

Her-story in the Making

by Breanna Beck

The video game *80 Days* takes the player around the world in an attempt to win a wager and become the talk of the town. Adapted from Jules Verne's 1872 novel *Around the World in 80 Days*, the goal is simple, circumnavigate the globe in 80 days or less. However, the player will shortly learn that the trip is more than they bargained for when they face an array of scenarios and characters that are completely unexpected. Part of the video game being a more literary based game is meeting some strange characters. The player gets more background information than a typical video game allows, and the outcome is entertaining but not for the usual reason. The characters may seem "strange" but not in a bad way. *80 days* takes place in the 1870s and anyone who knows a little about history knows that typically history that far back underrepresents minorities like nonwhite cultures and women. This game does an excellent job of telling the stories that are not told throughout history. It is important to understand the underrepresented in history because it helps tell the truth of how things came to be in the present.

Some of the characters the game mentions may seem unusual initially but that is what Meg Jayanth was hoping for when she created the game. Jayanth grew up loving the Jules Verne novel *Around the World in 80 days* but being a British woman of Indian descent, she found it troubling when the character Aouda was supposed to represent someone from the same background as her. Verne's Aouda is an Indian princess who was a damsel in distress until the white man came to the rescue. Jayanth felt strongly against this stereotype stating in an article on The Literary Platform: "I loathe Aouda. For those of you that haven't had the pleasure of reading Jules Verne's seminal adventure novel *Around the World in 80 Days*, Aouda is the Indian princess that the gentleman protagonist Phileas Fogg rescues from being burned alive. She is

fair-skinned and soft-spoken and English-speaking and—of course—falls desperately, gratefully in love with Fogg. In short, she is less a person than a trophy. Aouda is not just Indian, she is an imperialist's vision of India: rescued from savagery and ignorance by the cool-headed rationality of an Englishman; a grateful bounty that delivers itself willingly into the hands of the benign master." So, she used that as a motivation to create an alternative history which was more like a "her-story." Jayanth stated in an interview with the website Nerdy But Flirty that was her favorite part of the game "It's really great to be able to write an alternate history that is full of women and marginalised people, and have non-Western cultures invent wondrous technologies and have agency. I think that's probably my favourite part – people like me don't often get to be heroes, they don't often get to captain airships and lead automaton armies and incite rebellions in games, and in historical or steampunk stories – even though there were plenty of us doing incredible things in history. We're usually written out and ignored, so it was liberating and wonderful to put us back in the story. To give us power and politics and agendas."

Aodha is a character in the game who is based on Aouda but with a slight Jayanth twist. She is an Indian Mercenary leader who fights the British who are trying to colonize India. This time period would describe that as a man's job but not in Jayanth's world. The more interesting thing in this is that there are many women throughout history who prove that there are no jobs just limited to a man. Take Belva Lockwood for example: in the 1870s she went through law school and became the first female to practice law in front of the US supreme court. That accomplishment is huge in this time era because a woman was supposed to be at home taking care of her husband and family. To top it off, Lockwood was a single mother at the age of 19. That makes her even more astounding. She then became one of the first women to run for president, but she did not make it past the nomination round.

Although it seems that these two careers are at completely opposite ends of the spectrum, any career that was not a housewife was not considered much of an option for many women. There are also plenty of other women who crossed the boundaries that were forced upon them, including Clara Barton, who established the American Red Cross, she started off as a school teacher and worked for the US patents office. When the civil war broke out she assisted surgeons with taking care of soldiers and even helped operate when needed. She was inspired and established the American Red Cross

Another example would be Antoinette Blackwell. She was the first woman minister of a recognized denomination. This is significant because even in present times there are very little female ministers. Another common practice is woman who minister to other women and that is it. According to the Hartford Institution for Religion Research “survey estimates consistently find that right around 10% of American congregations have a female as their senior or sole ordained leader.” This is a great example of how even though women feel that they are making history they can still be oppressed by those who are stuck in past times. These women show that anything is possible regardless of boundaries and that they have no reason to fill a role that is assigned to them based on their gender or minority for that matter. This is exactly who Jayanth channeled as she created this game. She wanted to make sure that she gave women who are similar to her the history they deserve.

Some have never heard of these women before and they are a big part of the history of our country, that is exactly why it is important to tell their stories even today. A recent movie that was just released, *Hidden Figures*, tells the story of the African American women who were the minds behind NASA sending John Glenn into space in the 1960s. Until 2016 not many had any clue as to who these women were or that the minds behind this mission were women in

general. Why is this? Why is it assumed that something so spectacular and something so significant in history is contributed by a man? Because that is majority of what is taught in history unless a special course is taken that looks further into those who are underrepresented. But it's not like those minorities should be considered "special" when they contributed just as much as the white man did. Although it may seem that things are starting to change in present times that is not necessarily the case.

As previously stated, there are some characters who seem a little strange in the game because they are not in the roles of their gender norms. Like Amulya Savarkar for example, she is a female inventor. Initially it seems a little different because in the 1870s famous inventors were Alexander Graham Bell, Levi Strauss, and Thomas Edison, but there were not many females. Can one name a female inventor from the 1870s off the top of their head? Probably not, and that's the problem. It is one thing to state there is an issue, and it is another to fix it. So, what is currently being done to involve minorities in history?

The first thing would be how nationally each month we spotlight on a different minority history. February is African American history month, March is women's, June is pride month, and September is Hispanic heritage month. It is not just putting on a spotlight and that is it. It is about embracing those histories and changing how we view the rise of our country. Secondly, we can take after Meg Jayanth and reclaim a history to prove that even though it is the past it is still important to honor the memories of these incredible women and minorities who fought long and hard to make us the country we are today.

Works Cited

"A Quick Question What Percentage of Pastors Are Female?" Hartford Institute for Religion

Research, n.d. Web. 13 Dec. 2017.

Jayanth, Meg. "Don't Be A Hero - 80 Days the Game." *The Literary Platform*. N.p., 30 July

2014. Web. 13 Dec. 2017.

Kelseyr713. "Interview with Meg Jayanth, Writer of 80 Days." *Nerdy But Flirty*, 18 Aug. 2014,

nerdybutflirty.com/2014/08/18/interview-with-meg-jayanth-writer-of-80-days/.