

L.A.'s OnRamp Arts Rediscovered "Tropical America" Online Game Does Double Duty As Cross-Cultural Curriculum

[October 7, 2002 - Los Angeles, CA] This Discovery Day, just 510 years after Christopher Columbus became the New World's first European tourist, OnRamp Arts celebrates with the launch of "Tropical America," its latest in a series of innovative new media projects, at the <<Race In Digital Space 2.0>> conference on October 11th, 2002 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. The <<Race in Digital Space 2.0>> is a three-day event exploring the challenges and accomplishments minorities experience in an era of rapidly evolving digital technologies.

"Tropical America" offers an entertaining teaching platform that succinctly engages students in a comprehensive, thematic exploration of their own histories and cultural identities. Developed in partnership with Los Angeles high school students, drawn largely from recent immigrant families, "Tropical America" authentically addresses the urgent challenges of cultural assimilation of America's contemporary students.

"Due to overwhelming pressure by institutions, peers and mass media, today's students often abandon the political and historical dilemmas that have forced their emigration to the United States," notes project directors Stephen Metts and Jessica Irish. "Tropical America" -- developed for students, by students, teachers and artists -- is an exciting, engaging new media platform that addresses this cultural predicament through the exploration of thirteen interconnected episodes that weave in details of the history of the Americas.

Inspired by the similarly titled mural by David Alfaro Siqueiros- subsequently whitewashed in Los Angeles in 1932- *Tropical America* explores the causes and effects of the erasure of history. From the battles of Bolivar, to the single-crop economy of Cuba, the myth of El Dorado and the poems of Sor Juana de la Cruz, *Tropical America* reveals a forgotten terrain, the birthplace of contemporary cross-cultural life.

The user's quest begins not before a massacre, as it is often the case in first-person shooter games, but rather after a killing occurs. The story of Rufina Amaya, sole survivor of the 1981 massacre of El Mozote in El Salvador, where more than 1,000 people died in the hands of the Atlacatl battalion, becomes the contextual anchor for "Tropical America", and the impetus from which the user will begin their journey.

For "Tropical America", El Mozote symbolizes the silencing of one people's histories and the perseverance of its survivors to bring the events into the open.

OnRamp Arts is a non-profit media arts organization whose mission is to create and produce collaborative, innovative, digital media projects that bridge new technology, the arts and local communities. "Tropical America" is the culmination of a grant initiative of the Department of Education in partnership with the NEA to encourage media literacy.

