

## The Value of Gaming in Heritage Interpretation:

### Lessons Learned from the Rising Above Project

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Mochocki (2021) observes that a player's experience of a historical place in a digital game may be similar to a tourist's visit to a heritage site. While games do not offer physical contact with material heritage, they offer perceptual contact (audio-visual) which in turn affords cognitive, emotional, and social engagement with heritage content. However, if a site is inaccessible or no longer exists, digital reconstructions and games can offer a unique realm of exploration and immersion that are not possible in the physical world.

A growing body of scholarship seeks to refine guidelines for the development of historical virtual environments. Statham (2018) asserts that "3D visualisations of heritage must respect the Charter of London and Principles of Seville, but also incorporate recommendations regarding physical heritage that enhance the scientific rigour and authenticity of the 3D visualisation." We made a similar argument in 2018 when we recommended the standards for the reconstruction of physical environments published in the United States Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes as valuable supplemental guidance to the Charter of London (Erdman and Payne 2018). Since creating historical digital reconstructions continues to become a cross-disciplinary endeavour, it is essential to evaluate and incorporate discipline-specific strategies relevant to the creation of these environments. A hybrid approach is necessary to ensure specific guidelines are met and historical integrity is maintained.

The Rising Above in Arkansas project <https://risingabove.cast.uark.edu/> is a multi-institutional, educational website and research tool dedicated to telling the story of Japanese American incarceration during World War II (1942-1945), specifically within the two camps in Arkansas. The extremely low level of integrity at the two sites created by the deliberate removal of almost all physical remnants of these camps prompted the project team to consider a reconstruction with gaming technologies to portray the lost character of these historically significant cultural landscapes to a broad audience. The focus of the project was on reconstructing the camp environment with an emphasis on portraying the adaptations and modifications to the camp made by its residents. This approach was enabled by a particularly large amount of historical documentation that included design drawings and specifications, photographs, newspaper articles, journals, videos, official reports and more. During the development of a virtual environment depicting a typical residential block, the project team were confronted with critical questions such as how to build an environment that was accurate and sensitive to the memories of the people who experienced it, how to balance historical authenticity with software and historical documentation limitations, and the amount the digital reconstruction could be "gami-fied" to improve engagement before it trivialized the serious events it portrayed. As we look more to gaming for conveying history, it is essential to continually evaluate how true we are keeping to the

historical narrative and also how we delineate area of vagueness and interpretation. This paper will discuss some of the approaches used by the Rising Above project to address these issues.

## References

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