A History of Violence

• Believe it or not:
  – Violence has been in decline for long stretches of time
  – Today we are probably living in the most peaceful time in our species’ existence
The decline of violence:
- has not been steady
- has not brought violence down to zero
- is not guaranteed to continue
• A persistent historical development
• Visible on scales
  – from millennia to years
  – from wars and genocides to the spanking of children and the treatment of animals
- Six major declines of violence
- Their immediate causes (particular historical events of the era)
- Their ultimate causes (general historical forces interacting with human nature)
1. The Pacification Process
1. The Pacification Process

- Until 5,000 years ago, humans lived in anarchy, without central government.
- What was life like in this “state of nature”?
Life in a State of Nature?


- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1755): “Nothing can be more gentle than man in his primitive state.”
Life Before States

• Two methods to measure death rates in nonstate societies:
  – 1. Forensic archaeology *(CSI: Paleolithic)*
    • What proportion of prehistoric skeletons have signs of violent trauma?
Violent Deaths in Prehistoric Societies

Sources:
Bowles, 2009;
Keeley, 1996;
White, 2011;
2. Ethnographic vital statistics
   – What is the rate of death by violence in people who have recently lived outside of state control (hunter-gatherers and hunter-horticulturalists)?
Violent Deaths in Nonstate Societies

Immediate cause:

- Rise and expansion of states
- “Paxes”:
  - Romana, Islamica, Hispanica, Sinica, Brittanica, Australiana, Canadiana
- Tribal raiding and feuding is a nuisance to overlords
Homicide in England, 1200-2000

Source: Eisner, 2003
Homicide in Europe, 1300-2000

Source: Eisner, 2003
Homicide in Europe, 1300-2000
Immediate Causes

- Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*
- Middle ages → Modernity:
  1. Consolidation of central states, kingdoms:
     - Criminal justice was nationalized
     - Feuding warlords (knights) → “King’s justice”
  2. Growing infrastructure of commerce:
     - Money, finance
     - Transportation, timekeeping
     - Zero-sum plunder → Positive-sum trade
3. The Humanitarian Revolution
Abolition of Judicial Torture

Sources: Hunt, 2007; Mannix, 1964
Abolition of Death Penalty for Nonlethal Crimes

- England, 18th century:
  - 222 capital offenses, e.g., poaching, counterfeiting, robbing a rabbit warren, being in the company of Gypsies, "strong evidence of malice in a child aged 7–14 years of age"
  - by 1861: down to 4

- US, 17th & 18th centuries:
  - theft, sodomy, bestiality, adultery, witchcraft, concealing birth, slave revolt, counterfeiting
American Executions for Crimes other than Murder, 1650-2002

Sources: Espy & Smykla, 2002; Death Penalty Information Center, 2010
Abolition of the Death Penalty in Europe
American Executions, 1640-2010

Sources: Espy & Smykla, 2002; Death Penalty Information Center, 2010b
Other Abolitions during the Humanitarian Revolution

- witchhunts
- religious persecution
- dueling
- blood sports
- debtors’ prisons
- slavery
Abolition of Slavery
What were the immediate causes of the Humanitarian Revolution?

- Affluence?
  - One’s own life becomes more pleasant → Higher value on life in general
Per capita income, England, 1220-2000

Source: Clark, 2007
What were the immediate causes of the Humanitarian Revolution?

- Printing and literacy?
Efficiency in Book Production, 1470-1870

Source: Clark, 2007
English Books Published per Decade, 1475-1800

Source: Simons, 2001
Literacy in England, 1625-1925

Source: Clark, 2007
Why should literacy matter?

• “The Enlightenment”
• Knowledge replaced superstition & ignorance ➔
  – Jews poison wells, heretics go to hell, witches cause crop failures, children are possessed, Africans are brutish..
  – Voltaire: “Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.”
Why should literacy matter?

- Cosmopolitanism:
  - Reading fiction, history, journalism
  - Inhabit other people’s minds
  - More empathy, less cruelty
4. The Long Peace

“The 20th Century was the most violent in history.”
Was the 20th century really the most violent?

- No one cites #s from any other century!
- The “peaceful 19th century”:
  - Napoleonic wars (4 million deaths)
  - Taiping Rebellion (20 million deaths)
  - American Civil War (650,000 deaths)
  - Shaka Zulu (1-2 million deaths)
  - War of the Triple Alliance (60% of Paraguay)
  - African slave-raiding wars (??)
  - Imperial wars in Africa, Asia, south Pacific (??)
Was the 20th century really the most violent?

- World War II: Deadliest in absolute numbers
- *Not* in relative numbers (% of world population)
Trends in Great Power War, 1500-2000
(Jack Levy)
Proportion of Years Great Powers Fought Each Other, 1500-2000

Source: Levy & Thompson, 2011
Duration of Wars Involving a Great Power, 1500-2000

Sources: Levy, 1983; Correlates of War Project; PRIO
Frequency of Wars Involving a Great Power, 1500-2000

Sources: Levy, 1983; Correlates of War Project; PRIO
Deadliness of Wars Involving a Great Power, 1500-2000

Sources: Levy, 1983; Correlates of War Project; PRIO
Deaths in Wars Involving a Great Power, 1500-2000

Sources: Levy, 1983; Correlates of War Project; PRIO
Deaths in War, 1900-2005

Source: Lacina, Gleditsch, & Russett, 2006
The Long Peace

- Since 1946:
  - Historically unprecedented decline in interstate war
- Some zeroes:
  - 0 wars between US & USSR
  - 0 nuclear weapons used
  - 0 wars between Great powers (since 1953)
  - 0 wars between Western European countries
    - (cf. before 1945: 2/year for 600 years!)
  - 0 wars between developed countries
5. The New Peace

• What about the rest of the world?
World Since 1946:

- Fewer inter-state wars
- More civil wars
  - newly independent states with inept governments vs. insurgent movements
  - both sides stoked by Cold War powers
Number of Wars, 1946-2008

Source: UCDP/PRIO; Human Security Report Project
But which wars kill more people?
Deadliness of Interstate & Civil Wars, 1950-2005

Source: UCDP/PRIO; Human Security Report Project
Battle Deaths in Wars, 1946-2008

Source: UCDP/PRIO; Human Security Report Project
But what about genocide?

- Wasn’t the 20th century “the age of genocide?”
• Chalk & Jonassohn, *The History of Genocide*:
  – “Genocide has been practiced in *all regions of the world* and during *all periods in history*... We know that [in ancient times] empires have disappeared and that cities were destroyed... but we do not know what happened to the bulk of the populations involved in these events. Their fate was simply too unimportant. When they were mentioned at all, they were usually lumped together with the herds of oxen, sheep, and other livestock...
  ...Looking at the available evidence from antiquity, one might develop a hypothesis that most wars at that time were genocidal in character.”
A Few Pre-20th Genocides

- Bible (Amalekites, Amorites, Canaanites, Hivites, Hittites, Jebusites, Midianites, Perizzites, etc.)
- Athens vs. Melos
- Rome vs. Carthage
- Mongol invasions
- Crusades
- European wars of religion
- Colonization of Americas, Africa, Australia
• What is the trajectory of genocide in the 20th century?
• Do the genocides in Bosnia & Rwanda mean that “nothing has changed”?
Genocide in the 20th Century

Sources: Rummel, 1997; Political Instability Task Force, Marshall, Gurr, & Harff, 2009
Immediate causes of the Long Peace & the New Peace

• Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 1795
  – Democracy
  – Trade
  – International community

• Bruce Russett & John O’Neal:
  – All have increased in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} half of the 20\textsuperscript{th}
  – All are statistical predictors of peace
Democracies & Autocracies, 1946-2008

International Trade, 1885-2000

Source: Russett, 2008; Gleditsch, 2002
Membership in Intergovernmental Organizations, 1885-2000

Source: Russett, 2008
International Peacekeeping, 1948-2008

Source: Gleditsch, 2008
6. The Rights Revolutions
Civil Rights
Lynchings, 1880-1960

Source: Payne, 2004
Hate Crime Murders of Blacks, 1996-2008

Source: FBI
Nonlethal Hate Crimes Against Blacks, 1996-2008

Source: FBI
Whites’ hostility to blacks, 1942-1997

Source: Gallup & NORC; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1997
Discrimination Against Minorities, 1950-2003

Source: Asal & Pate, 2005
Women’s Rights
Rape, 1973-2008

Source: FBI National Crime Victimization Survey
Domestic violence, 1993-2005

Source: US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Uxoricide & Mariticide, 1976-2005

Source: US Bureau of Justice Statistics
Children’s rights
US States with Corporal Punishment, 1954-2010

Source: Leiter, 2007
Approval of Spanking, 1954-2008

Child Abuse, 1990-2006

Sources: Jones & Finkelhor, 2007; Finkelhor & Jones, 2006
School Violence, 1992-2003

Source: DeVoe et al., 2004
Gay Rights
States that have Decriminalized Homosexuality, 1791-2009

Source: Ottosson, 2006, 2009
Anti-Gay Attitudes, US, 1973-2010

Sources: General Social Survey; Gallup, 2001, 2008, 2010
Anti-Gay Hate Crime Intimidation, US, 1996-2008

Source: FBI Hate Crime Statistics
Animal Rights
Hunting, 1977-2006

Source: General Social Survey
Vegetarianism, 1984-2009

Sources: UK Vegetarian Society; US Vegetarian Resource Group
Motion Pictures in which Animals were Harmed, 1972-2010

Source: American Humane Association, 2010
Why Has Violence Declined?
Why Has Violence Declined?

• One possibility: Human nature has changed:
  – People have lost their inclinations toward violence

• Unlikely:
  – Violence in children
  – Enjoyment of vicarious violence:
    • murder mysteries, Greek tragedies, Shakespearean dramas, video games, hockey, ...
  – Homicidal fantasies:
Males

Females

% CONSIDERED KILLING ANOTHER

Source: Kenrick & Sheets, 1994
A more likely possibility...

- Human nature is extraordinarily complex
A More Likely Possibility:

• Human nature comprises inclinations toward violence...
• AND inclinations that counteract them
  – “The Better Angels of our Nature”
• Historical circumstances increasingly favor our peaceable inclinations
Motives for Violence:

1. Exploitation
   - rape, plunder, conquest, elimination of rivals, ..

2. Dominance
   - individual: alpha male
   - group: ethnic, racial, national, religious supremacy

3. Revenge (moralistic violence)
   - vendetta, rough justice, cruel punishments
4. Ideology
   – Militant religions; Nationalism; Nazism; Communism
   – Utopian cost-benefit analysis:
   – If the ends are infinitely good, then
     • The means can be arbitrarily violent
     • Opponents are arbitrarily evil (and deserve arbitrarily severe punishment)
Our Better Angels

1. Self-control
   – anticipate consequences of behavior and inhibit violent impulses

2. Empathy
   – feel others’ pain

3. Moral sense
   – tribalism, authority, puritanism vs. fairness

4. Reason
   – objective, detached analysis
Which Historical Developments Bring out our “Better Angels”?
1. The Leviathan
(Hobbes)
1. The Leviathan

- A state & justice system with a monopoly on violence can:
  - eliminate the incentives for exploitative attack
  - reduce the need for pre-emption, deterrence, and vengeance
  - circumvent self-serving biases:
    - both sides believe their opponent’s attacks are unprovoked aggression
    - both sides believe their own attacks are justified retaliation
    - stokes cycles of revenge
1. The Leviathan

- Some historical evidence:
  - Pacifying and civilizing effects of states
  - Eruptions of violence in zones of anarchy (Wild West, failed states, collapsed empires, mafias, street gangs)

Sources: Keeley, 1996; Gat, 2006; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Courtwright, 1996; Fortna, 2008; Goldstein, 2011
2. “Gentle Commerce”
(Montesquieu, Smith, Kant)

- Plunder is zero-sum
- Trade is positive sum: “Everybody wins”
- Improving technology allows trade of goods & ideas
  - over longer distances
  - among larger groups of people
  - at lower cost
- Other people become more valuable alive than dead
Gentle commerce, cont.

• Some historical evidence:
  – Countries with open economies, greater international trade:
    • fewer wars
    • fewer civil wars
    • fewer genocides

Sources: Russett & Oneal, 2001; Gartzke, 2007; Bussman & Schneider, 2007; Schneider & Gleditsch, 2010; Gleditsch, 2008; Harff, 2003, 2005
3. The Expanding Circle
(Charles Darwin, Peter Singer)

- Evolution bequeathed us with a sense of empathy
  - By default, we apply it only to friends & family
  - Over history, the circle has expanded:
    - village → clan → tribe → nation → other races → both sexes → children → other species
But what expanded the circle?

- Increased cosmopolitanism:
  - history
  - literature
  - journalism
- Adopt a real or fictitious person’s perspective →
  More sympathy toward person & kind

Sources: Batson et al., 2002, 2005, 2008; Hakemulder, 2000
• Historical evidence:
  – 17\textsuperscript{th}–18\textsuperscript{th} century:
    • Humanitarian Revolution preceded by the “Republic of Letters”
  – 20\textsuperscript{th} century, second half:
    • Long Peace, Rights Revolutions occurred in “The Global Village”
  – 21\textsuperscript{st} century:
    • Color revolutions & Arab spring fostered by Internet, social media?
4. The Escalator of Reason

- Literacy, education, public discourse →
- Think more *abstractly* and *universally*
  - Rise above parochial vantage point
  - Harder to privilege own interests over others’
  - Replace
    - morality of Tribalism, Authority, & Puritanism with
    - morality of Fairness & Universal rules
  - Recognize futility of cycles of violence
  - See violence as a *problem to be solved* rather than a *contest to be won*
• Some historical evidence
  – Abstract reasoning abilities (IQ) increased in the 20th century

Source: Flynn, 2007
– People & societies with higher education, measured intelligence →
  • commit fewer violent crimes
  • cooperate more in experimental games
  • more classically liberal attitudes
  • more receptive to democracy

Sources: Farrington, 2007; Burks et al., 2009; Jones, 2008; Deary et al., 2008; Rindermann, 2008
Why Do So Many Forces Push in the Same Direction?

- Violence is a social dilemma:
  - Tempting to an aggressor, but ruinous to the victim
  - In the long run, all parties are better off if violence is avoided
- The human dilemma: How to get the other guy to refrain from violence at the same time as you do
• Over history, human experience & human ingenuity gradually solve this problem (just like other scourges of nature like pestilence & hunger)...

• Increasing the material, emotional, & cognitive incentives of all parties to avoid violence
Implications of the Decline of Violence

• A reorientation of efforts toward violence reduction from *moralistic* to *empirical* mindset:
  – Not just “Why is there war?” but “Why is there peace?”
  – Not just “What are we doing wrong?” but “What have we doing *right*?”
Implications of the Decline of Violence

• Reassessment of *modernity*:
  – Erosion of family, tribe, tradition, and religion →
  – individualism, cosmopolitanism, reason, science

• Everyone acknowledges:
  – longer, healthier lives; less ignorance & superstition; richer experiences...

• But some question the price:
  – terrorism, genocide, world wars, nuclear weapons
• But despite impressions, the long-term trend (though halting and incomplete) is that violence of all kinds is *decreasing*.
• Rehabilitation of the concept of modernity and progress.
• Cause for gratitude for the institutions of civilization and enlightenment.
Miscellaneous extra slides:
Two Direct Comparisons:
% Battered Skeletons from Pre-Columbian Hunter-Gatherer vs. State Societies

Source: Steckel & Wallis, 2009
!Kung Homicide Rate before & after state control

Source: Lee, 1979
• The “age of genocide” is the age in which people started to care about genocide

• Word *genocide* itself: coined in 1944