

ON BATTLEFIELD V

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Last year, the giant gaming company Electronic Arts released the latest version of an extremely popular military game, Battlefield V. Each release in the series takes place in a different time period; this one recreates World War II. Such games are very popular; successful titles can take in considerably more than \$1 billion for their makers, and the budget for creating Battlefield V was around \$250 million. So this is big business: as big as, or bigger than, Hollywood. But all mega-corporations today kowtow first of all to their real masters, the social justice warriors of the Left, not to their owners, and that, in the context of computer gaming, is what we are here to explore today.

Battlefield V, you see, is deliberately not a simulation of World War II. Rather, it is a rewrite of World War II, in which female soldiers are co-equal with men. The main publicity image for Battlefield V, featured everywhere, is of such a woman, rushing to battle with a pistol in her right hand and an M1 carbine under her left arm. Other promotional images show other women in similar poses, and the player can play as a woman. This type of ideological rewriting of “historical” military games is a new thing. No earlier Battlefield game included female characters—including games set in the present, where at least there actually are, and in the future, where they may also be, a few female combat soldiers. A deliberate choice was made, at the highest levels of Electronic Arts, to depart in this direction.

I am not here to analyze the question of women in today’s military, although it is an interesting topic, and my own position has changed over time. I used to think that women should not be allowed in combat; that it was the supreme example of ideology triumphing over common sense. I still think that, but more broadly, now I think that except in dire circumstances involving existential peril for a nation, women should not be permitted in the formal military at all, except in roles such as nurse and non-combat roles totally disconnected from the deployed military. Basically, that would be similar to the real American setup in World War II. But that’s a topic for another day. Today, we’re talking about propaganda.

To get an idea of the game, and of the ideological bent, you can look at the “reveal trailer” released by EA at the end of May 2018. The purpose, and critical importance, of such trailers is as advertising, to generate interest in the game some months before its release and prompt “pre-orders,” delivered to the consumer on the release date. Thus, such trailers highlight what the game maker thinks will be most attractive about, or, in this case, what is most important about, the game. As you can see, the video features female soldiers in the British army, along with a few men whose faces are not shown. One woman, around whom the video revolves, is apparently the squad leader. She leads the charge, riding to battle on top of a tank, leaping off to run into a house filled with enemies, yelling obscenities and orders in a Cockney accent, spraying machine gun fire and killing man after man (none of the enemies are women—surely an unintended acknowledgement of the visceral actual real-world reaction of men when women are killed). She snipes from the back of a moving vehicle and caps off her superman actions by using a makeshift spiked club to save a helpless male comrade. Nobody viewing the trailer could miss the message or view this as anything but a female-centered game, with women largely replacing men in all traditional roles.

The response of consumers to the reveal trailer was not favorable. Across the Internet, players of the Battlefield franchise, many of whom had played it for more than fifteen years (the first release was in in 2002), objected. Usually, the stated objection was lack of realism, and that was probably true for many of the complainers. The deeper reason, not so hidden, was that gamers, overwhelmingly male, didn’t want their entertainment turned into propaganda. Social justice warrior manifestos, instructing them how women really should be viewed, is not what they wanted to pay money for. For most gamers, playing these military games allows them to act out a masculine fantasy; they don’t want to break the fantasy by fighting alongside, or as, women, any more than they want to use guns that shoot flowers or grenades that shower their enemies with bubbles. Plus, of course, they are tired of being exposed to such propaganda in every area of life; they were offended that one of the last remaining outposts not infected by propaganda, where they could still pretend to be free men in a sound society, was being overrun.

One possible analysis is that EA must have made this change to make money, by attracting buyers from an underserved market, women. But the percentage of players of such “shooter” games who are women is extremely low—between two percent and four percent, depending on what survey you look at. This includes science fiction shooters, where women are not infrequently featured as characters, so my bet is that the percentage of specifically Battlefield players is less than two percent. That is, there is no relevant market at all if the business goal is to attract women to buy the game, since women simply don’t buy such games, as is totally obvious and understandable to anyone who is not wearing ideological blinders. Perhaps there is a large unserved fetish market for men who are titillated by seeing hot women with weapons featured on the cover of a game, or within the game itself, but I doubt it. And even if that were true, a business decision would have to weigh that against men turned off by the propagandistic inclusion of women. So while every so often EA’s defenders make the claim that “fans wanted women included,” they never offer any evidence whatsoever for that claim, which is pretty obviously just a lie.

Thus, business decision is exactly what none of this was. Further proving this, when challenged, EA made no arguments at all along those lines. Instead, they offered preening ideological declarations and attacked critics as bigots, haters, and misogynists. They launched an organized campaign to denigrate and deplatform their own potential buyers, complete with hashtags like #everyonesbattlefield. They mocked their customers and burnt incense at the altar of “diversity and inclusion.” All this was done overtly and by executives at all levels, and they were explicit that their only goal was to be ideologically correct. EA chief creative officer Patrick Söderlund publicly said that “We stand up for the cause, because I think those people who don’t understand it, well, you have two choices: either accept it or don’t buy the game. I’m fine with either or.” The “cause,” of course, is forcing ideological conformity to a radical agenda through a distortion of reality.

Given Söderlund’s challenge to “accept it or don’t buy the game,” consumers quickly chose the latter. Pre-orders, which the trailer normally drives, were a total disaster. The November 2018 release was an even bigger disaster. The game was a flop, selling half what the original, 2002, Battlefield game did. EA cut its projected 2019 earnings by

hundreds of millions of dollars. Its stock dropped nearly fifty percent, slicing billions from the company's market capitalization. True, the gaming industry in general declined during that time, but a competitor shooter game from Activision, *Black Ops IV*, released at the same time, was the bestselling game in Activision's history. Nobody has claimed *Battlefield V* was a success.

The controversy percolated in the background of gamer circles, but only in the background, during the second half of 2018. It was confined to the background by a well-organized and funded campaign to attack anybody who dared criticize the game. Rather than address any complaint, or offer business rationales, EA and the social justice warriors dominant in the entertainment and media worlds immediately shrieked that the real problem was misogyny. Gamers, we were told, hate women. There was much talk of "angry white men" (though what "white" had to do with it was not explained). In other words, the response was that the gamers should shut up, and that they must abase themselves, admit their sin, and bow down before the brazen idol as a condition of being allowed to talk in public. Naturally, speech to the contrary was aggressively censored. For example, Reddit, which calls itself "The Front Page of the Internet" and is a main location for the types of young men who play such games to communicate about such matters, promptly banned any mention of the topic, and various media outlets rolled out articles attacking complainers.

When not merely mouthing social justice warrior cant, the most common claim by defenders of EA (not by the company itself, whose only response was to wrap itself in the glowing cape of social justice warriorhood), was to note that (a) all shooting games are unrealistic in many ways, such as usage and effects of weapons; (b) complaints were only about the particular unrealism of a feminized World War II military; so (c) complainers must hate women. This is the rankest sophistry, though mostly it wasn't meant as a serious argument, merely as a prop to hide that what really matters is "the cause." The unrealities that characterize shooting games have always characterized shooting games; it is a function of the limitations of simulations, combined with the need to make changes to increase the entertainment value. Nobody would buy a game which, like real war, is mostly boredom. But the goal of designers has always been to increase depictional realism as

computer power increases, a goal that has largely been met (as can be seen from the reveal trailer), while making necessary modifications for entertainment value. The unreality complained of here is different—it adds no entertainment value, but harms the experience, by deliberately decreasing realism for purely political reasons, wholly unrelated to the game itself, or to the entertainment of the players.

Scrambling for a fallback defense, defenders of the game pointed out that a non-trivial (but relatively very small) number of women did serve in the Soviet armed forces in World War II, though they did not note that was due to a unique combination of the existential nature of the crisis and Communist ideology. The vast majority served as medics, but a miniscule number sometimes engaged in combat (the precise details are hard to ascertain, between Soviet lack of records, Soviet secrecy, and modern Western attempts to use this as a political lever to support the ideologically driven goal of women in modern combat). Regardless, this is also a dishonest defense of the game, since *Battlefield V* features no Soviet soldiers, or fighting in the Soviet Union—it takes place in Crete, Normandy, Norway, and the Ruhr. To place women soldiers on the frontlines in the British army is, of course, ludicrous. No women fought as combat soldiers in any army west of the Rhine.

So that's the saga of *Battlefield V*. Such propaganda by giant corporations is not an isolated incident; yesterday Gillette rolled out an expensive advertising campaign for men's shaving products that revolved around "toxic masculinity," how men are evil, and how by feminizing themselves they can be better. Why? Certainly not to sell men's shaving products. Giant corporations offer such advertising constantly, spending money so they can lose more money by turning off their customers. Examples are legion, and getting more frequent.

How can we explain this? What rational decisionmaker would deliberately spend hundreds of millions in order to lose hundreds of millions? To answer that question, we must examine it from the perspective of two separate (if overlapping) groups: social justice warriors and corporate insiders (i.e., officers and directors). As to the former, their goal in service of their poisonous ideology is that the *Gleichschaltung* that they have successfully (but temporarily, I am sure) imposed across much of American society must not be permitted to have a single exception. Nobody may escape. Any and all people who present themselves in

public, or have any role in society, must worship at the altars of their extremist and anti-reality ideas. Men as a class, and young men in particular, are regarded as resistant to their ideology, central to which are demands for the feminization of men, the denial of masculine virtues, and the exaltation of non-existent female characteristics. Any resistance to this program is characterized as misogyny, or increasingly as the non-specific fantasy category of “toxic masculinity,” in both cases something to be crushed. And for current purposes, what matters is that the Left especially hates that gaming, due to the demographics and political leanings of its participants, is one of the last bastions of resistance to the SJWs, hence the campaign against male gamers of which Battlefield V is a centerpiece.

The claim that misogyny drives objections to extremist SJW propaganda is easily disposed of. Not just because as I outline above it’s provably untrue in specific cases, but also because young men are, as a moment’s thought will make obvious, known for the exact opposite of misogyny, in the natural order of things. Though the Tinder-esque decay of culture, of chivalry and proper morals, the result of the Left’s agenda of societal destruction, has given many young men today an instrumental view of women, that is still not misogyny, but rather very badly misdirected appreciation. What young men need to restore a proper approach to women is not hectoring from social justice warriors in pursuit of an extreme ideology of sexual fluidity, but a return to formation by other men in the masculine virtues and strengths, which together with feminine virtues and strengths, make up a strong society. It is restoring the balance that is needed. And to the extent there is hatred in this mix, it is not the hatred of misogynists, but hate directed at normal masculinity by a subset of women and a group of feminized men.

Of course, young men do tend to be easy to whip up to hatred, even though the reaction to Battlefield V is not an example. Nuance is not their specialty. This is why young men form the backbone of street-level support for demagogues throughout history. We see caustic manifestations of this same tendency today, in direct reaction to the dominance of the Left and its hatred of and oppression of masculinity, most recently in Gavin McInnes’s Proud Boys, successfully (it appears) suppressed by coordinated action of the Lords of Tech and leftist-dominated local

governments. My bet, though, for good or ill, is that is far from the last we have seen of such groups, the responsibility for which is purely the Left's.

The SJWs also try other approaches to discredit any pushback on their agenda. One is to pick through the Internet statements of their opponents for some statement everyone would agree is beyond the pale, and then to highlight it across all their platforms, falsely claiming it is representative. With young men, you don't have to look very far to find such a statement, especially when online such statements are anonymous, not to mention it's not necessary for the purpose to determine if any given statement is meant as a tasteless joke. And when they find one, the SJWs make no effort to first prove it is not a statement planted to support the Left, analogous to so-called hate crimes on college campuses, the vast majority of which are hoaxes perpetrated by leftists. Another is to claim that any objection to their radical ideas is in fact an objection to a totally different, uncontroversial, idea. Thus, they make such claims as that "feminism means a man can choose to be a woman; gender is a social construct." When that stupid idea is challenged, the argument offered in return is not how and why that can possibly be true, but rather some variation of "feminism just means that women aren't inferior to men; how dare you question feminism?" At the end of the day, though, none of these approaches are what matter to the SJWs—all that matters is that everyone conform.

So that's why and how social justice warriors relate to Battlefield V. To them, it being a commercial flop is not a disaster at all. The goal of increasing ideological conformity has been achieved at zero cost to themselves. Their behavior is not surprising; when you live to impose your ideology on others, you naturally take actions to achieve your goals. But why corporate insiders would cooperate is less obvious, aside from that some of them are personally infected with the SJW virus. The reason is because each and every corporate insider, director or officer, who cooperates in the SJW program personally benefits and pays no cost at all.

Really, on a corporate governance level, this behavior exists for the same reason executive pay is grossly excessive, a topic Steven Clifford ably addresses in *The CEO Pay Machine*. Both behaviors are examples of the agency problem, the separation of ownership and control. Corporate

executives are legally required to act in the best interests of the company's owners, the stockholders. (They can take into account, within limitations, other goals as well.) In theory, benefiting the stockholders will usually lead to performance rewards for executives. But the stockholders in large corporations have only the most indirect form of control, through electing directors, and those elections are almost never competitive. In practice, stockholders are passive investors, and directors and officers run the company for their own benefit, limited only by the possibility of a lawsuit for gross self-dealing. Unsurprisingly, this leads insiders (directors and officers) to line their own pockets at stockholder expense. To combat this, various mechanisms, such as payment in stock, are used to align the incentives of insiders and stockholders, such that when insiders line their own pockets they may also be lining stockholders', though these mechanisms meet with varying amounts of success.

In recent years, however, the extremist creed today referred to with the cant words "diversity and inclusion" (tomorrow it will be different ones) has taken hold among directors and officers. Such ideological goals have nothing to do with benefiting stockholders and there is no way to pursue them without harming stockholders, so no mechanism can be created to align incentives. Directors and officers, though, can and do line their pockets in two ways by advancing this ideology with stockholders' money. Within the corporation, through indoctrination and external social and legal pressure, individual executive advancement has been made heavily dependent not on job performance, but on whether an executive has furthered SJW goals, both inside and outside the company. And outside the corporation, an insider receives even more rewards by advancing this pernicious ideology, the more rewards the more of the stockholders' money he spends. He is praised by the news-setting media, invited to the choicest social events, given the public approbation of those he regards as his social equals and betters, offered seats on the boards of other corporations, and pursued with outstanding new employment opportunities.

Conversely, an executive who is seen to refuse to spend money in that way, or, worse yet, can be tied in any way to any type of social conservatism, inside or outside the company, gets none of these things. His career is instantly over; at best, he may keep his current job, but probably

not. If he entered the company insufficiently attentive to Leftist social ideology, he has been endlessly reminded of the need to conform by the object lessons of those who failed to do so, accompanied by constant direct indoctrination by the harridans from Human Resources. It is no different than Mao's Cultural Revolution, with fewer dead people. Only the most obtuse, or those on the autism spectrum like James Damore, fail to get the message, loud and clear, and do not conform. They pay the price. The natural and obvious, in fact inevitable, cumulative effect of this type of soul-deadening ecosystem is the type of business decision exemplified by Battlefield V.

So, really, it's simple. People respond to incentives. We can expect to see more of this, more demands for enforced conformity to a monolithic leftist line, profit be damned, until the stranglehold of the Left over the culture is broken. Lately, I have been optimistic; I can sense the burbling of magma beneath the surface of our culture, inevitably, sooner rather than later, erupting in force, both destructive and creative, but either way, ending the Left's power. Or perhaps it's just the Mexican food I culturally appropriated for my lunch that I feel. I hope it's the former. Now I, too old for shooting games, am going to fire up a flight simulator game, and try to forget about this for a while.