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**A History of Nintendo: How the Big N Changed Video Games for the Better**

         As long as the human race has lived, we have been constantly advancing in terms of our technological capabilities, to the point that entire industries have sprung up based on this advancement. One of them is video games, an interactive entertainment media industry that swelled to a tremendous size as decades progressed. But out of the several big names in the industry, there is one in particular that stands out: Nintendo. They have proven to be extremely innovative in their creations, and although some constantly insist that their days are numbered with every console generation that passes by, it is undeniable that they have been extremely influential in the development of the video game industry, and they continue to have a huge impact to this day.

         What many don’t know is that Nintendo didn’t start off in the video game industry, and they’ve actually been around for far longer. Dating back all the way to 1889, they began as a small company manufacturing Japanese playing cards called *Hanafuda*, but they attempted to branch out into selling several other types of products before moving into electronic toys and games (Kohler). It wasn’t long before they started manufacturing arcade games, but the Japan-based company had a harder time selling to the American market. That is, until a young man named Shigeru Miyamoto was hired to develop a project which eventually became a game known as *Donkey Kong*. It was a platformer where the protagonist, then named Jumpman, had to save his kidnapped girlfriend from a stubborn gorilla while dodging barrels and other dangerous obstacles, and it immediately became a huge hit in America (Kent 157-160). This catapulted Nintendo to success in the Western market, while also kickstarting a franchise that would eventually become the centerpiece of their company (after all, Jumpman would soon gain a different name: Mario).

         For anyone who truly thinks Nintendo has not had a huge influence on the video game business, they would eventually become the company responsible for preserving its existence, at least in America. While games thrived at first, things would soon go horribly wrong. Due to a variety of factors, the American video game market went down in flames during the Great Video Game Crash of 1983. However, the rest of the global industry at the time was hardly affected by this event, so Nintendo decided to try and get into the home console market with the Family Computer (nicknamed the Famicom). While they were massively successful in Japan, the negative reputation of video games in America due to the Crash made it much more difficult to do the same there (Kent 278-280).  However, as the old phrase goes, “never count Nintendo out,” and they came up with a very interesting solution. To negate concerns about the video game market, Nintendo redesigned the Famicom (and renamed it the Nintendo Entertainment System, or NES) and packaged it with two other peripherals: the NES Zapper (a light gun) and the Robotic Operating Buddy (known as ROB, a little toy that could play two games but ultimately had little play value) (Kent 287-288). They did this to essentially pretend that the NES wasn’t a normal game system, but instead a new, different technology, and it worked. These two toys looked cool enough to get the NES into the market, and it took off from there. As such, Nintendo single-handedly revived the gaming industry in America and dominated the market for years to come. Without them, people might not be playing video games today.

         Ever since this pivotal event in video game history, Nintendo has continued its massive influence by spawning several incredibly successful and influential franchises. The most famous has to be *Super Mario Bros*, the highest-grossing video game franchise in history (Piccalo). While the franchise’s roots lie in the aforementioned *Donkey Kong*, the game that truly launched the IP was the NES game sharing its name, which had a huge role in the console’s success and the subsequent revival of the industry. It was incredibly advanced and contained much more content compared to the simple games of the industry’s Golden Age, with reliable controls, a huge variety of levels and level elements for the time, and enjoyable challenges. People left and right tried to get their hands on it (Parish). As such, it ended up codifying the platformer genre of games, and Mario has become the hero of the world’s most successful video game franchise.

         While most of Nintendo’s franchises were massively successful, there were many people who weren’t impacted due to the limited size of gaming culture. Later, however, Nintendo would expand this culture in a way that had never been done before through a risky gambit that they pulled with their successor to the Nintendo Gamecube, thus introducing the gaming experience to an entirely new set of people. At that point in time, their standing in the console wars had dropped; when Sony initially stepped into the ring, Nintendo lost their lead for the first time ever. The Playstation 1 & 2 proved to be the most successful consoles in the fifth and sixth generations, and Microsoft also put up a fight with the original Xbox during the latter period (Minotti). This led people to once again declare that Nintendo was on its deathbed as a video game company.

But once again, Nintendo had a plan: a sleek console known as the Wii whose primary attribute was an extremely unconventional controller with motion controls. Not only did this seemingly crazy idea turn out to be a huge success, but it also expanded the gamer population in part due to the simplicity of the controls. As former President of Nintendo of America Reggie Fils-Aime states in a USA Today article, “Our focus is interactive game play… It allows everybody to pick up and play and isn't focused on the core gamer” (Redmond). People outside the core gaming culture were able to enjoy fun, casual games as they never had before, and games like Wii Sports became fun for the whole family to enjoy. Even senior citizens were able to get into playing on the Wii (Brockman). These people may never have been properly exposed to the joys of video games if it weren’t for Nintendo.

         When it comes down to it, Nintendo is known for being incredibly innovative, not just in software but hardware as well. Aside from the Wii’s motion controls, Nintendo has introduced and/or popularized several controller aspects that are widely used today. “Shoulder buttons” that lie on top of a controller to be pressed one’s by index fingers were introduced with the Super Nintendo Entertainment System controller, and its successor, the Nintendo 64 controller, featured a joystick. While it wasn’t the first system to feature the latter, said stick was different due to the fact that it was a digital thumb stick rather than an analog stick that had to be gripped with one’s entire hand (Kohler). Both of these features ended up being used by Nintendo’s competitors, and they’ve become key features in today’s gaming world, thus becoming another mark Nintendo has left over time.

         With all of these things in mind, Nintendo has undeniably influenced the video game industry immensely, and that’s not even getting into some of their other huge franchises such as *Pokémon* and *The Legend of Zelda*. They’re currently riding another wave of success with the Nintendo Switch, which has become the fastest selling console in history (Dent). But perhaps the most important thing they’re known for is this: making games that are just simply fun for anyone to enjoy, in addition to being well-designed and innovative. Some criticise them for making childish games, but is it really a bad thing to bring out the child in everyone once in a while? These games bring happiness to those that play them, and that’s what’s important. They may not be every gamer’s favorite company, of course, but even those who prefer other companies are still part of a world that has been shaped by Nintendo in ways that have allowed more people to enjoy games more. And this enjoyment is something that unites people all over the world, whether you’re a Nintendo fan, a Microsoft fan, or a Sony fan. As former global president of Nintendo Satoru Iwata said at his 2005 Game Developers Conference speech, “Even if we come from different sides of the world, speak different languages, even if we eat too many chips or rice balls, even if we have different tastes in games, every one of us here today is identical in the most important way: each one of us has the heart of a gamer.”

Works Cited

Brockman, Joshua. “Who's Gaming Now? Seniors Turn To Wii Bowling.” *NPR*, NPR, 23 Nov. 2009, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120705467.

This article explains one of the trends the Wii console set after its release. I used it as a small example to support my argument that Nintendo had been influential by expanding the gamer population, since senior citizens hadn’t been playing video games to nearly this extent beforehand.

Dent, Steve. “Nintendo's Switch Is the Fastest-Selling US Console Ever.” *Engadget*, 18 July 2019, https://www.engadget.com/2018/01/04/nintendo-switch-fastest-us-selling-console/.

I just used this to provide a little piece of information on how Nintendo is doing as a company today. It helps to connect their history to modern times.

GDC. “Satoru Iwata - Heart of a Gamer.” *YouTube*, 14 July 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMrj8gdUfCU.

This speech wasn’t used to support my argument. I just put it in to end off my conclusion on a heartfelt note due to how inspiring it is, while also tying into the idea of gamers being united by their culture in part thanks to Nintendo, even for those who don’t have them as their favorite company.

Kent, Steven L. The Ultimate History of Video Games: from Pong to Pokémon and beyond; the Story behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the World. Prima Publ., 2002.

This book covers a wide range of video game history, a lot more than just Nintendo, but I used it to provide information on some of Nintendo’s earlier history.

Kohler, Chris. “Controller's History Dynamite.” *1Up.Com*, 13 Sept. 2005, https://web.archive.org/web/20160105072217/http://www.1up.com/features/controller-history?pager.offset=3.

I used this article to provide examples of the various controller aspects that Nintendo has introduced which have become mainstays in the gaming world.

Kohler, Chris. “Sept. 23, 1889: Success Is in the Cards for Nintendo.” *Wired*, Conde Nast, 14 Jan. 2018, https://www.wired.com/2010/09/0923nintendo-founded/.

This informative article explains how Nintendo started off as a playing card manufacturer, so I used it to start off the informative section on Nintendo’s earliest history.

Parish, Jeremy. “The Essential 100, No. 1: Super Mario Bros.” *1Up.Com*, http://www.1up.com/features/essential-1-super-mario-bros.html.

This article was used to explain why the NES game *Super Mario Bros.* was so important for its time.

Piccalo, Cameron. “Top 15 Highest Grossing Video Game Franchises Of All Time.” *TheGamer*, TheGamer, 25 Mar. 2017, https://www.thegamer.com/top-15-highest-grossing-video-game-franchises-of-all-time/.

This article was used to introduce my paragraph on the Mario franchise by introducing it as the most successful video game franchise of all time.

Redmond, Wash. “Nintendo Hopes Wii Spells Wiinner.” *USA Today*, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 15 Aug. 2006, https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/tech/gaming/2006-08-14-nintendo-qa\_x.htm.

This interview with then-president of Nintendo of America outlines the company’s goals for the Wii console, namely their goals to expand their demographic, which ties into my claim that they had a huge impact by expanding the scope of gaming culture.