleans. <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/jewish-american-pows-europe#:~:text=Around%209%2C000%20American%20Jews%20ended>
- Hakim, L. (2021, January 16). *The Impact of the Rapid Development of Digital Technology, E-Business and E-Commerce on Our Perspective Halaman 1 - Kompasiana.com*. KOMPASIANA. <https://www.kompasiana.com/lukman23/6002bb738ede487eda7d9692/the-impact-of-the-rapid-development-of-digital-technology-e-business-and-e-commerce-on-our-culture-perspective-and-human-civilization>

- [Holocaust Memorial Museum, U. S. \(1993, October 28\). The Holocaust: A Learning Site for Students. Encyclopedia.ushmm.org. https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/project/the-holocaust-a-learning-site-for-students?parent=en%2F11232](https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/project/the-holocaust-a-learning-site-for-students?parent=en%2F11232)
- Huber, K., Lindenthal, V., & Waldinger, F. (2021b, May 1). *Discrimination, Managers, and Firm Performance: Evidence from "Aryanizations" in Nazi Germany*. National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w28766>
- Ishar, R., & Irawan, A. M. (2023). SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE DENOTATIVE AND CONNOTATIVE MEANING ON THE BEATLES' SONGS LYRICS. *E-Journal of English Language and Literature*, 12(1). <https://ejournal.unp.ac.id/index.php/ell/article/download/120307/107428>
- McCall, J. & Chapman, A. (2017) Discussion: historical accuracy and historical video games (Part 1). *Gaming the Past*. Available from: <https://gamingthepast.net/2017/12/26/discussion-what-is-historical-accuracy-in-an-historical-video-game-part-1/>
- McCall, J. & Chapman, A. (2018) The debate is on historical accuracy and historical video games (Part 2). *Gaming the Past*. Available from: <https://gamingthepast.net/2018/04/08/discussion-authenticity-the-characteristics-of-a-historical-game/>
- Melvin Barnes Jr & Derek B. Green (2017, May) *Top Ten Origins: Historically Themed Video Games*. (n.d.). Origins. [https://origins.osu.edu/connecting-history/top-ten-origins-historically-themed-video-games?language\\_content\\_entity=en](https://origins.osu.edu/connecting-history/top-ten-origins-historically-themed-video-games?language_content_entity=en)
- M. Muhibbuddin. (2020). *ADOLF HITLER Pikiran, Tindakan dan Catatan-Catatan Kelam Sang Diktator yang Disembunyikan*. Araska Publisher.
- Movius, S. F. (2017, June). *Critical Race Theory – Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research*. Joy Egbert and Mary Roe. Pressbooks.
- Natha, G. (2017). Representasi Stereotipe Perempuan Dan Budaya Patriarki Dalam Video Klip Meghan Trainor "All About That Bass." *Jurnal E-Komunikasi*, 5(2). <https://publication.petra.ac.id/index.php/ilmu-komunikasi/article/view/7073>
- Owen, P., & Staff, W. (2016, March 10). What Is A Video Game? A Short Explainer. TheWrap. <https://www.thewrap.com/what-is-a-video-game-a-short-explainer/>
- Pavlovic, D. (2020, July 23). *Video Game Genres: Everything You Need to Know*. www.hp.com. <https://www.hp.com/us-en/shop/tech-takes/video-game-genres>
- Spencer, H. (1873). The Study of Sociology. In *Google Books*. Henry S. King. [https://books.google.co.id/books?hl=id&lr=&id=vHoIAAAAQAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&ots=ie0Cr93iQB&sig=37Kh-iGp91IFh5X-7NiUkcMfY\\_Y&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.id/books?hl=id&lr=&id=vHoIAAAAQAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&ots=ie0Cr93iQB&sig=37Kh-iGp91IFh5X-7NiUkcMfY_Y&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- Stein, M. (2021). Representation of Jews in the Media: An Analysis of Old Hollywood Stereotypes Perpetuated in Modern Television. In *DigiNole*. Florida State University. <https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu:760253/datastream/PDF/view>
- Sullam, S. L., Minello, G., Tripodi, R., & Warglien, M. (2022, January 26). *Representation of Jews and Anti-Jewish Bias in 19th Century French Public Discourse: Distant and Close*

*Reading.* Frontiers in Big Data.  
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fdata.2021.723043/full>

[The Wiener Holocaust Library. \(2010, February 24\). Types of camps – The Holocaust Explained: Designed for schools. Theholocaustexplained.org. https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-camps/types-of-camps/](https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/the-camps/types-of-camps/)

Wischnitzer, M. (1940). Jewish Emigration from Germany 1933-1938. *Jewish Social Studies*, 2(1), 23–44. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4615124>

Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. Guilford Press.