

The Better Angels of Our Nature

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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?



- Thomas Hobbes (1651):
“The life of man: solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”



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

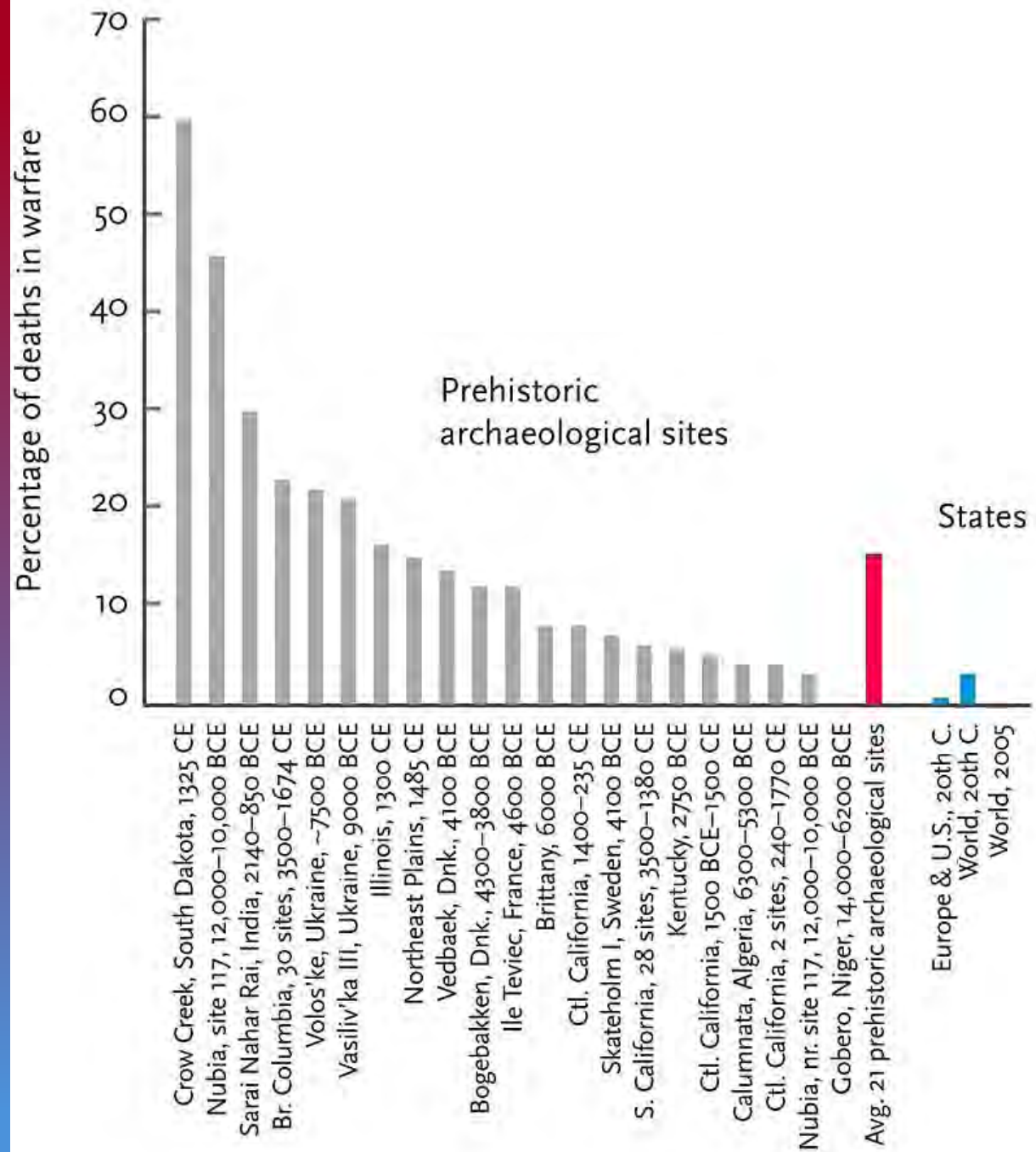
Life Before States

- 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 Pre-historic Societies

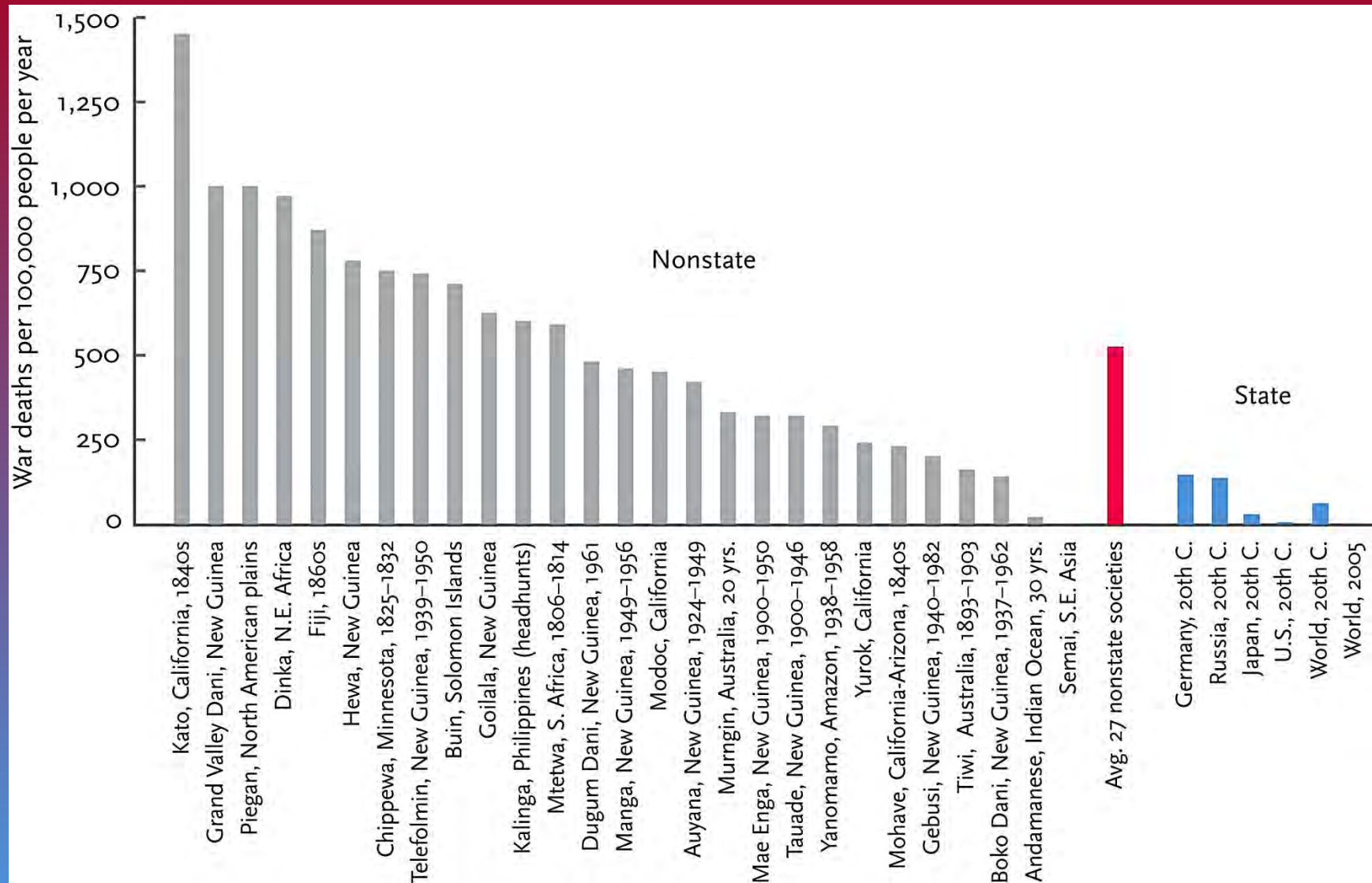
Sources:
Bowles, 2009;
Keeley, 1996;
White, 2011;
Human
Security Report
Project, 2008



- 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



Sources: Gat, 2006; Keeley, 1996; White, 2011; Human Security Report Project, 2008

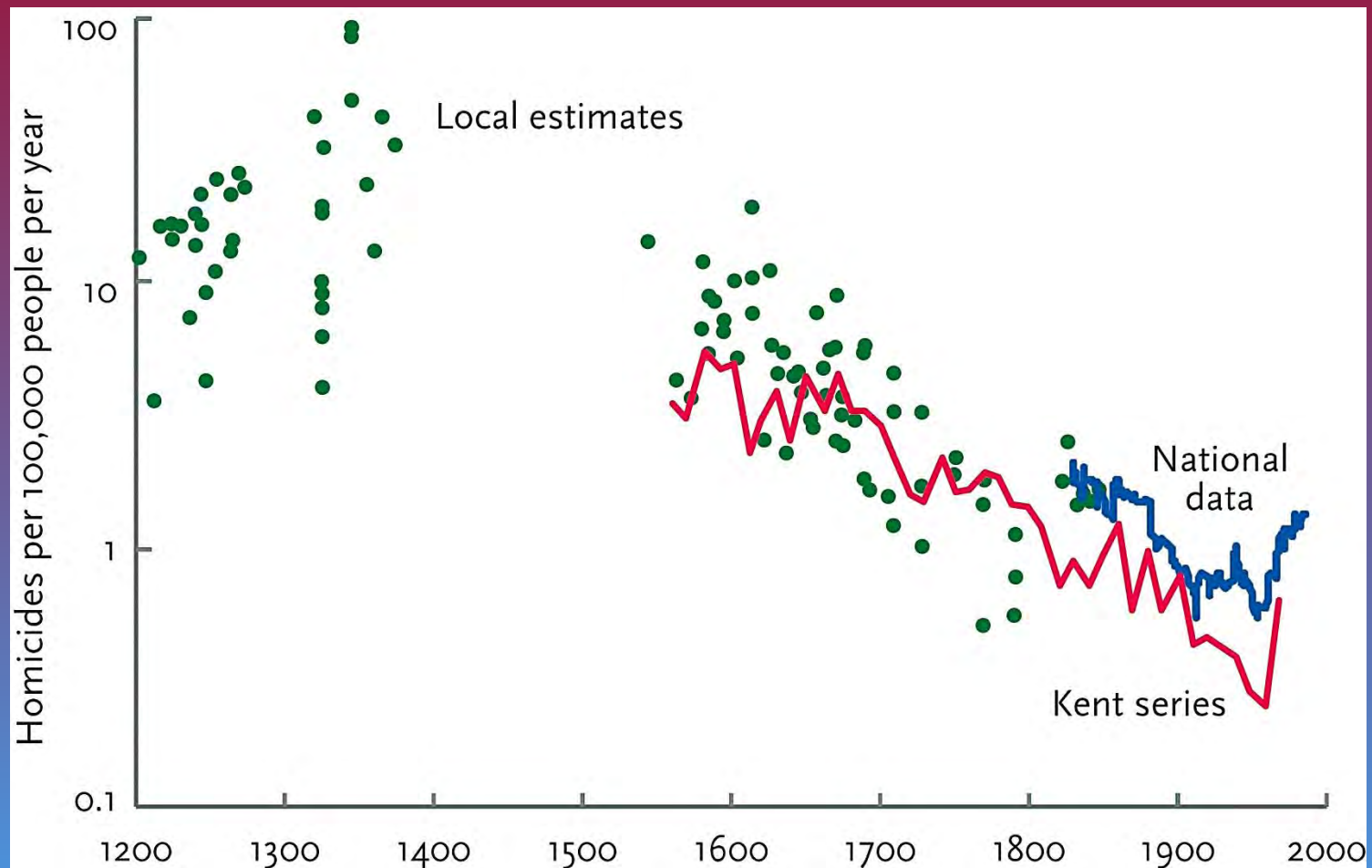
Immediate cause:

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

2. The Civilizing Process

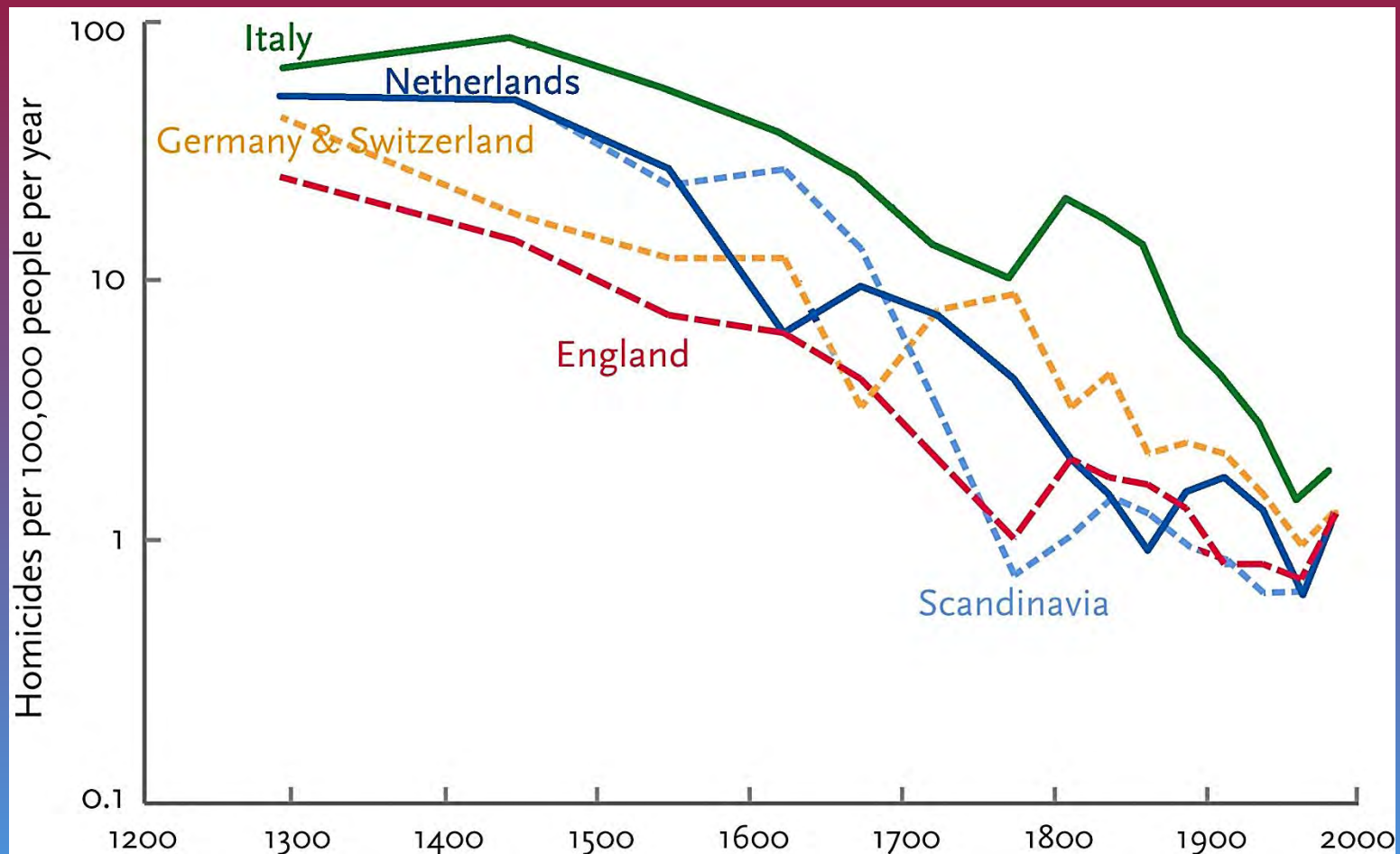


Homicide in England, 1200-2000



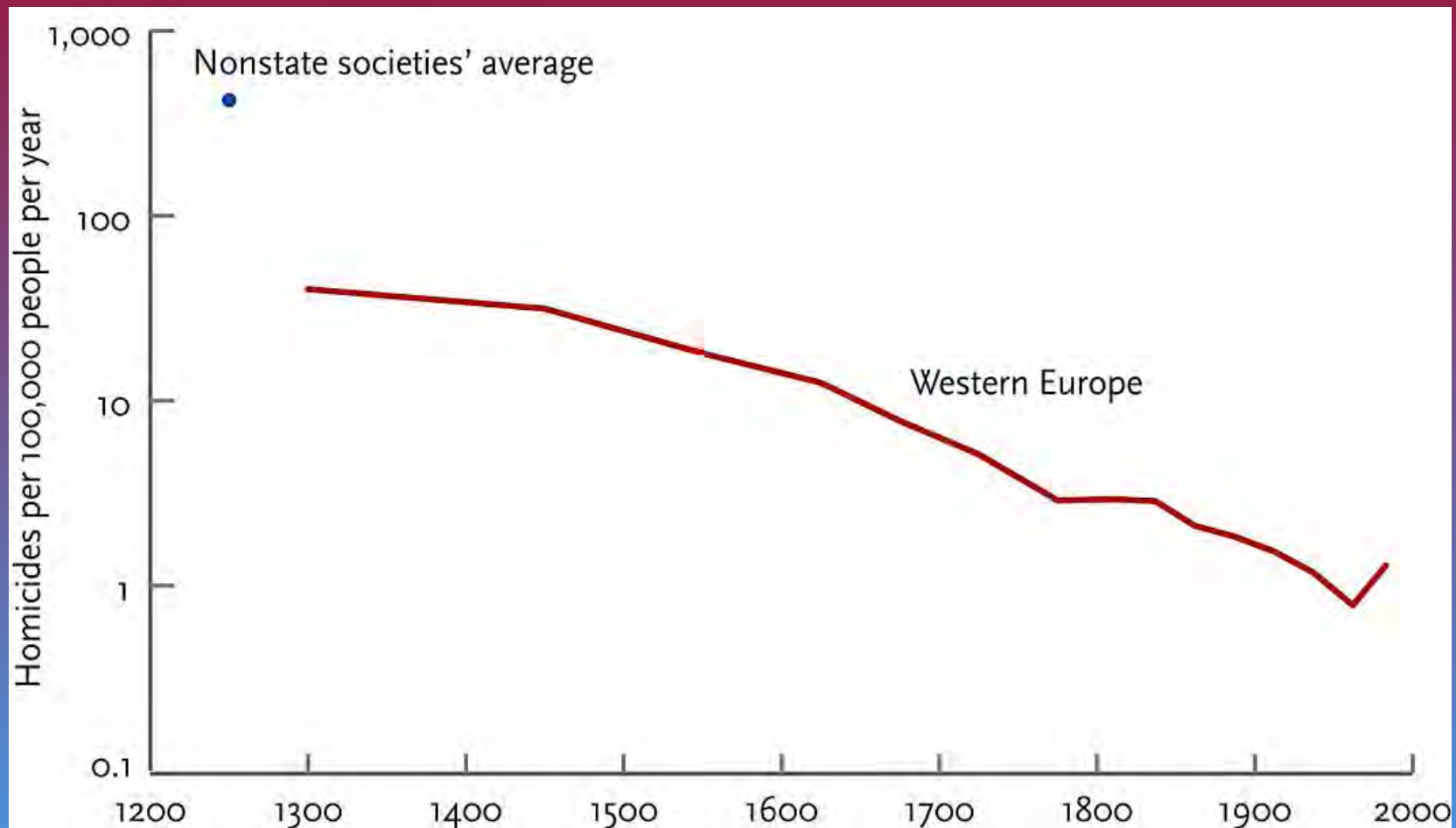
Source: Eisner, 2003

Homicide in Europe, 1300-2000



Source: Eisner, 2003

Homicide in Europe, 1300-2000

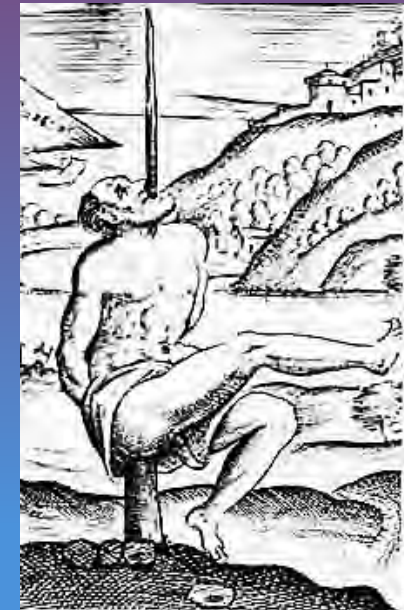
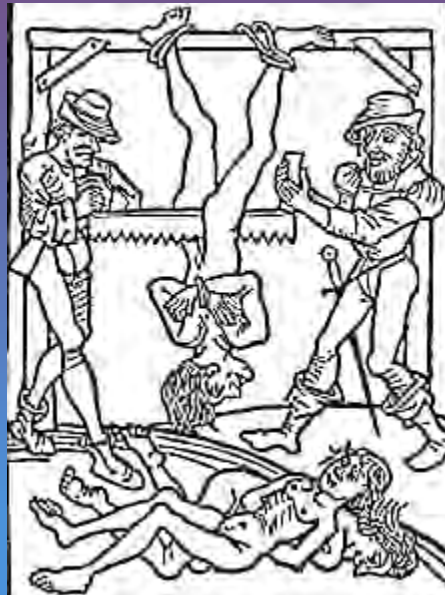


Source: Eisner, 2003

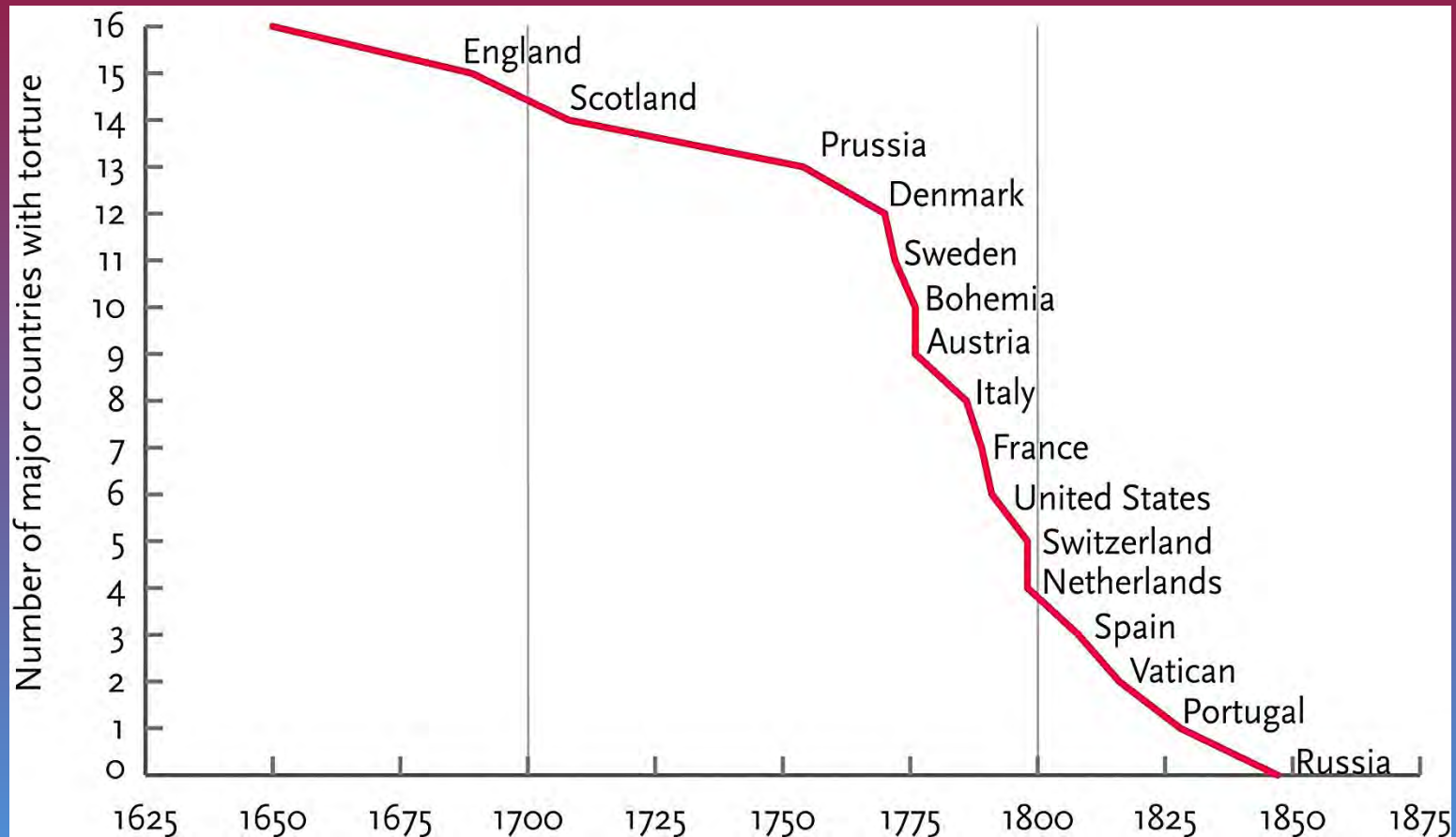
Immediate Causes

- 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

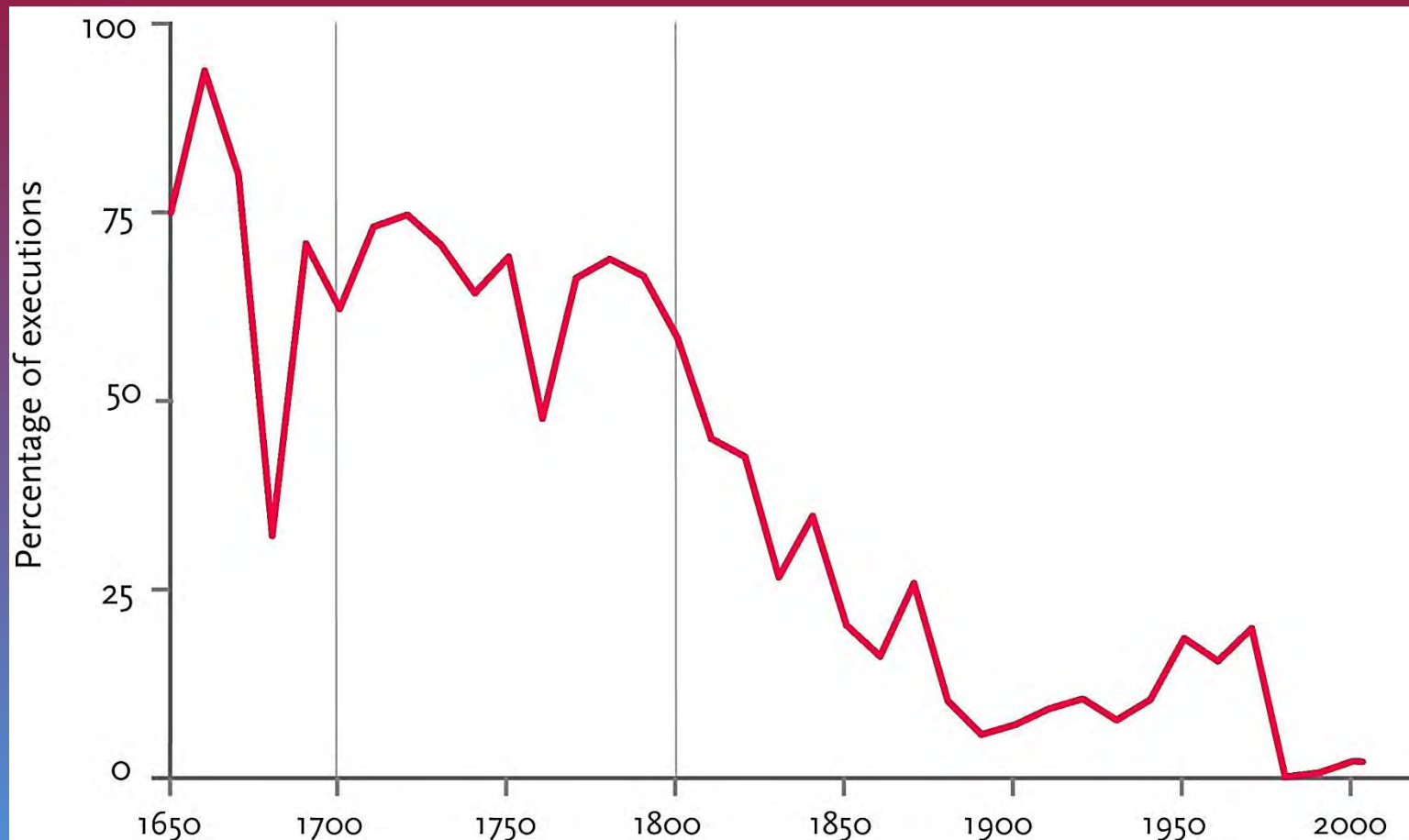


Sources: Hunt, 2007; Mannix, 1964

Abolition of Death Penalty for Nonlethal Crimes

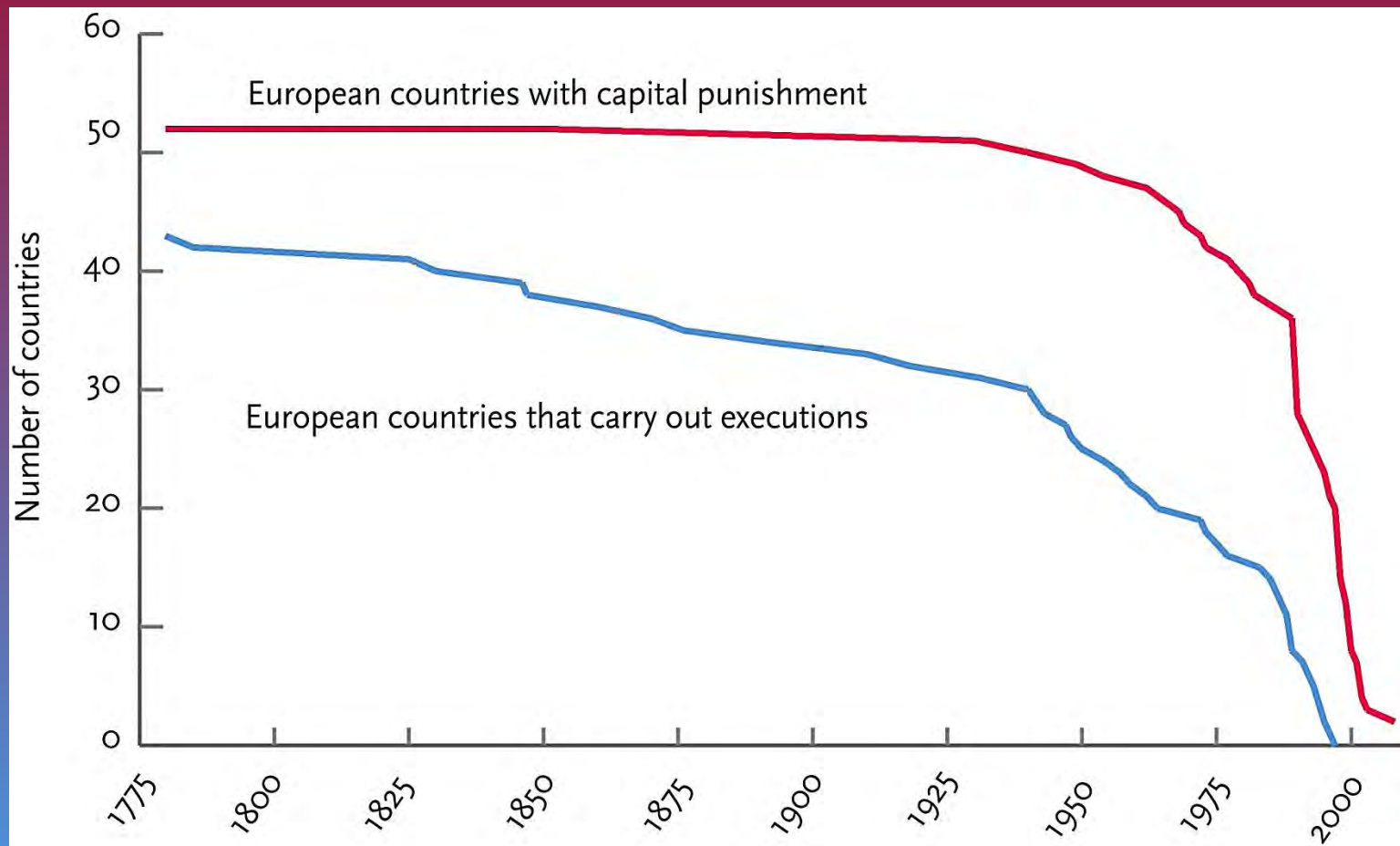
- England, 18th century:
 - 222 capital offenses, e.g., poaching, counterfeiting, robbing a rabbit warren, being in the company of Gypsies, "strong evidence of malice in a child aged 7–14 years of age"
 - by 1861: down to 4
- US, 17th & 18th centuries:
 - theft, sodomy, bestiality, adultery, witchcraft, concealing birth, slave revolt, counterfeiting

American Executions for Crimes other than Murder, 1650-2002

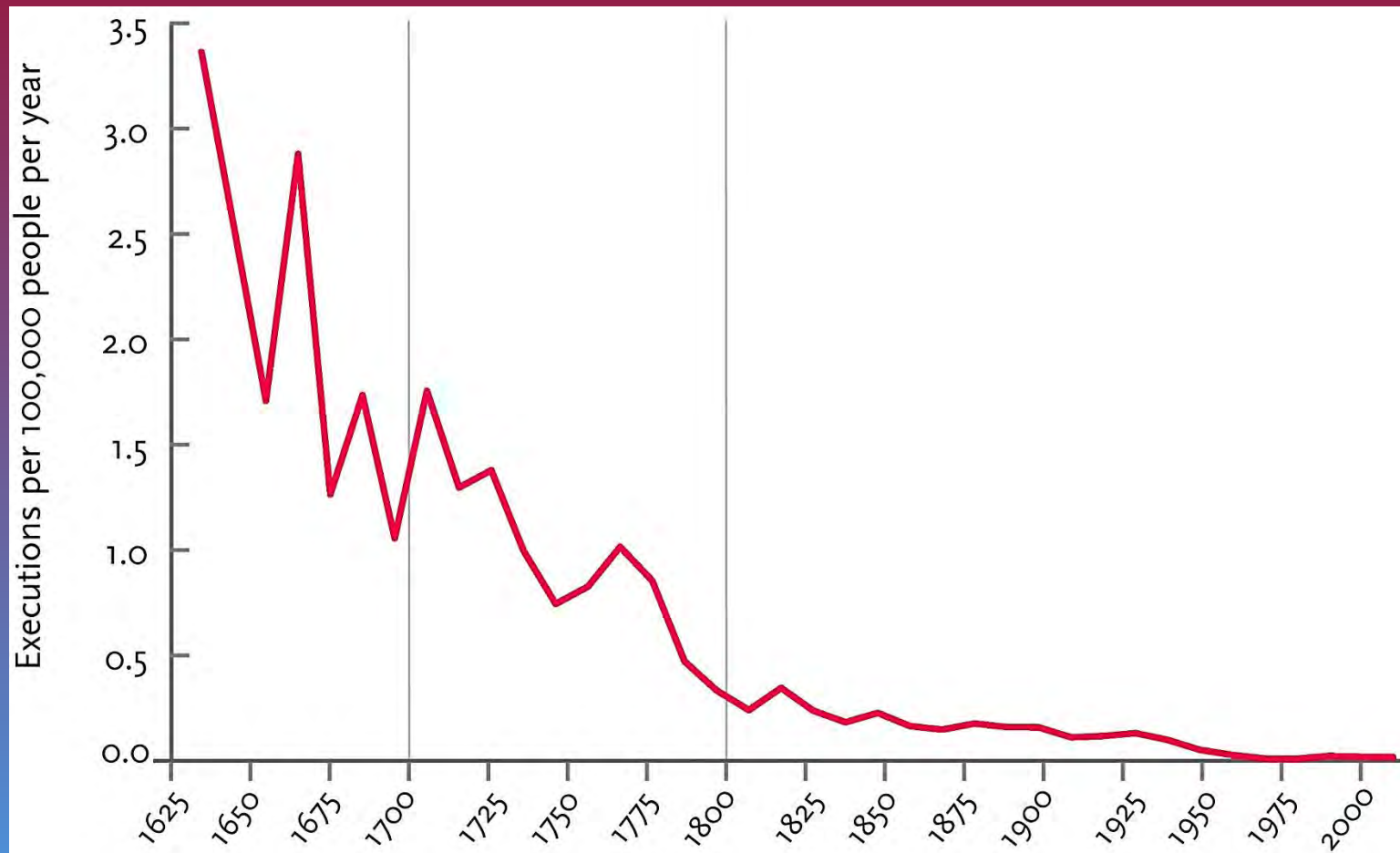


Sources: Espy & Smykla, 2002; Death Penalty Information Center, 2010

Abolition of the Death Penalty in Europe



American Executions, 1640-2010

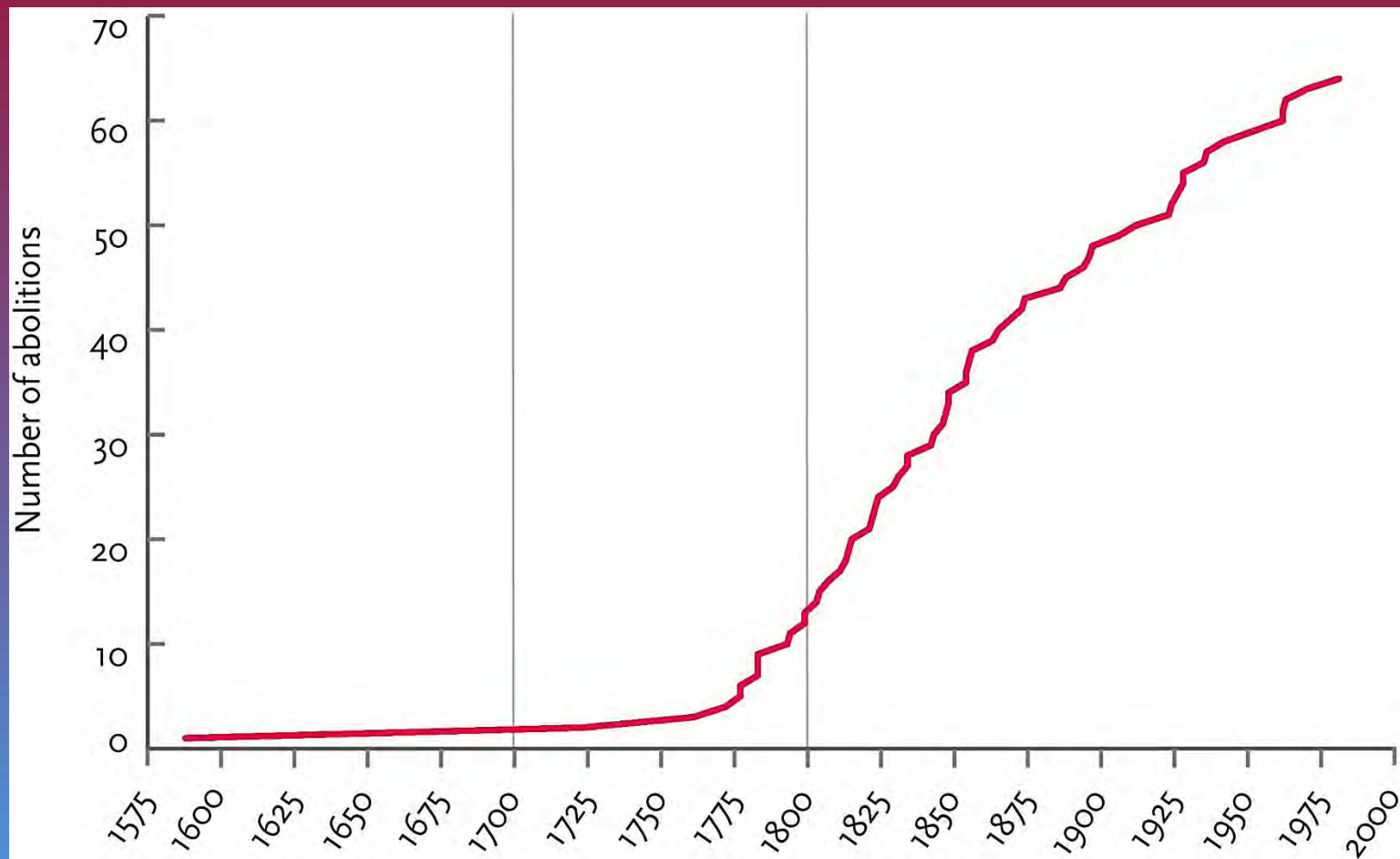


Sources: Espy & Smykla, 2002; Death Penalty Information Center, 2010b

Other Abolitions during the Humanitarian Revolution

- witchhunts
- religious persecution
- dueling
- blood sports
- debtors' prisons
- slavery

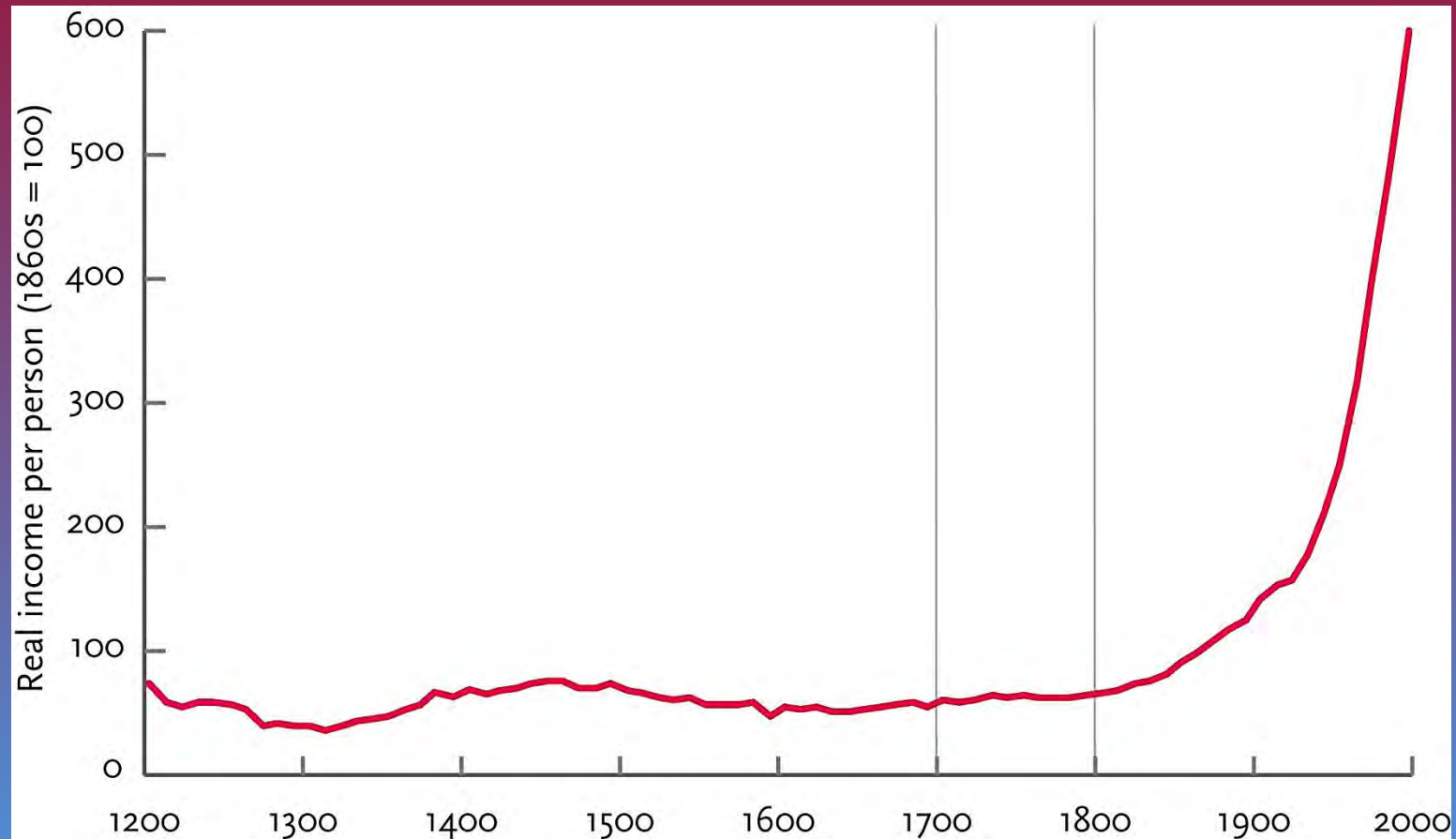
Abolition of Slavery



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

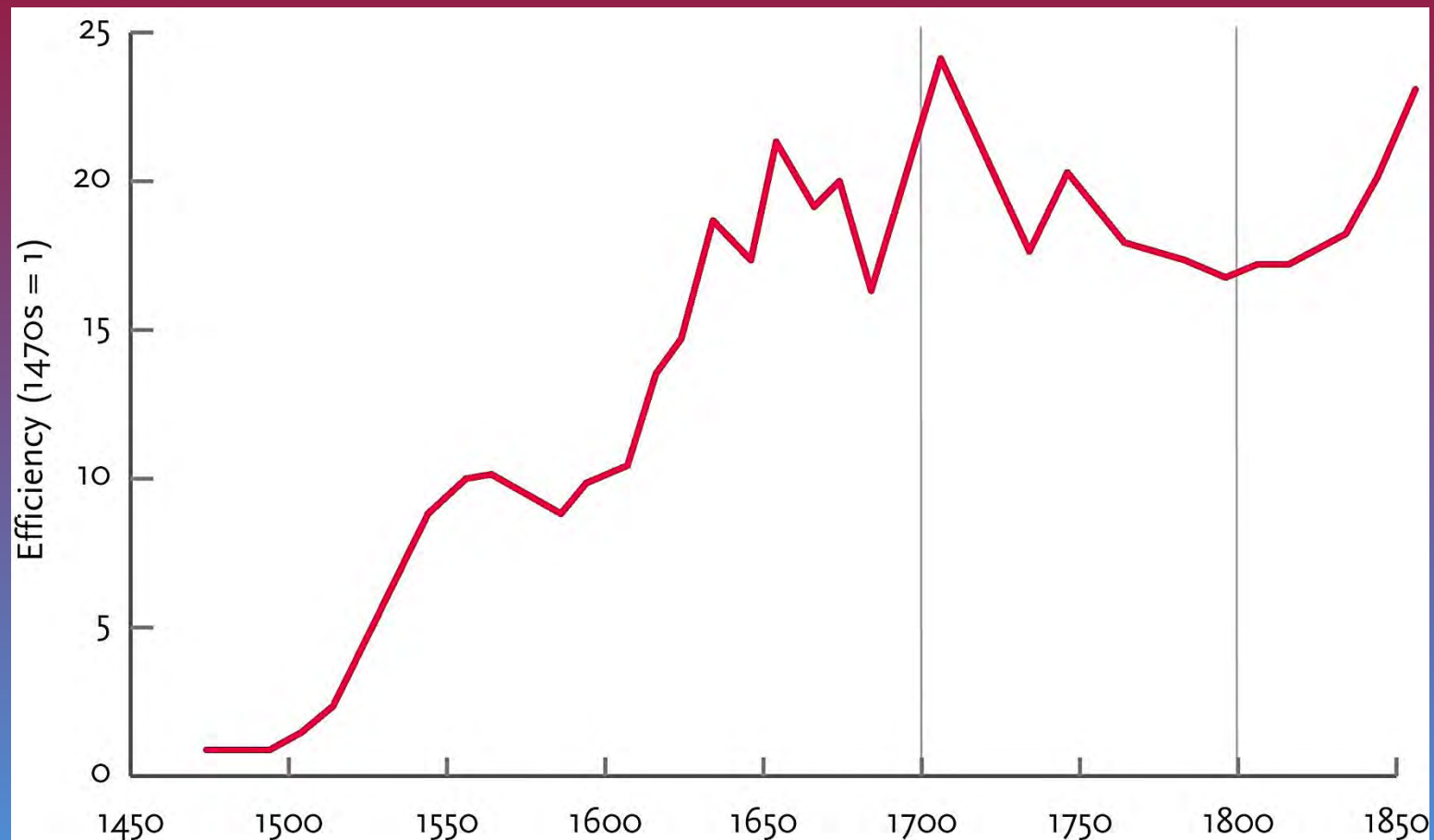


Source: Clark, 2007

What were the immediate causes of the Humanitarian Revolution?

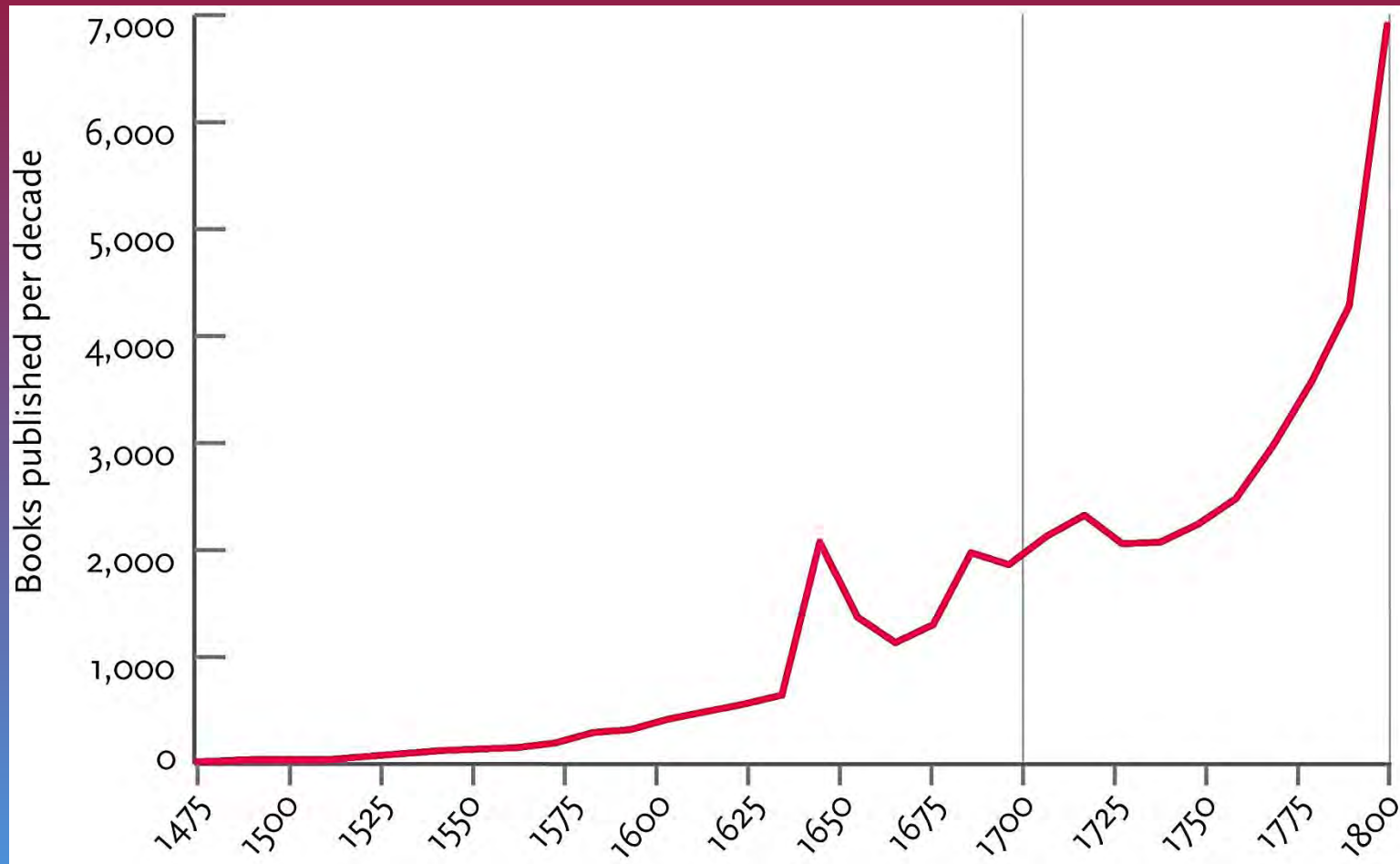
- Printing and literacy?

Efficiency in Book Production, 1470-1870



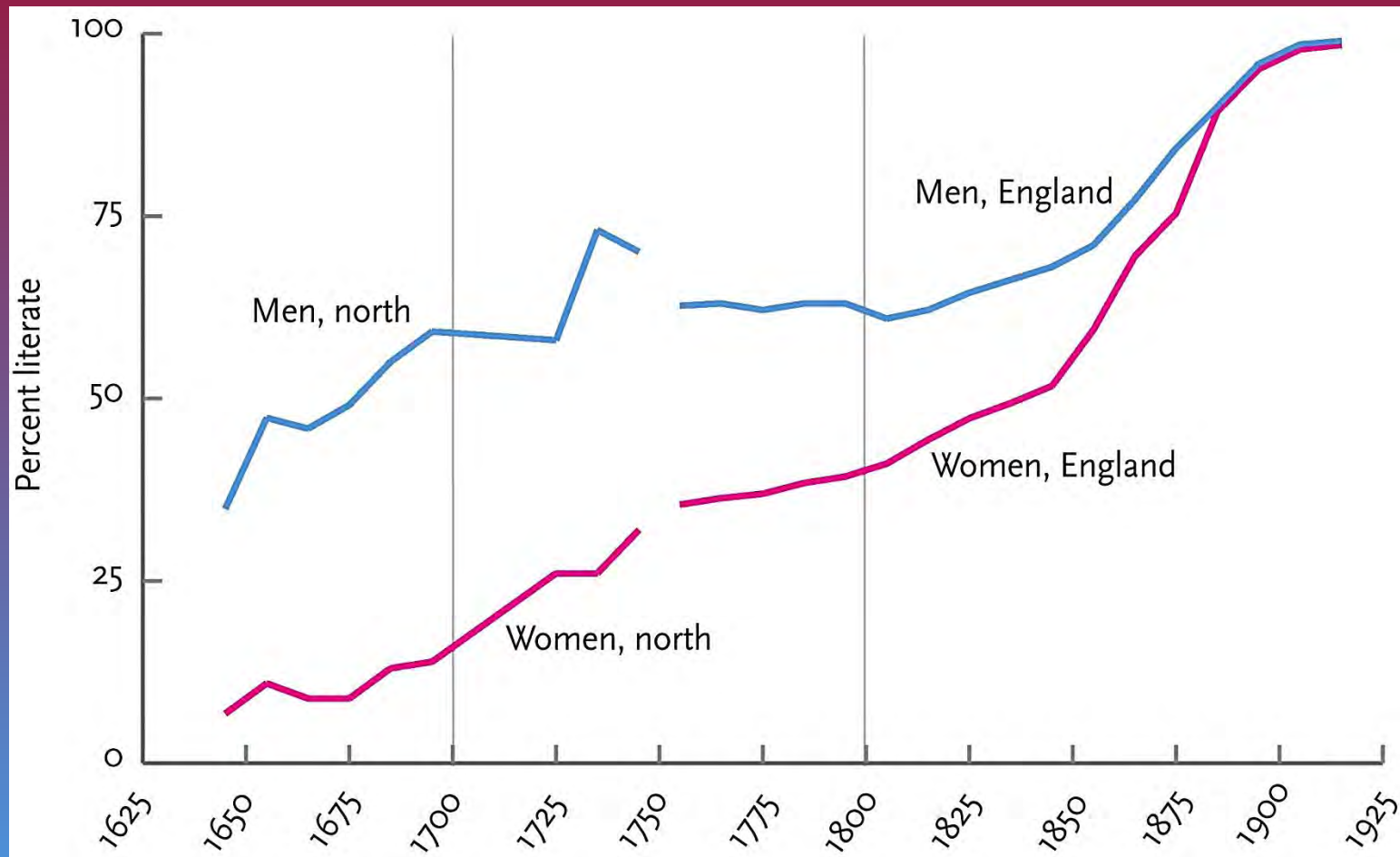
Source: Clark, 2007

English Books Published per Decade, 1475-1800



Source: Simons, 2001

Literacy in England, 1625-1925



Source: Clark, 2007

Why should literacy matter?

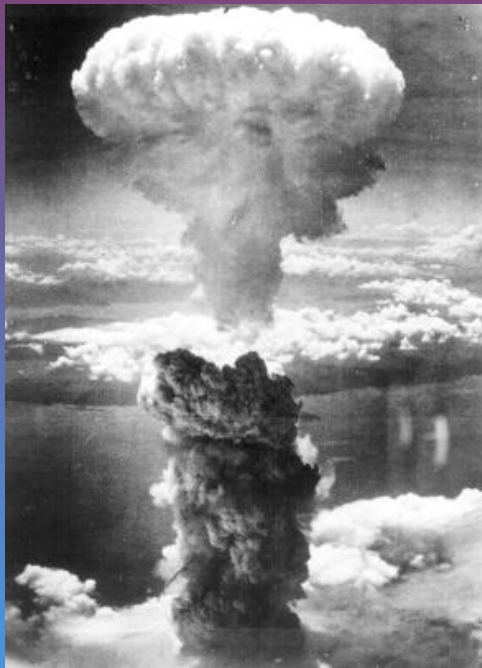
- “The Enlightenment”
- Knowledge replaced superstition & ignorance →
 - Jews poison wells, heretics go to hell, witches cause crop failures, children are possessed, Africans are brutish..
 - Voltaire: “Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.”

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.”



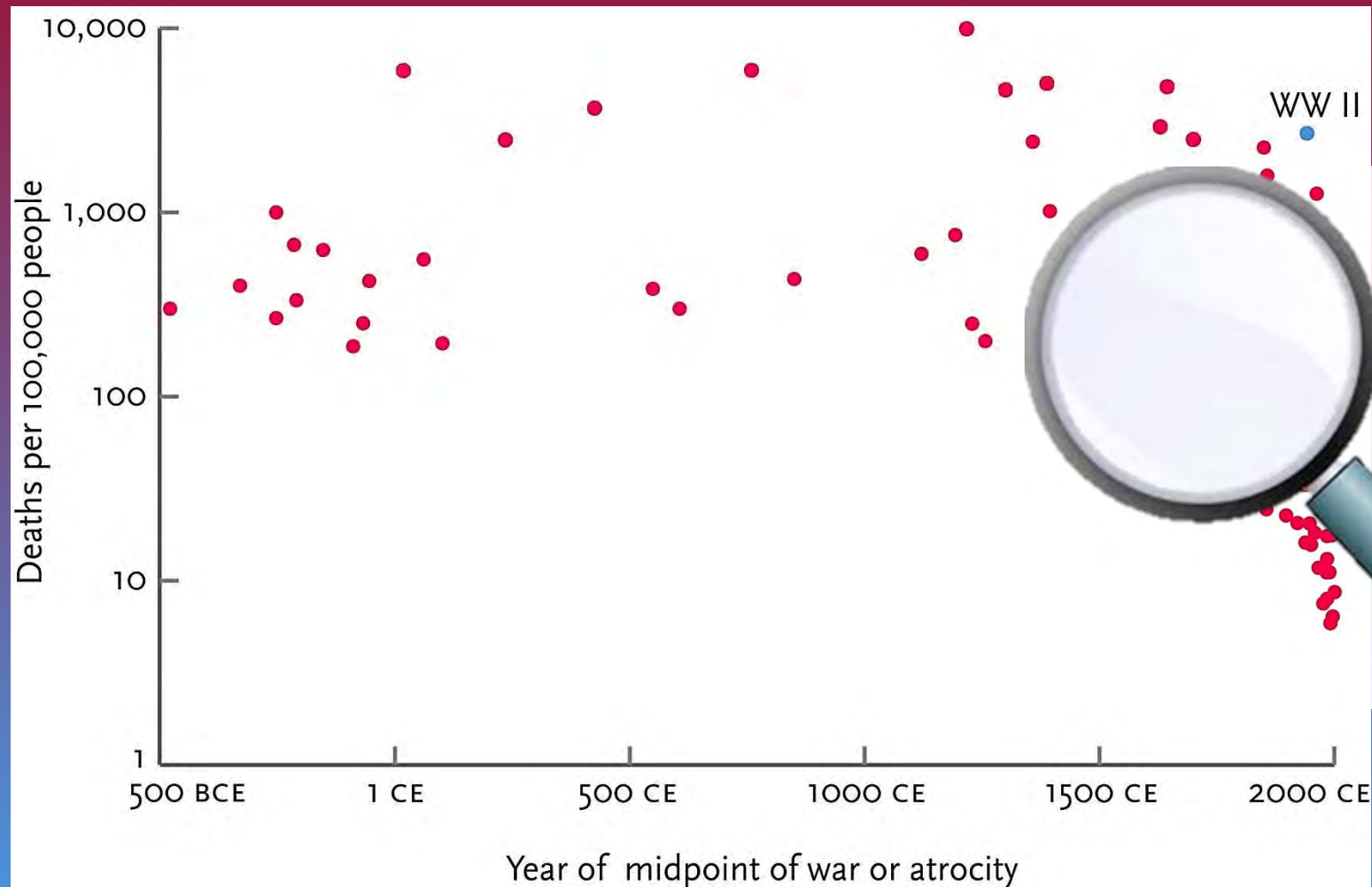
Was the 20th century really the most violent?

- 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)

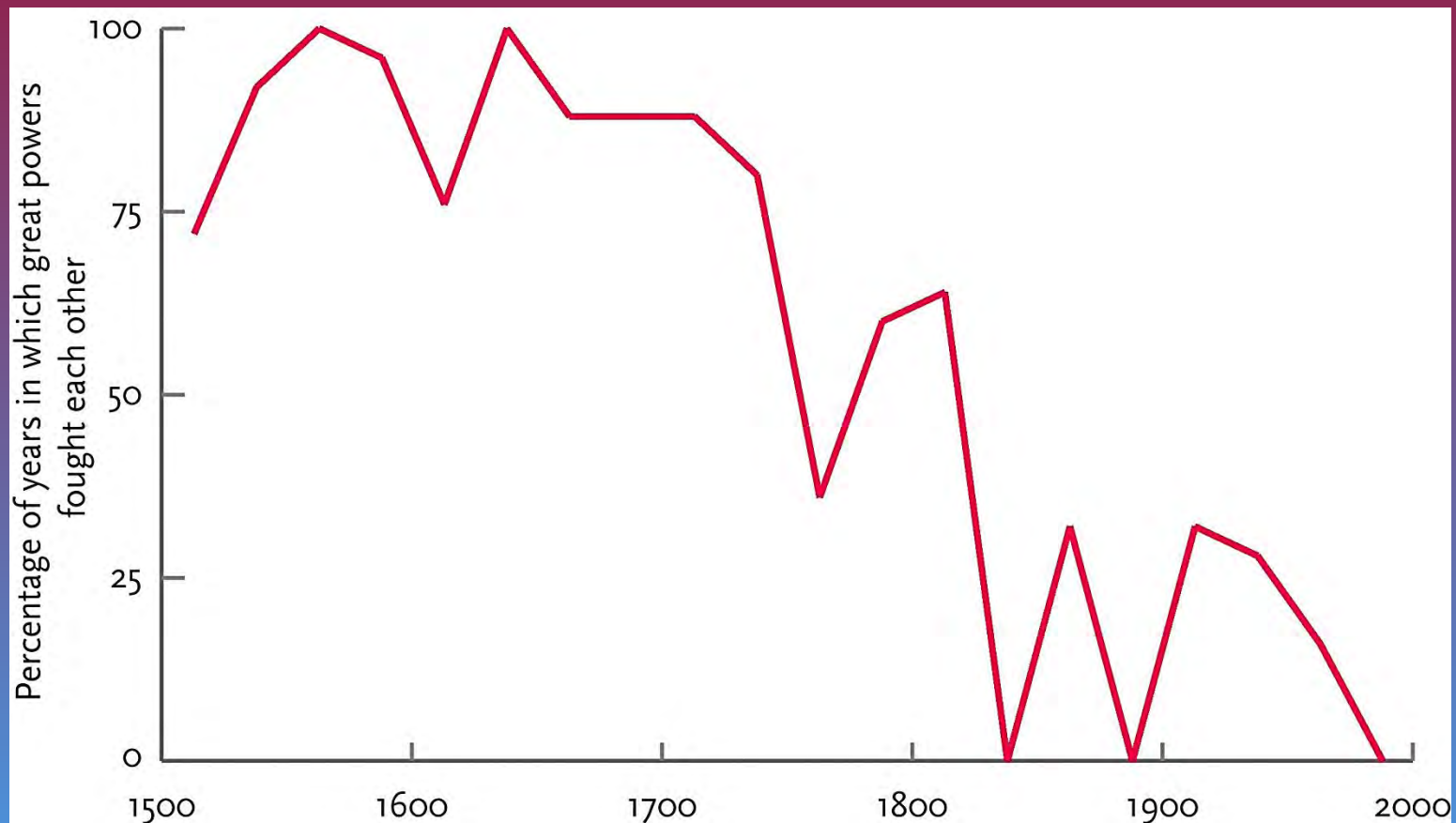
The 100 Worst Wars & Atrocities, 500 BCE – 2000 CE



Source: White, 2011

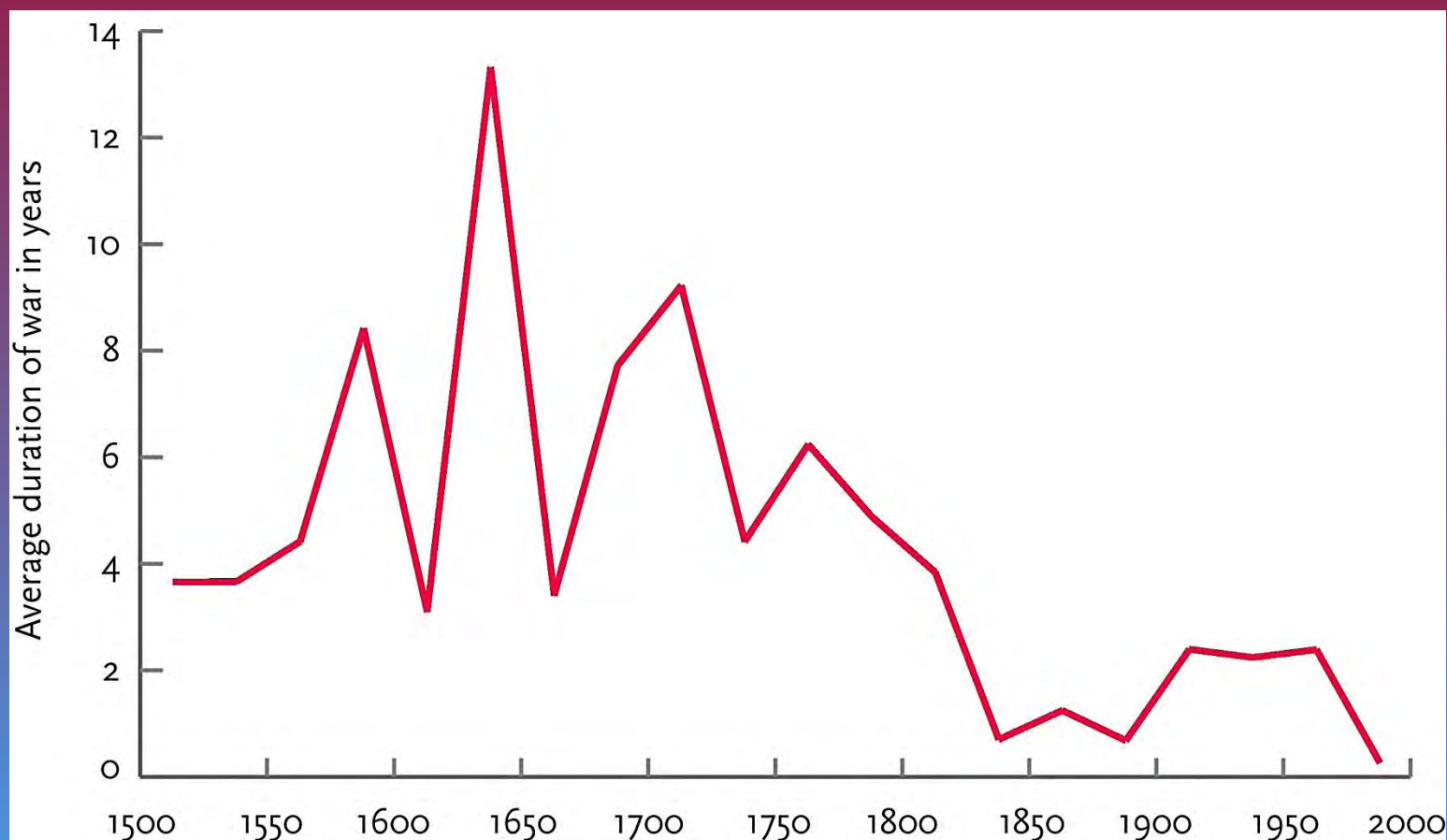
Trends in Great Power War,
1500-2000
(Jack Levy)

Proportion of Years Great Powers Fought Each Other, 1500-2000



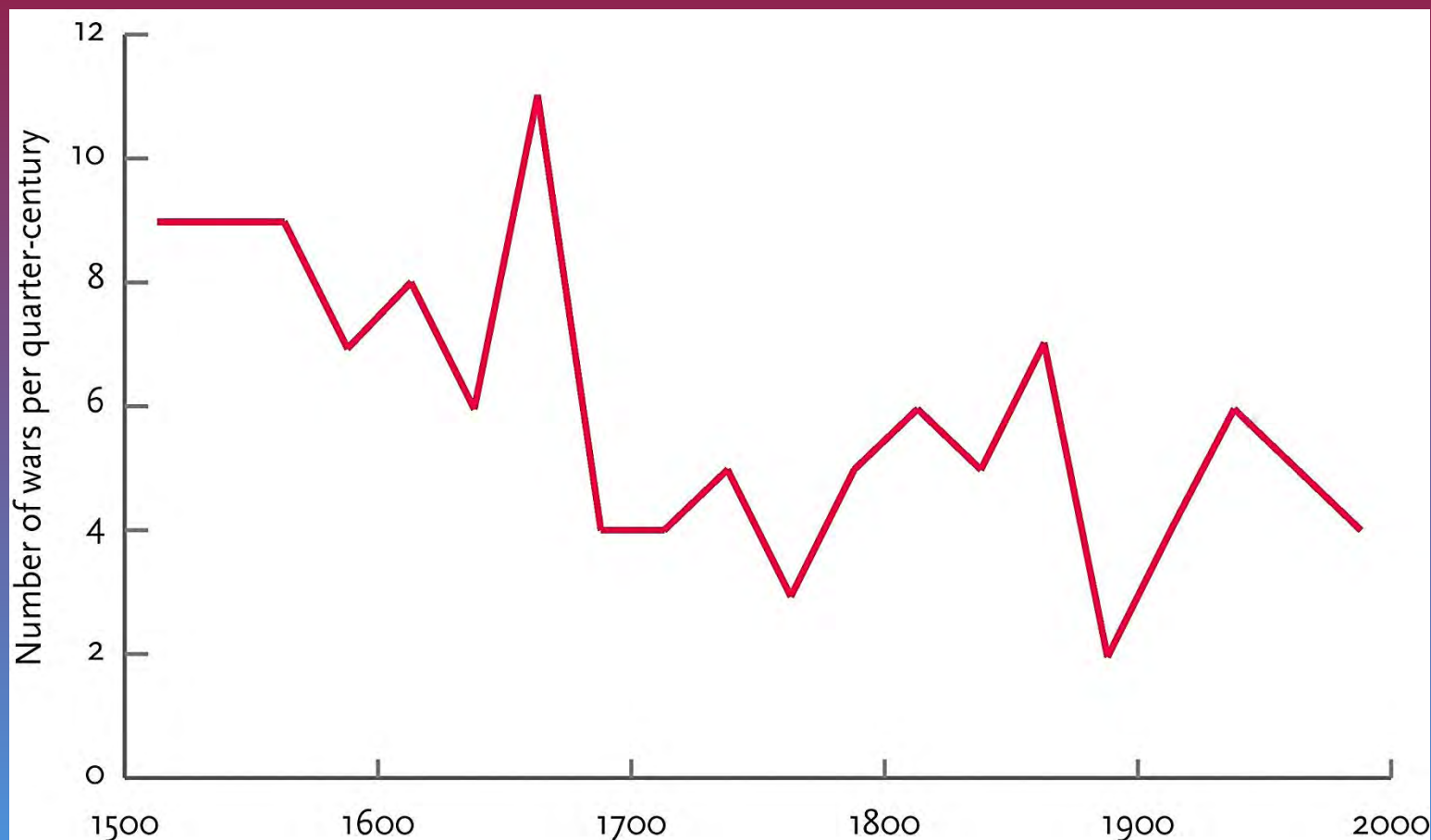
Source: Levy & Thompson, 2011

Duration of Wars Involving a Great Power, 1500-2000



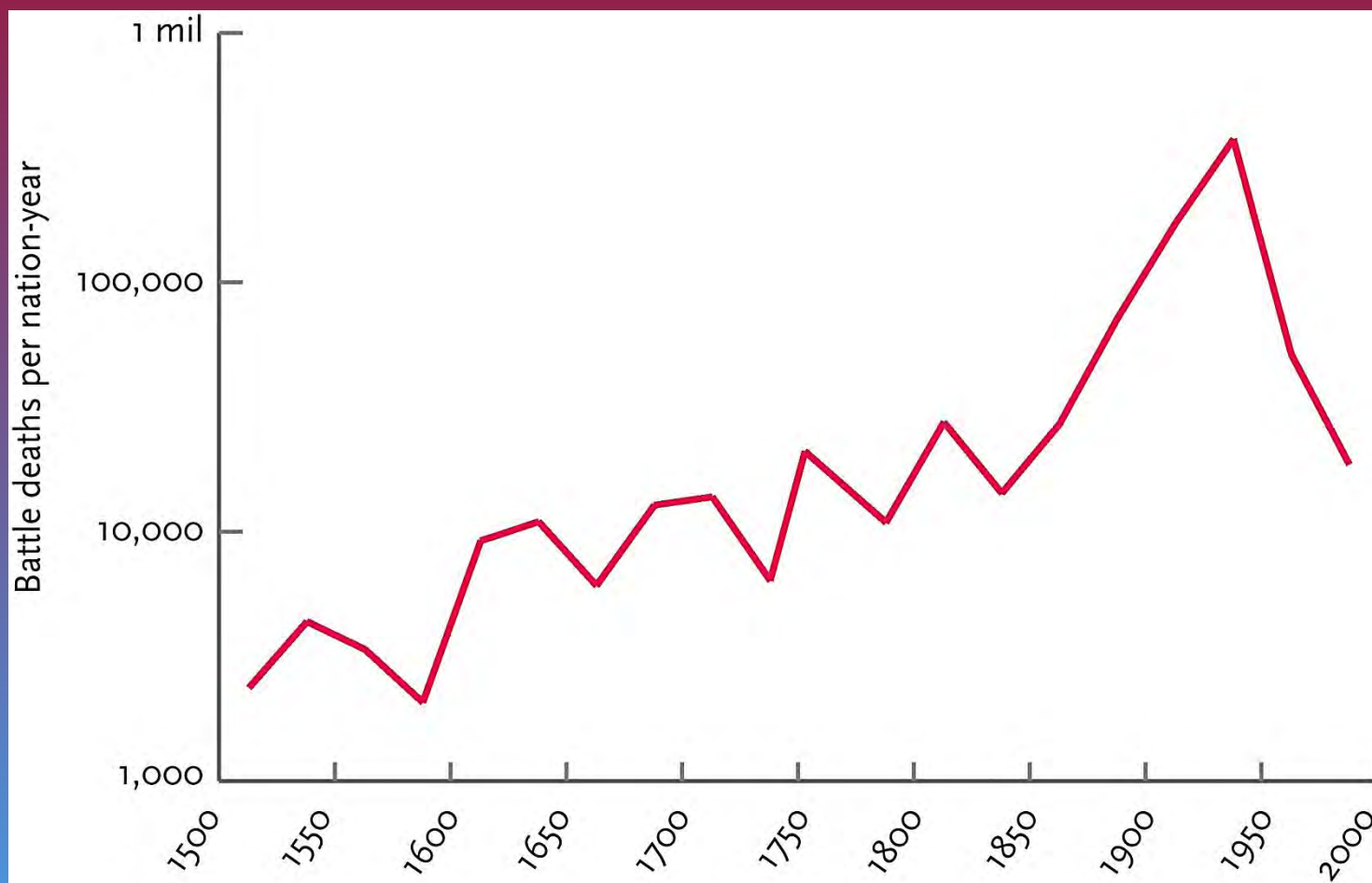
Sources: Levy, 1983; Correlates of War Project; PRIO

Frequency of Wars Involving a Great Power, 1500-2000



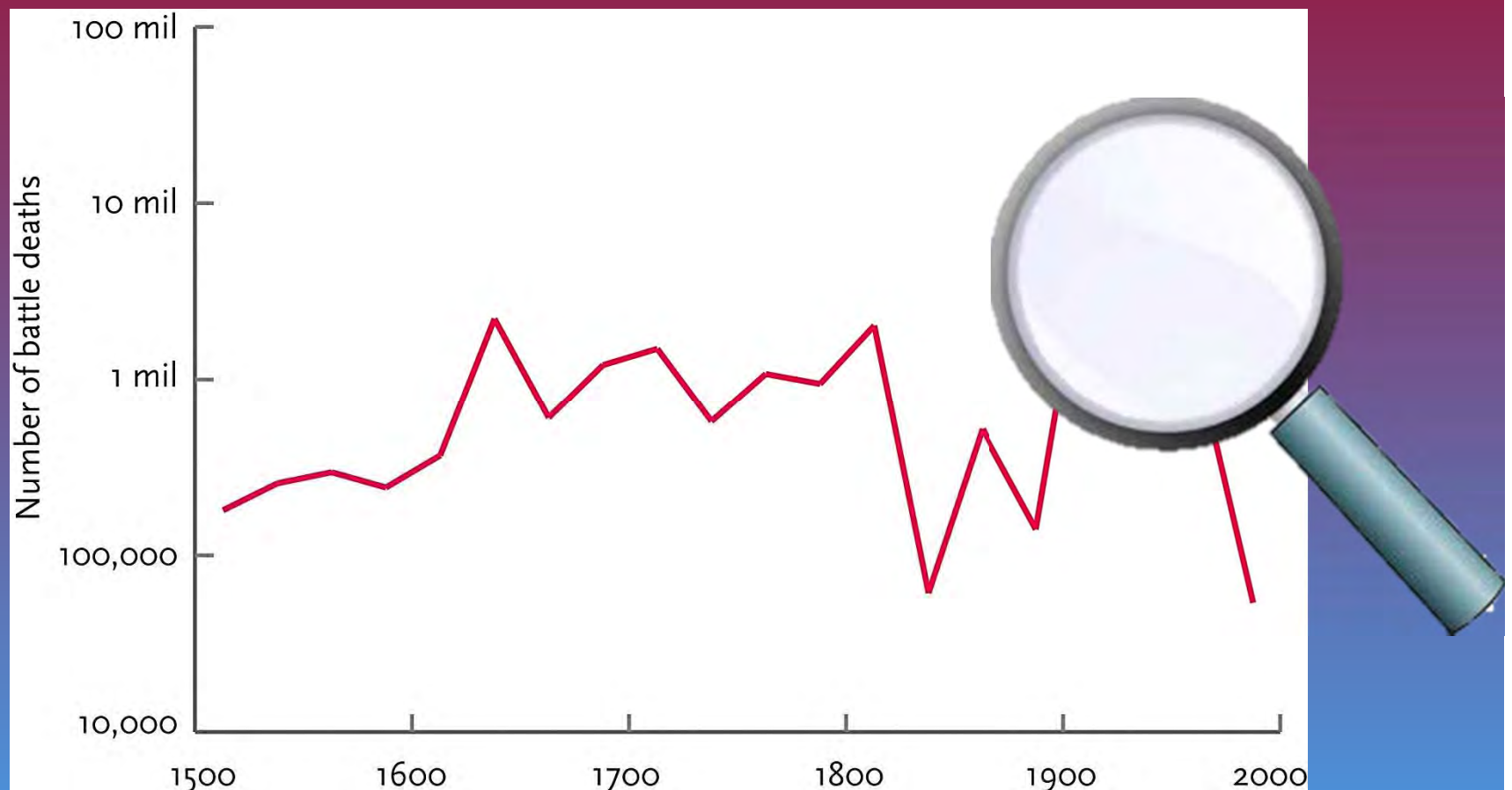
Sources: Levy, 1983; Correlates of War Project; PRIO

Deadliness of Wars Involving a Great Power, 1500-2000



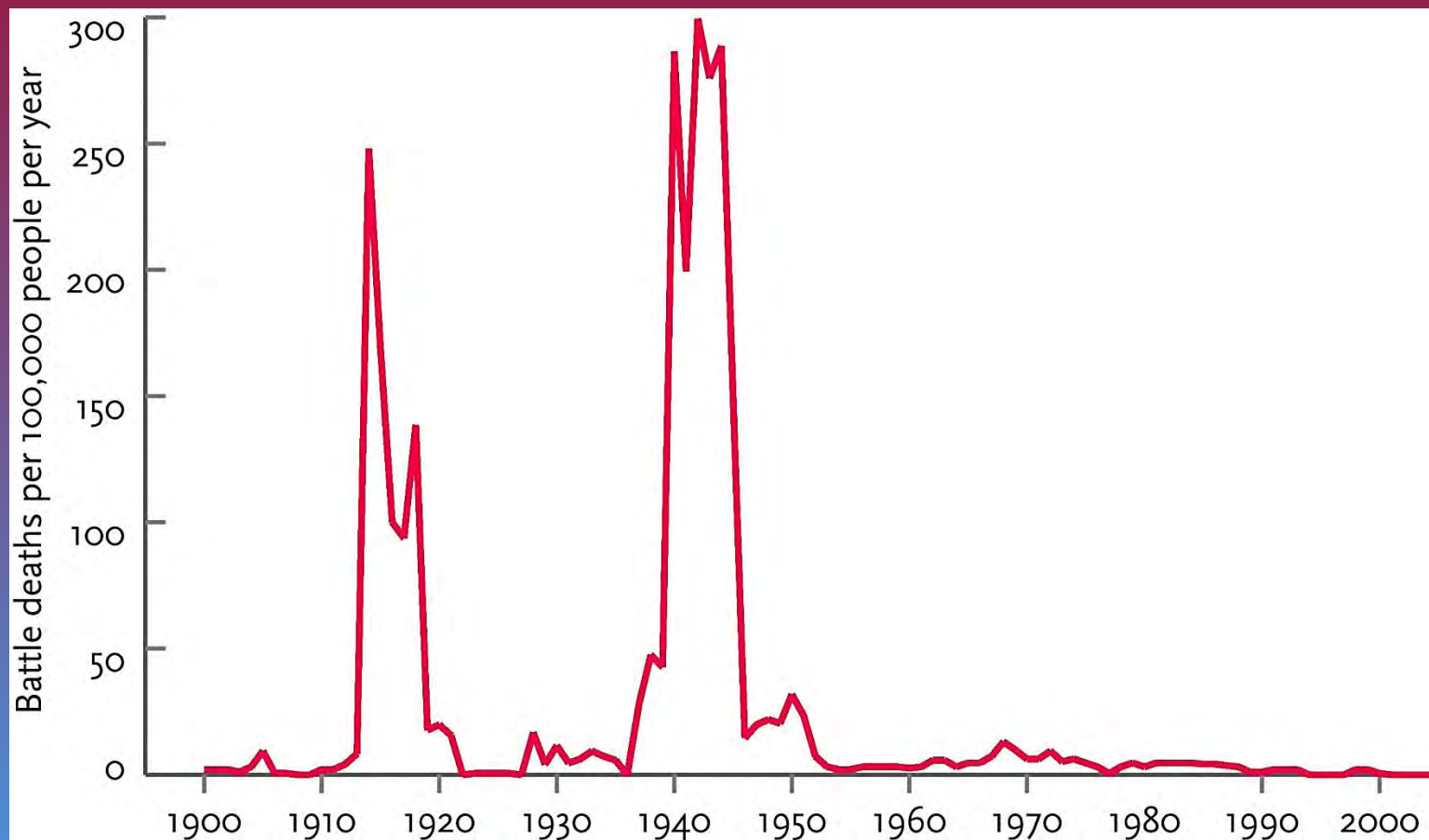
Sources: Levy, 1983; Correlates of War Project; PRIO

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

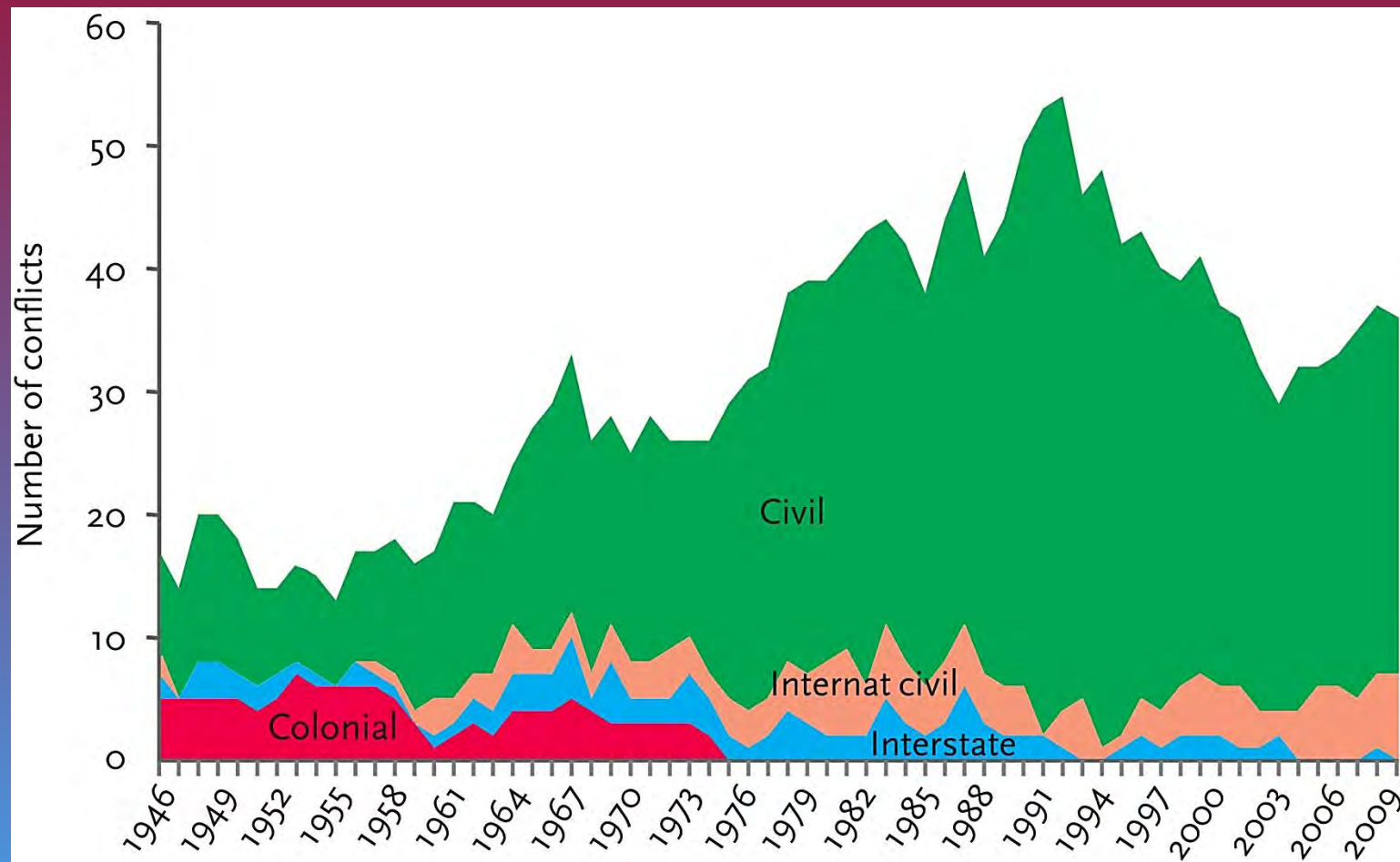
- What about the rest of the world?



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

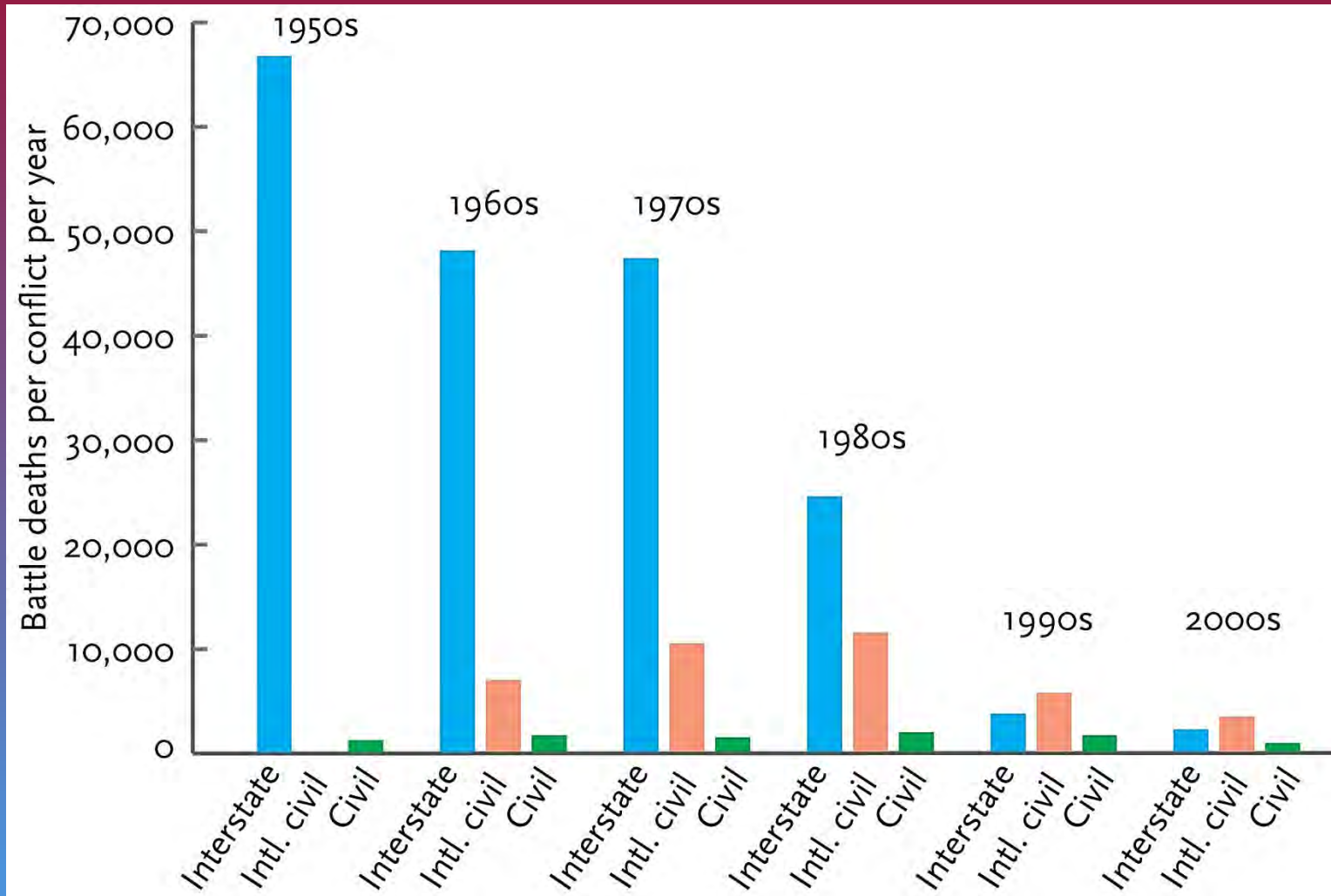
Number of Wars, 1946-2008



Source: UCDP/PRIO; Human Security Report Project

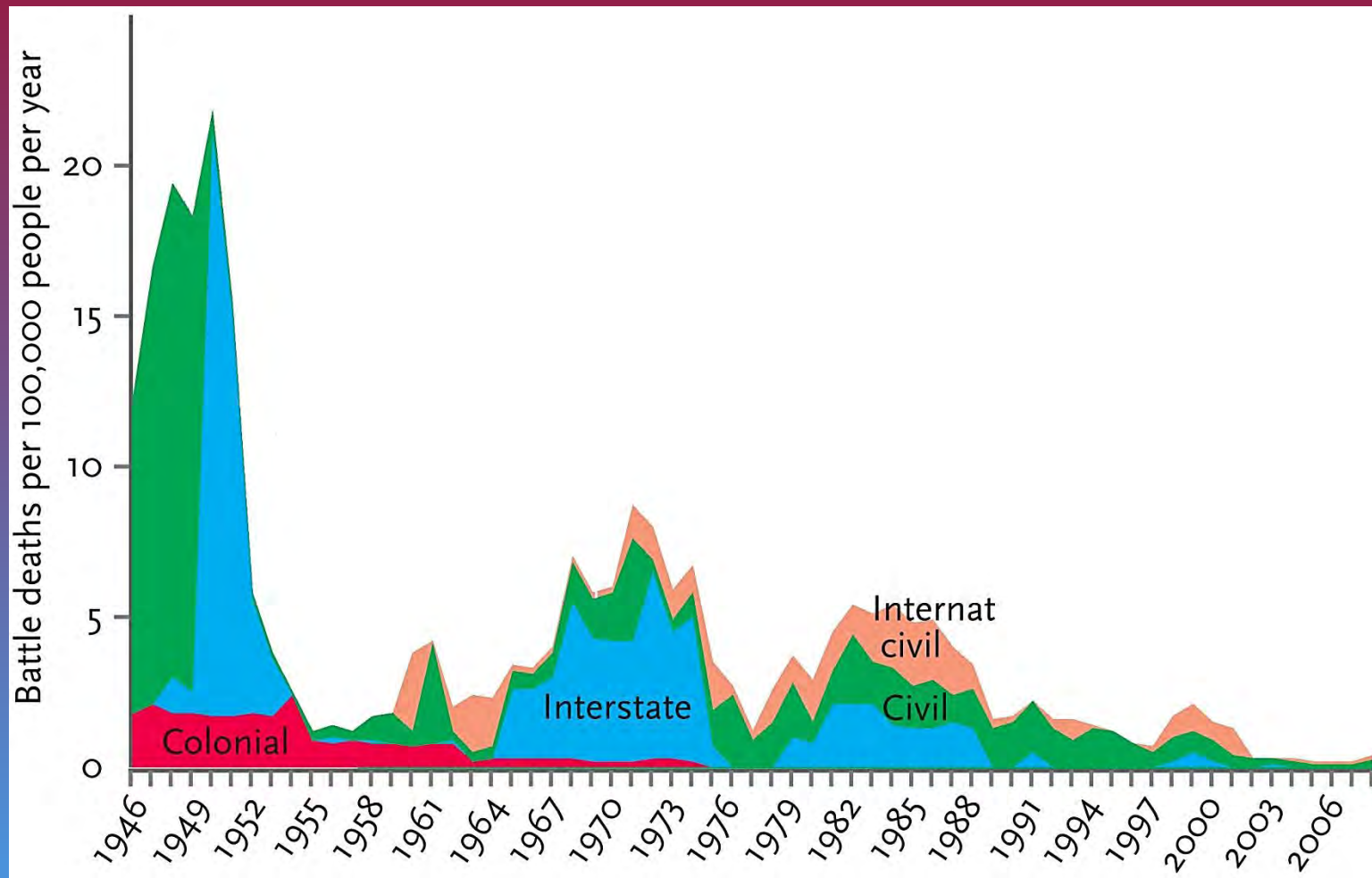
But which wars kill more
people?

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?”

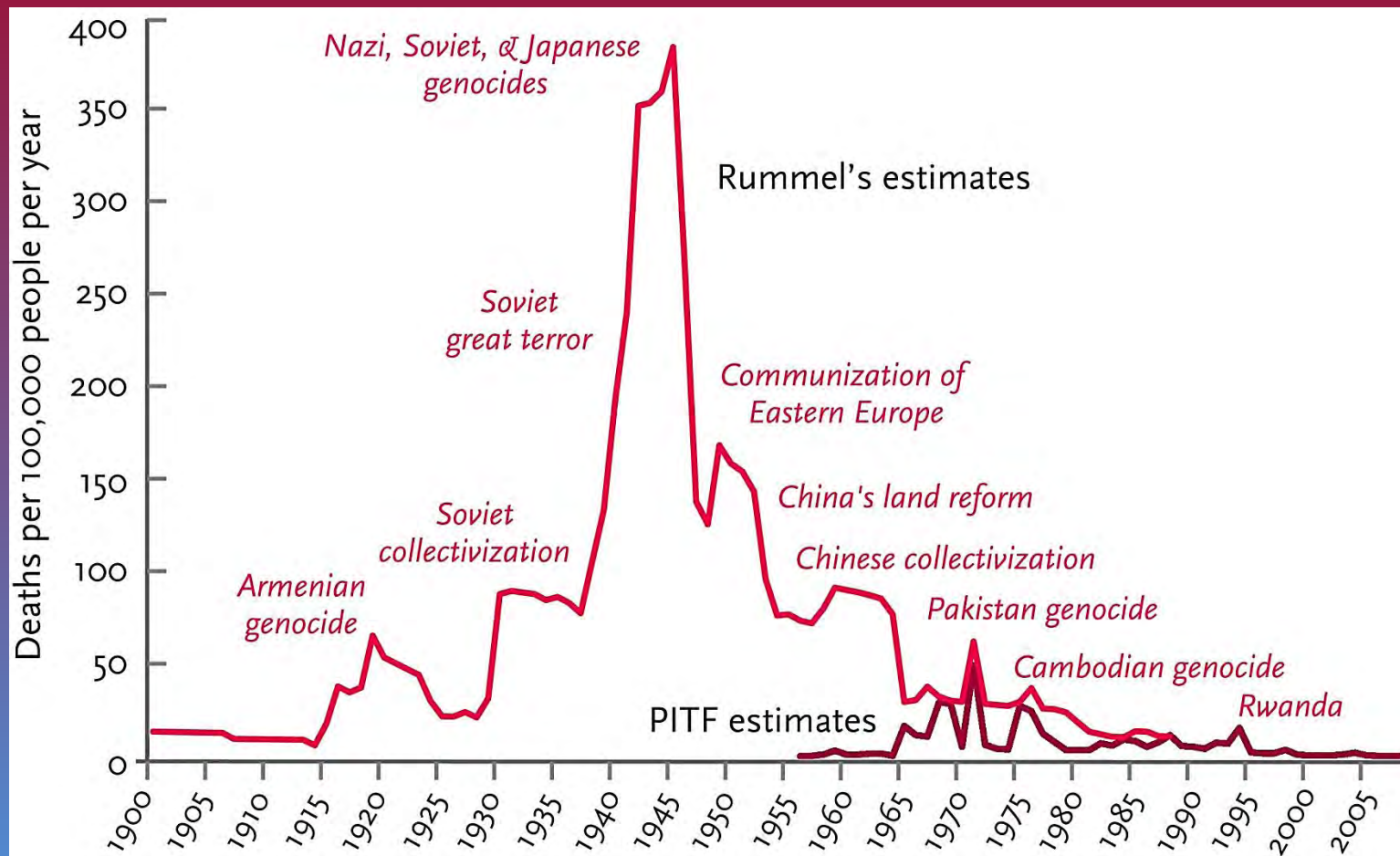
- Chalk & Jonassohn, *The History of Genocide*:
 - “Genocide has been practiced in *all regions of the world* and during *all periods in history*... We know that [in ancient times] empires have disappeared and that cities were destroyed...but we do not know what happened to the bulk of the populations 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

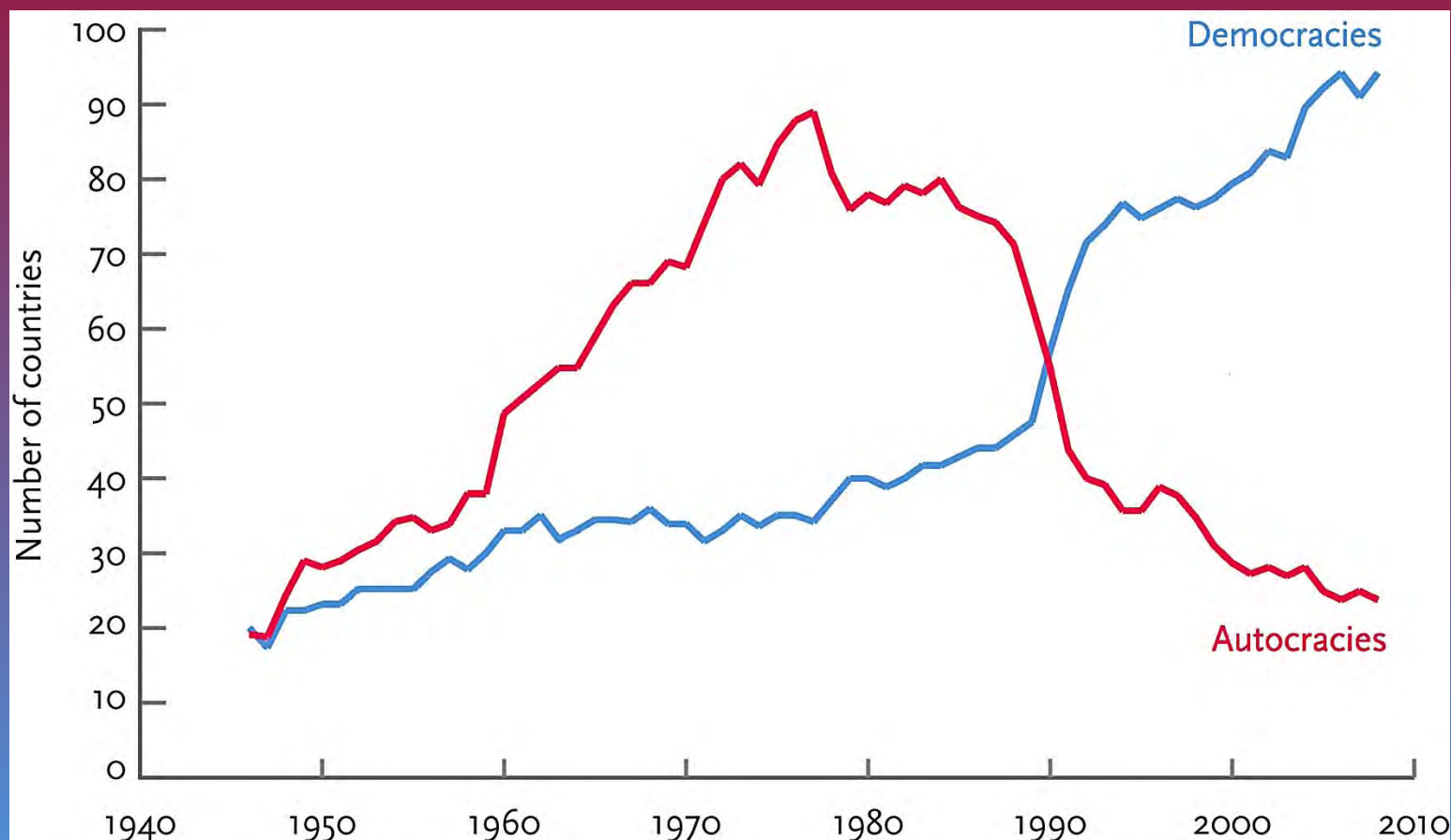


Sources: Rummel, 1997; Political Instability Task Force, Marshall, Gurr, & Harff, 2009

Immediate causes of the Long Peace & the New Peace

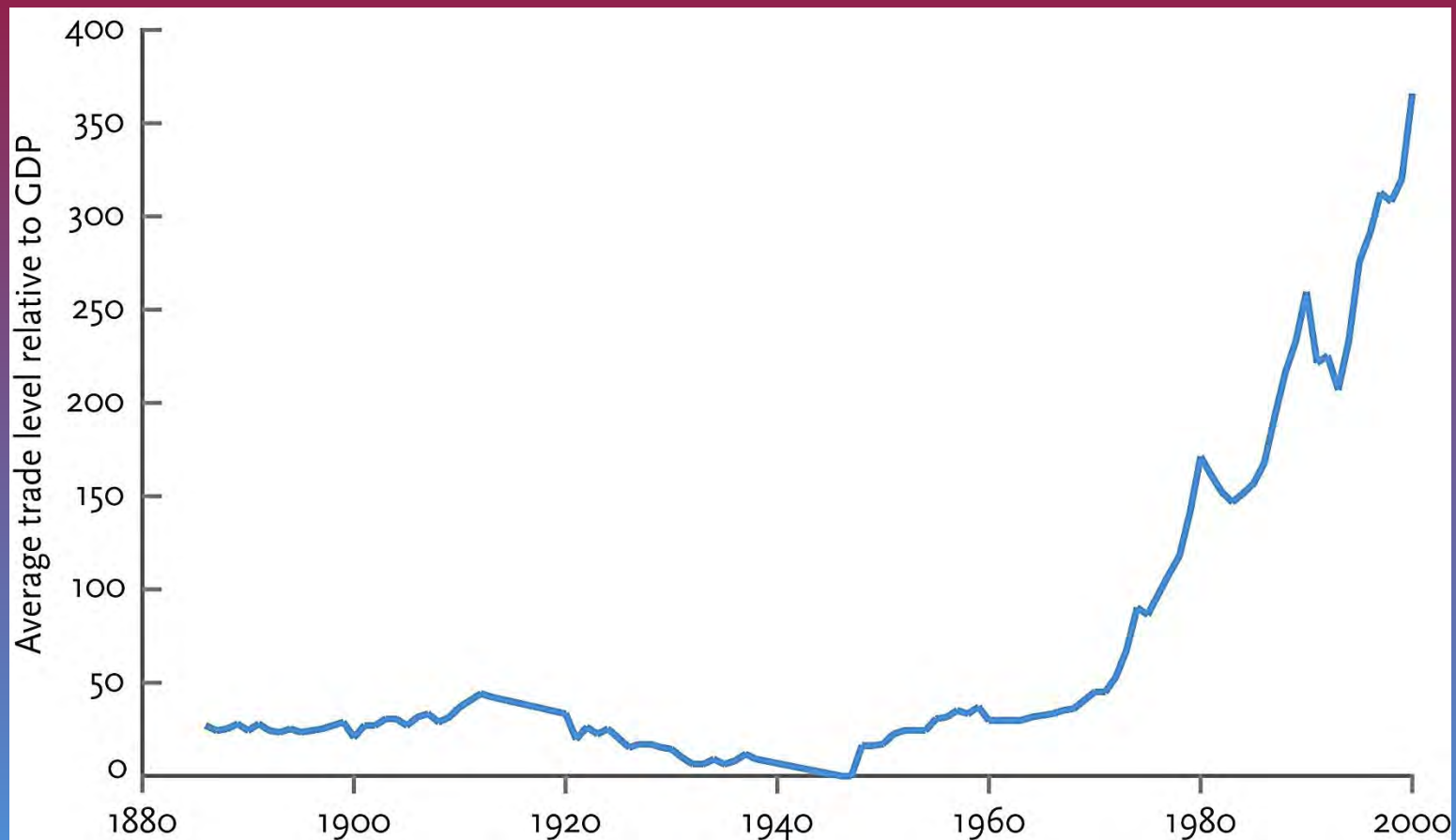
- Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 1795
 - Democracy
 - Trade
 - International community
- Bruce Russett & John O'Neal:
 - All have increased in the 2nd half of the 20th
 - All are statistical predictors of peace

Democracies & Autocracies, 1946-2008



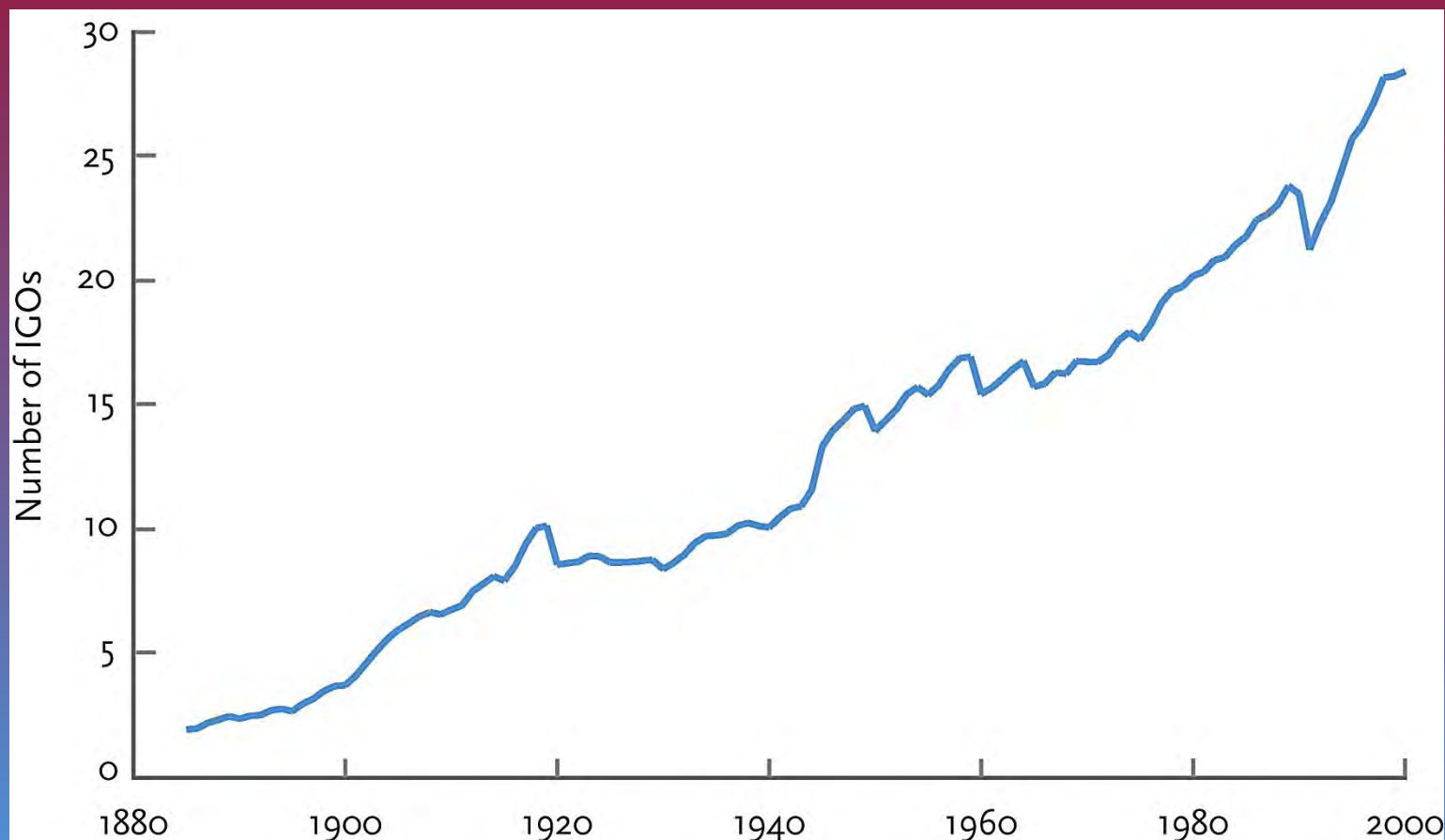
Source: Marshall & Cole, 2009

International Trade, 1885-2000



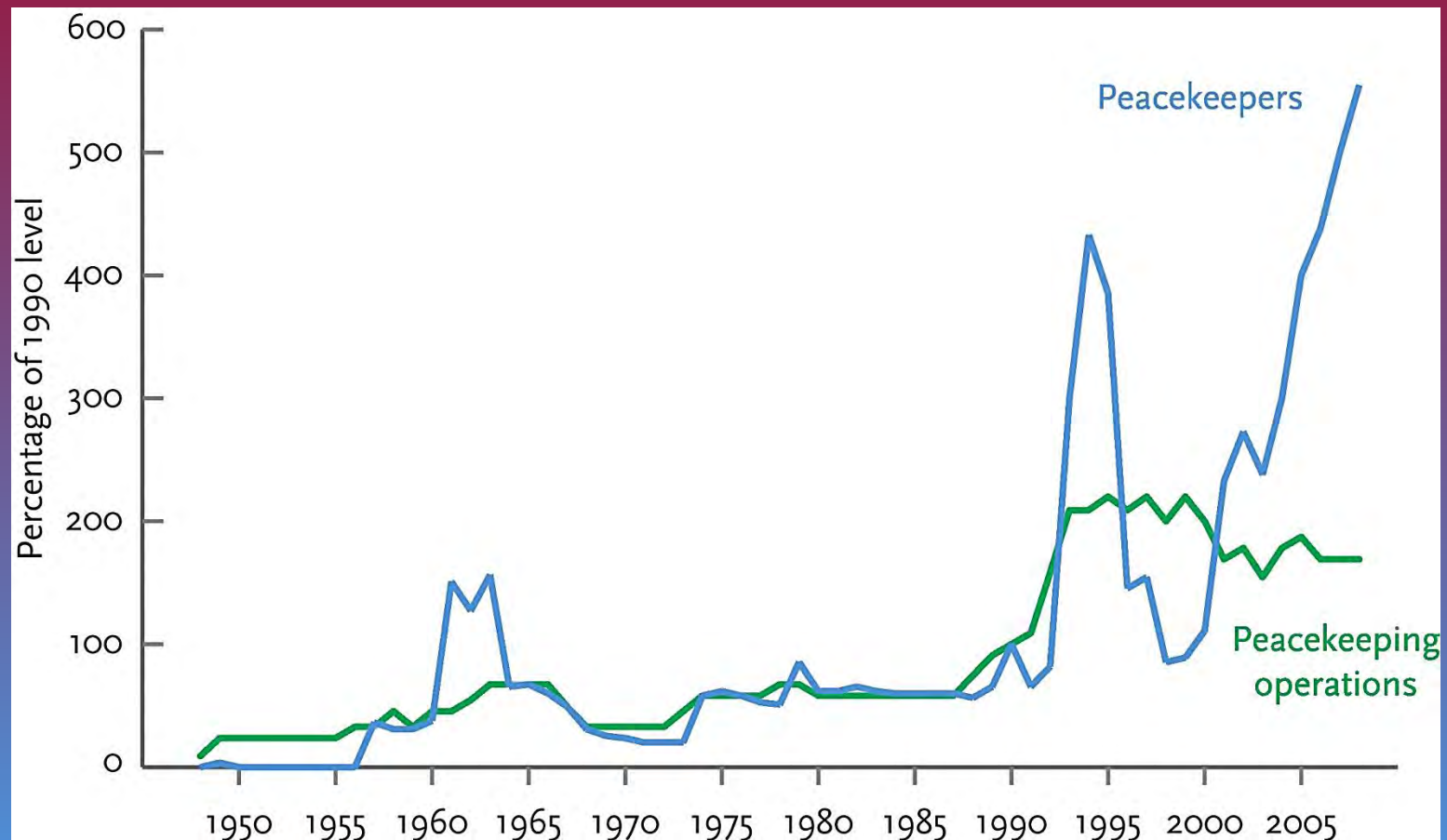
Source: Russett, 2008; Gleditsch, 2002

Membership in Intergovernmental Organizations, 1885-2000



Source: Russett, 2008

International Peacekeeping, 1948-2008



Source: Gleditsch, 2008

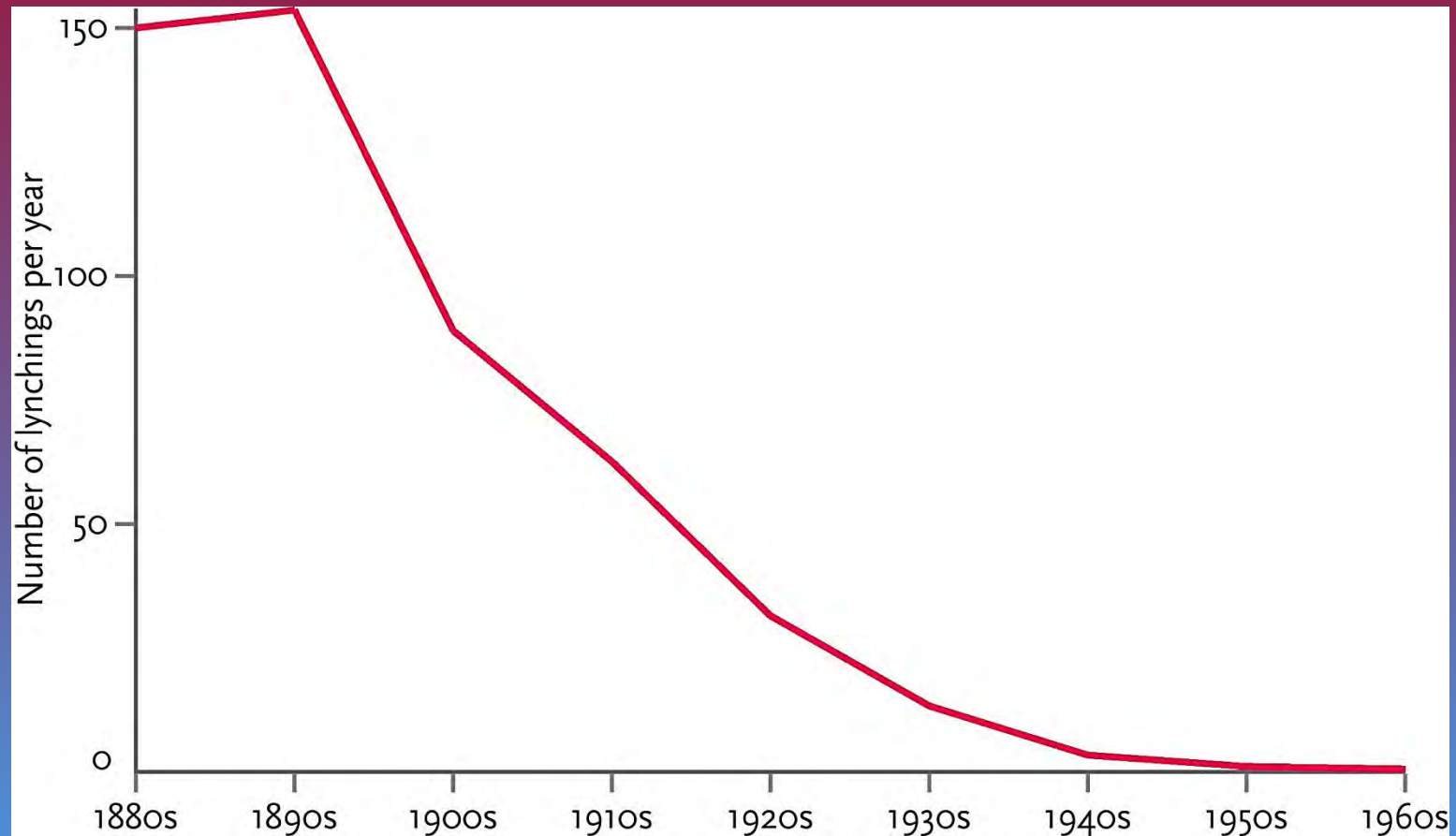
6. The Rights Revolutions





Civil Rights

Lynchings, 1880-1960



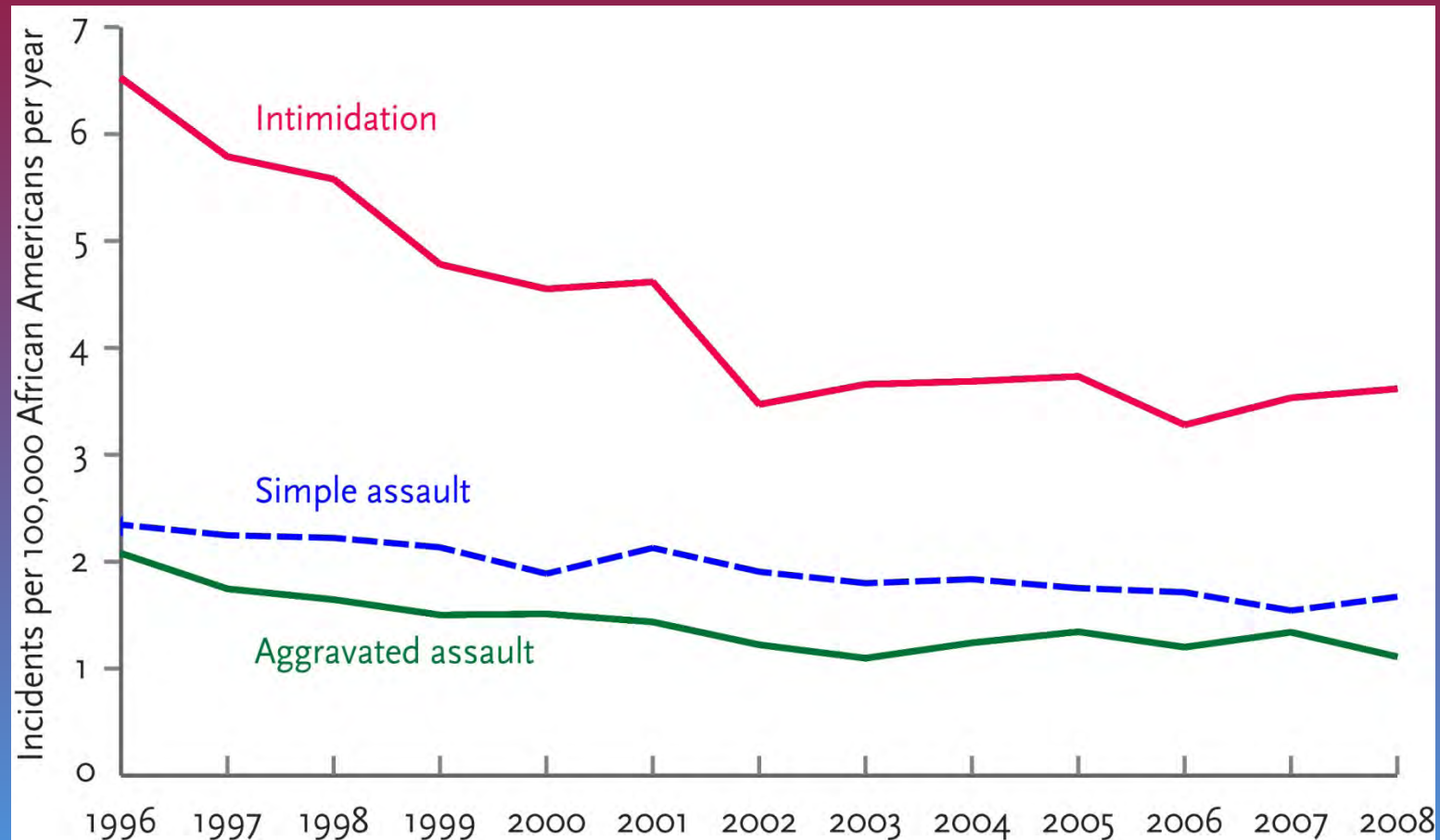
Source: Payne, 2004

Hate Crime Murders of Blacks, 1996-2008



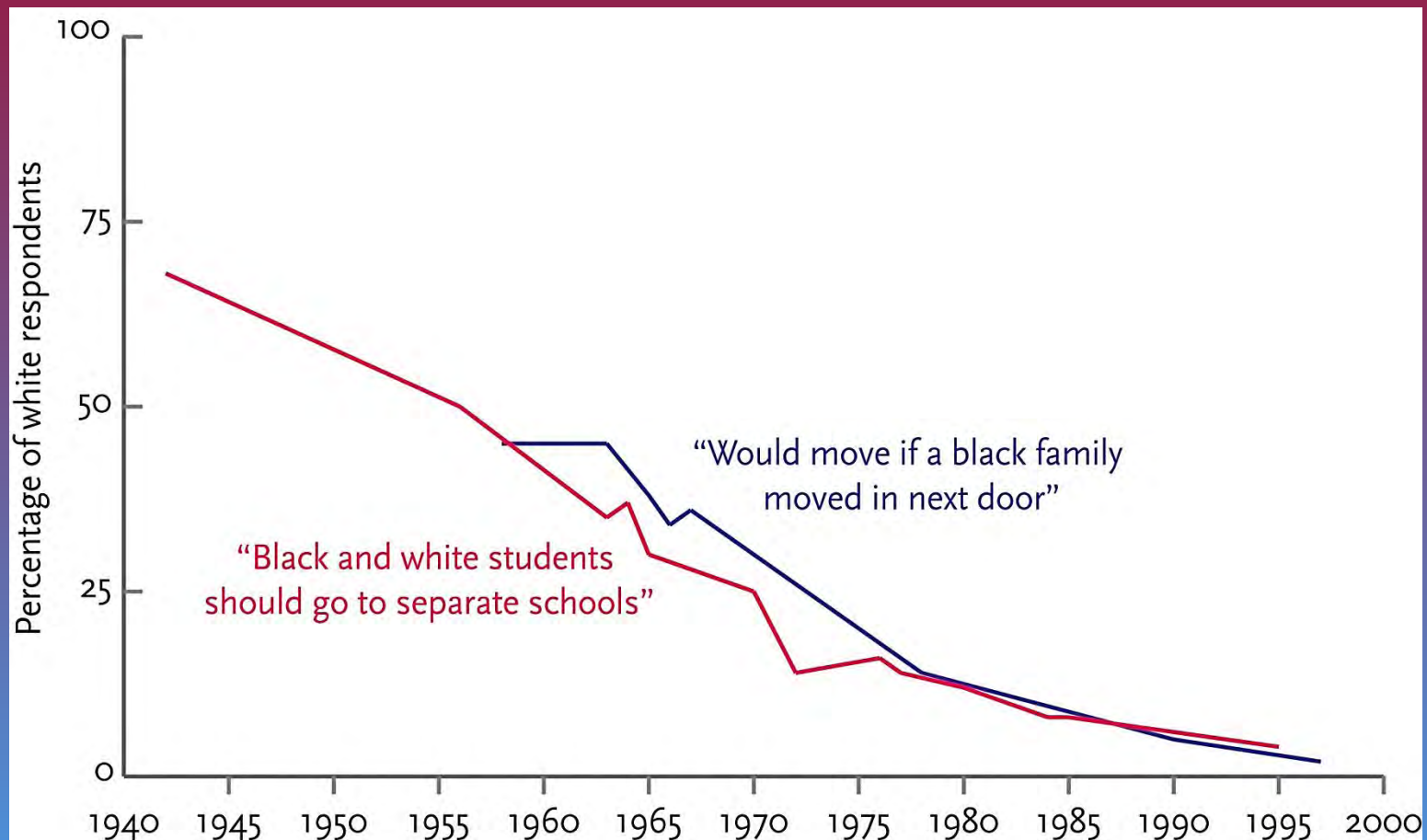
Source: FBI

Nonlethal Hate Crimes Against Blacks, 1996-2008



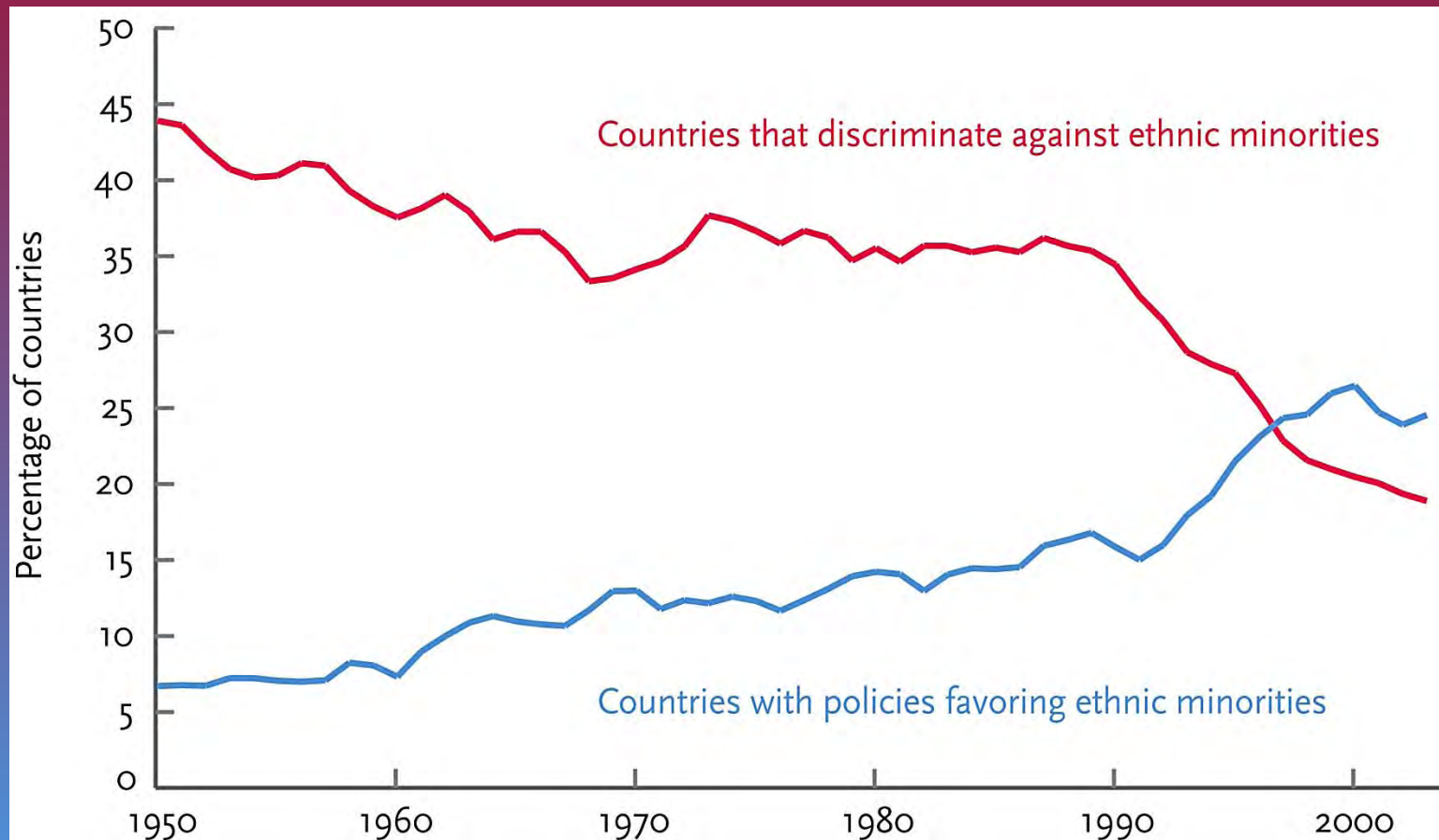
Source: FBI

Whites' hostility to blacks, 1942-1997



Source: Gallup & NORC; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1997

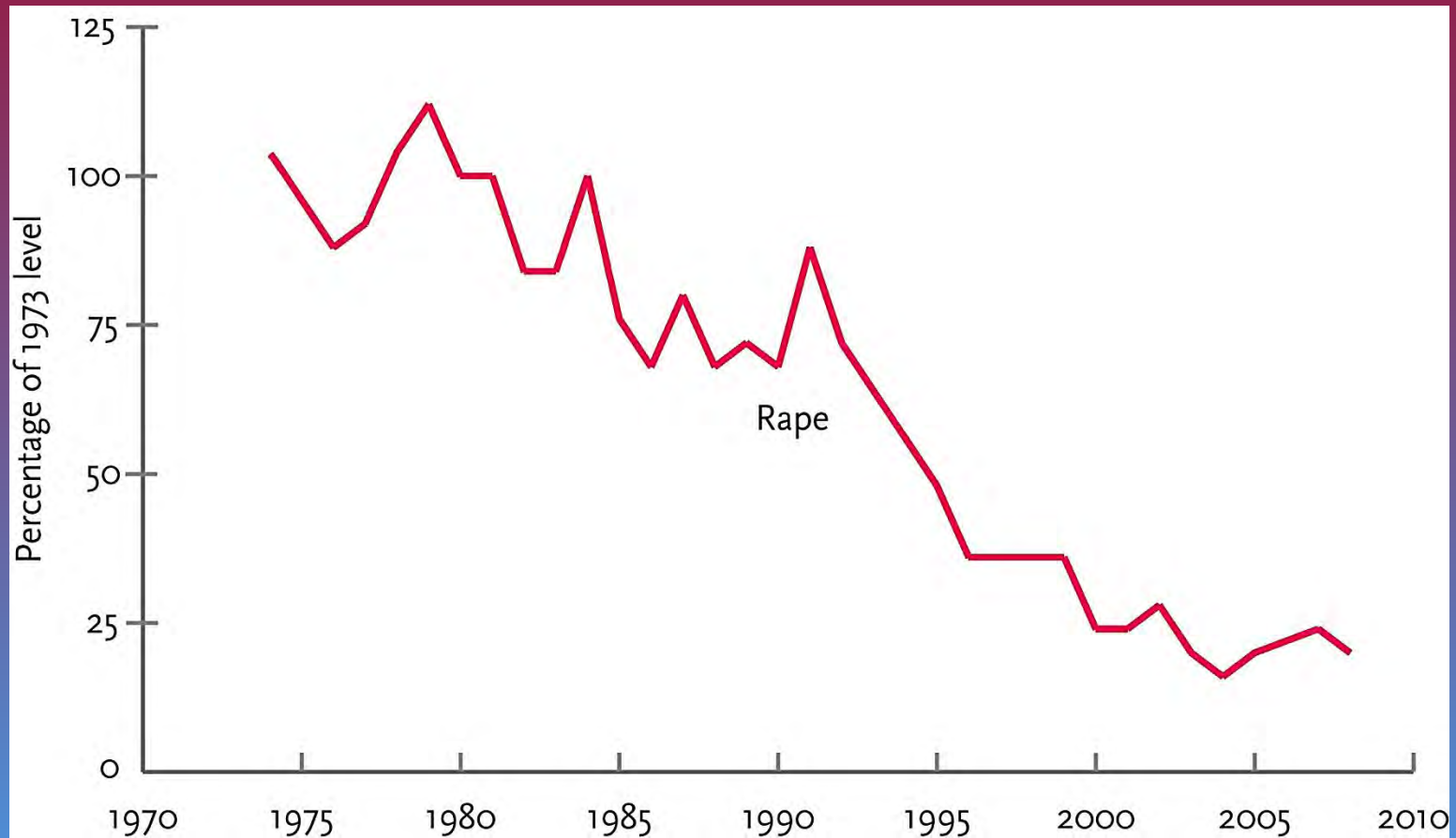
Discrimination Against Minorities, 1950-2003



Source: Asal & Pate, 2005

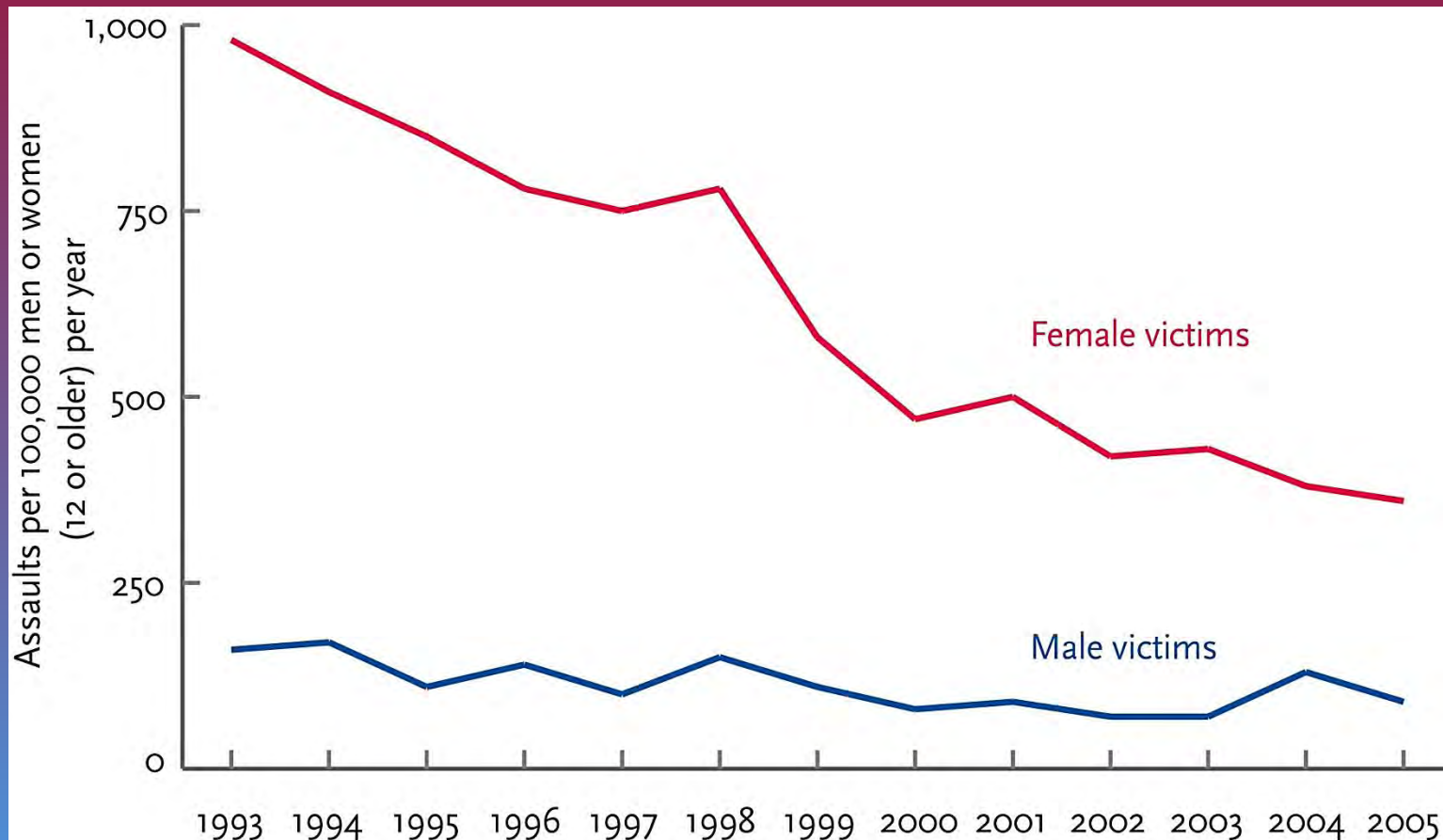
Women's Rights

Rape, 1973-2008



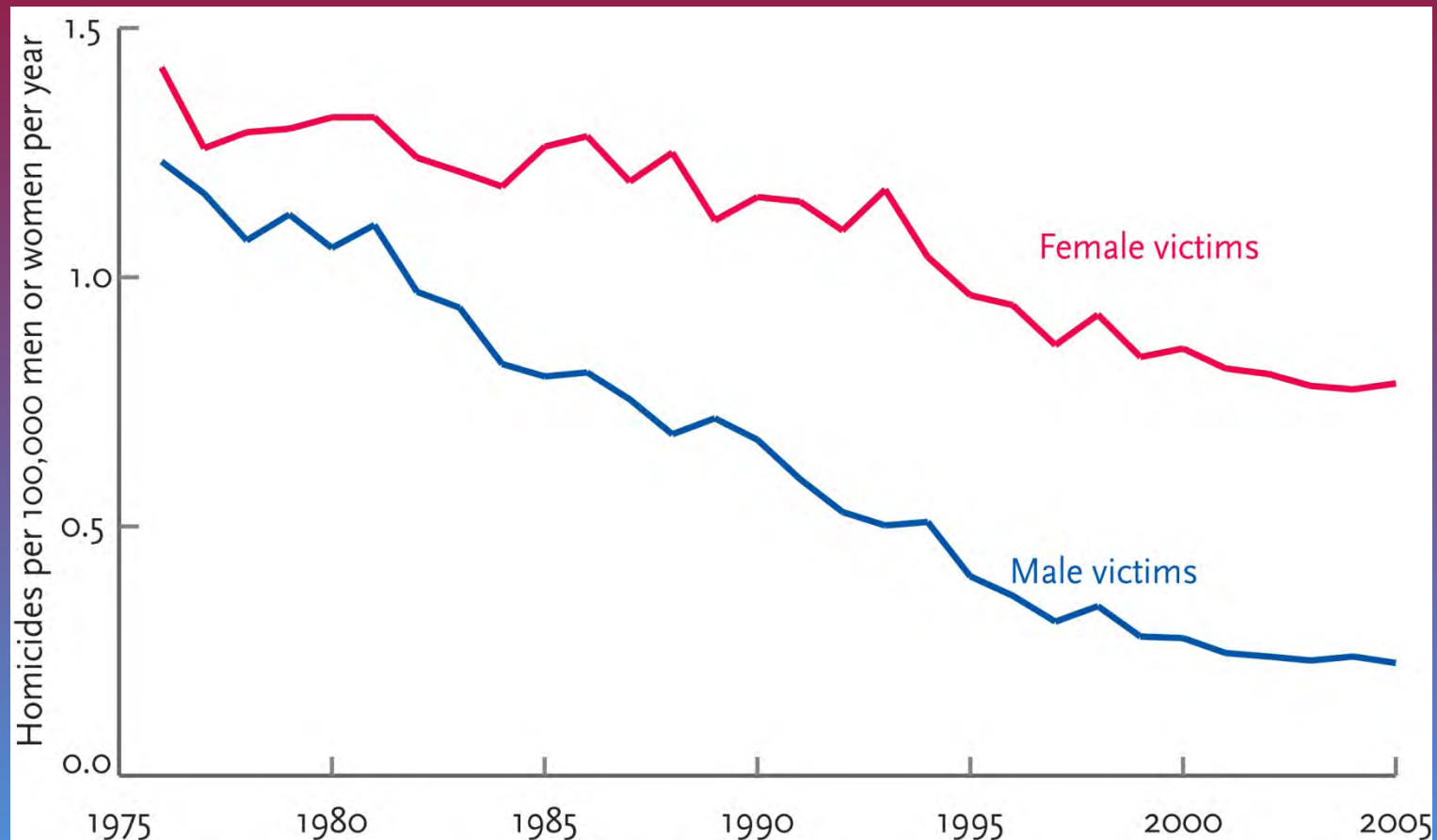
Source: FBI National Crime Victimization Survey

Domestic violence, 1993-2005



Source: US Bureau of Justice Statistics

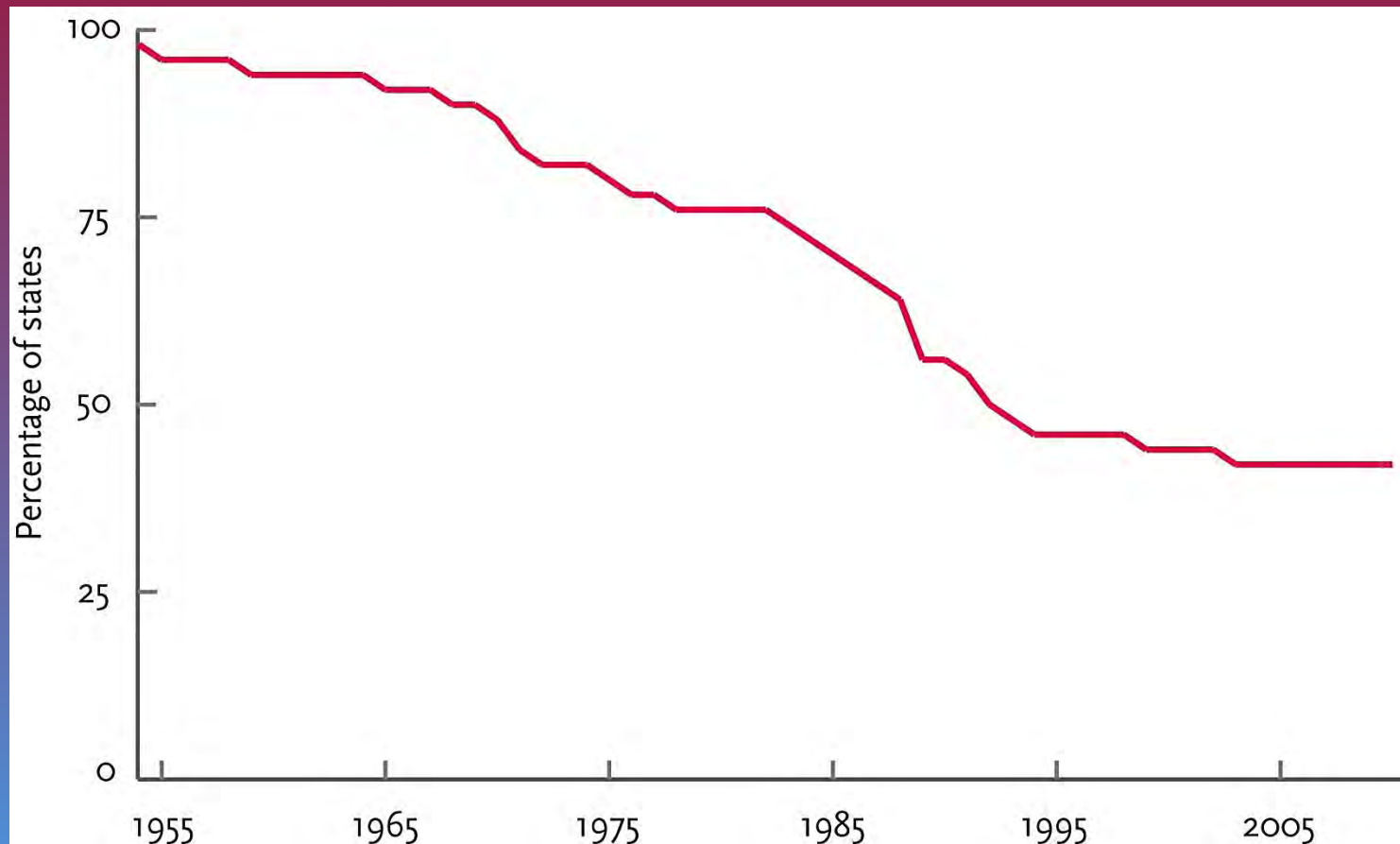
Uxoricide & Mariticide, 1976-2005



Source: US Bureau of Justice Statistics

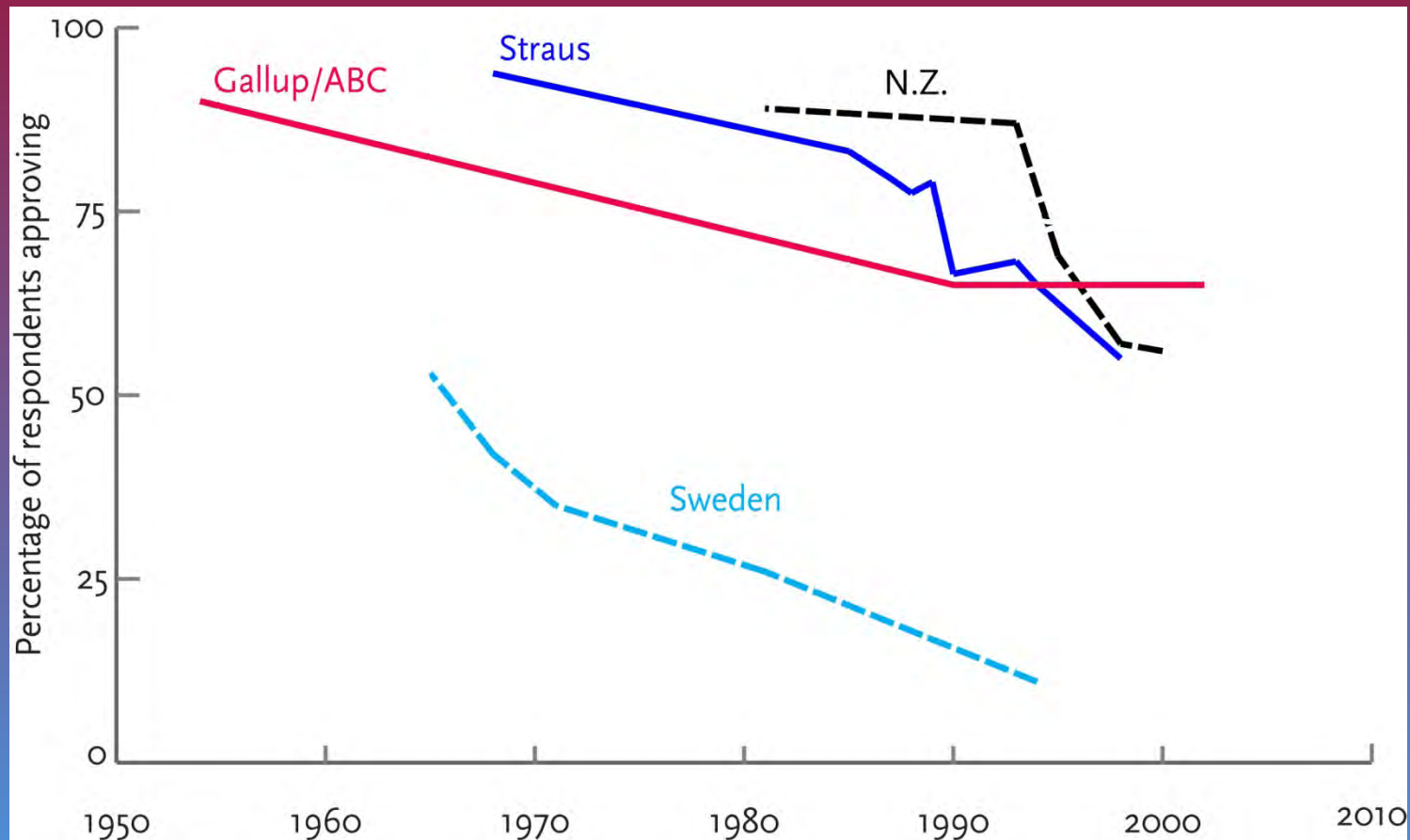
Children's rights

US States with Corporal Punishment, 1954-2010



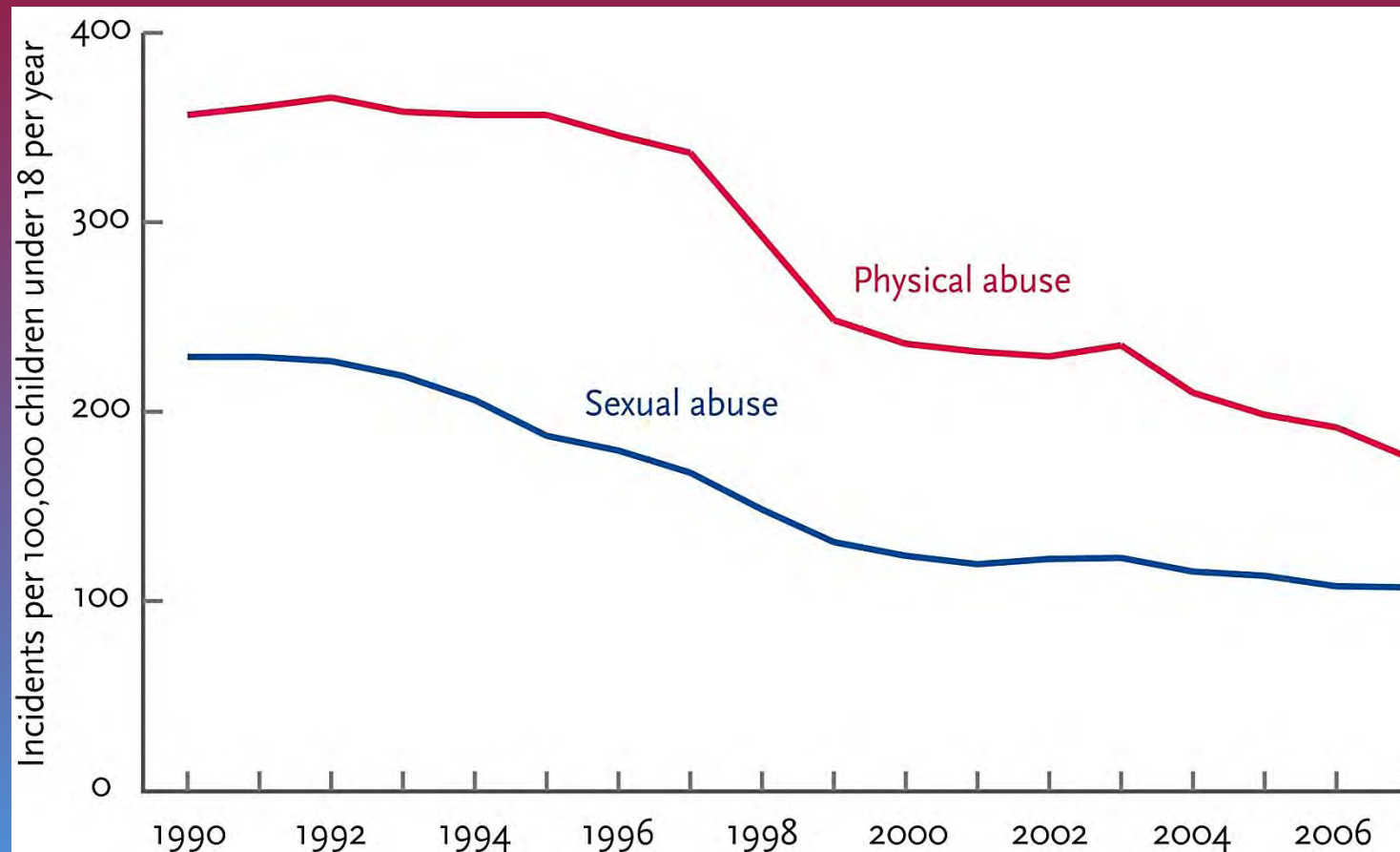
Source: Leiter, 2007

Approval of Spanking, 1954-2008



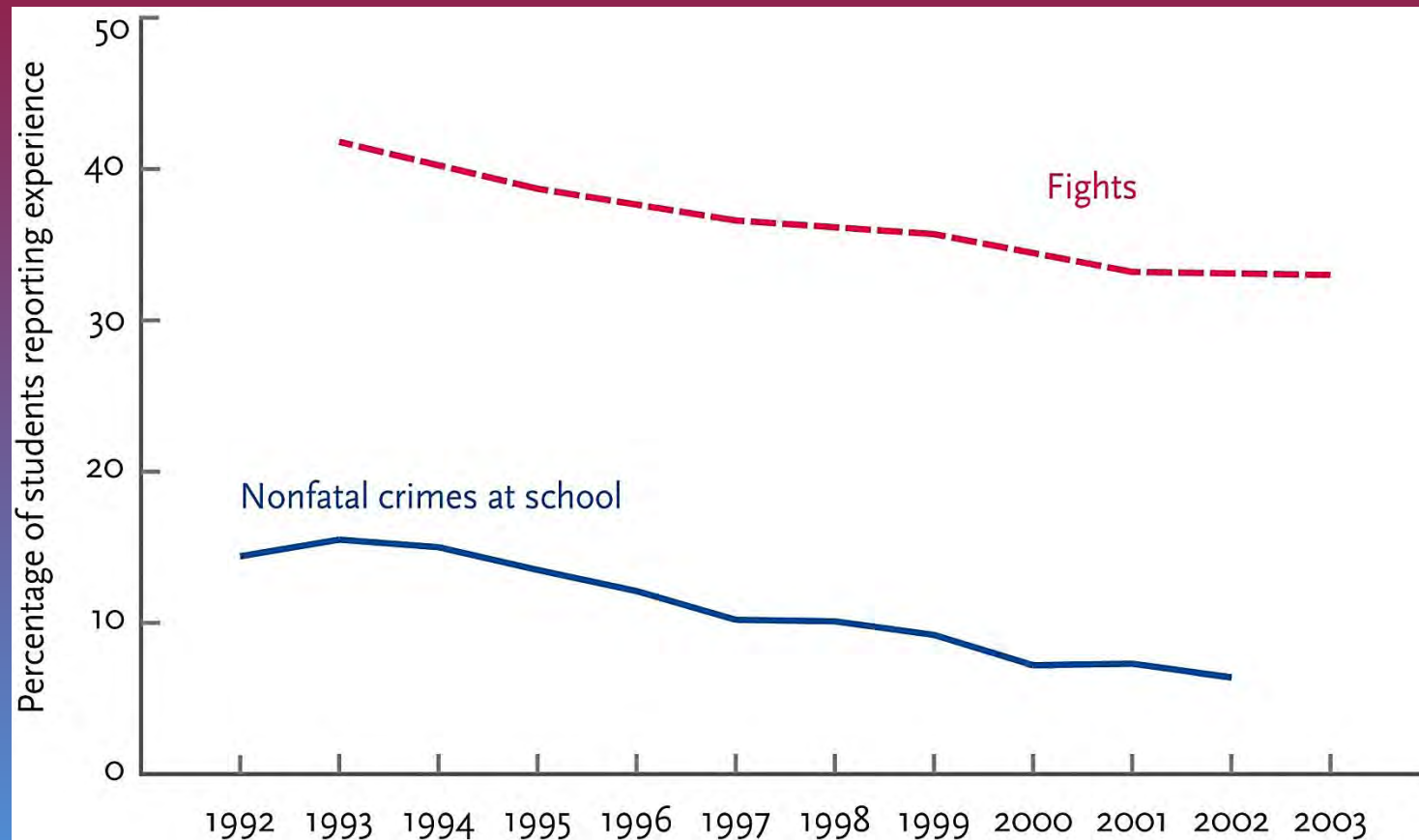
Sources: Gallup, 1999; ABC News, 2002; Straus, 2001, 2009; Carswell, 2001

Child Abuse, 1990-2006



Sources: Jones & Finkelhor, 2007; Finkelhor & Jones, 2006

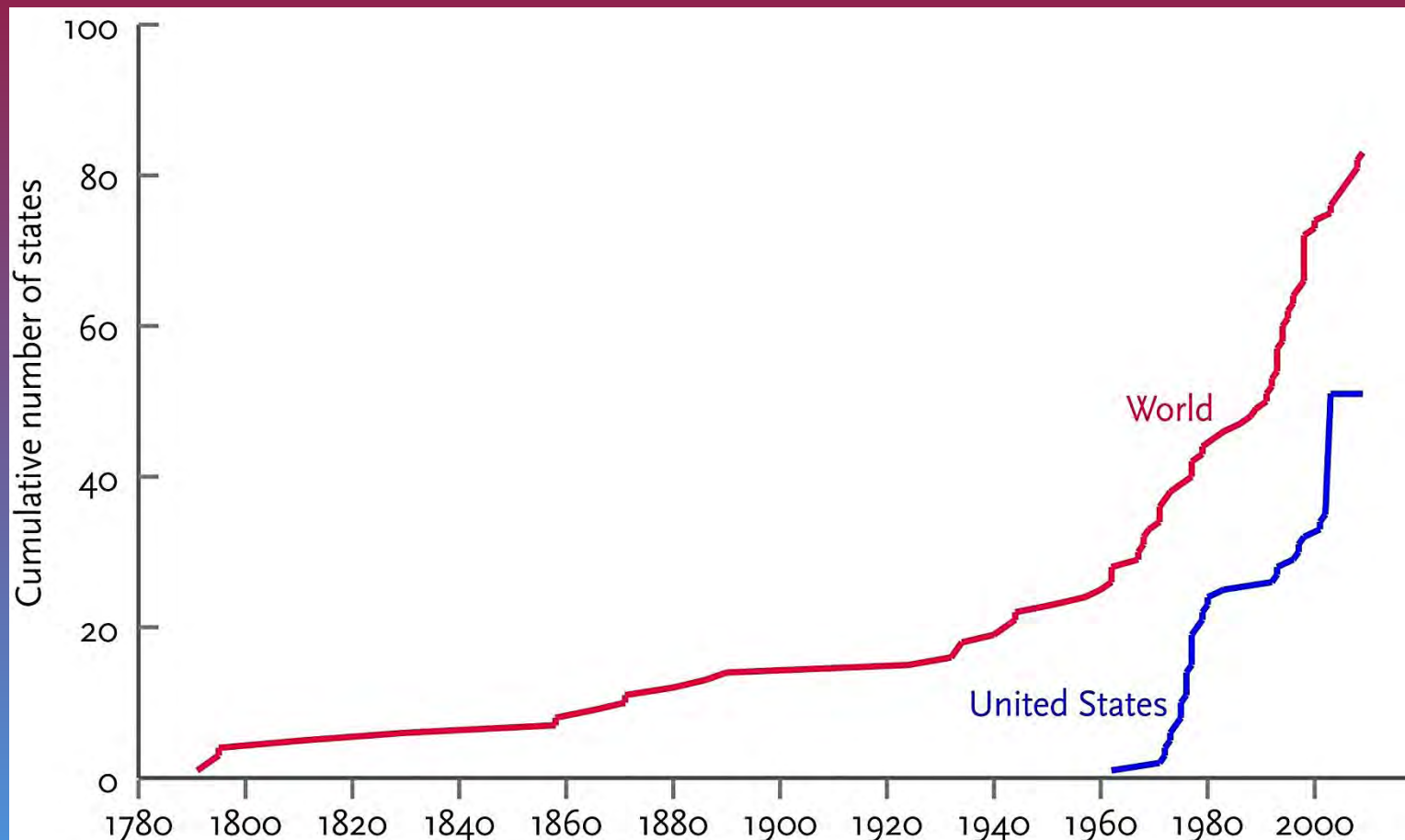
School Violence, 1992-2003



Source: DeVoe et al., 2004

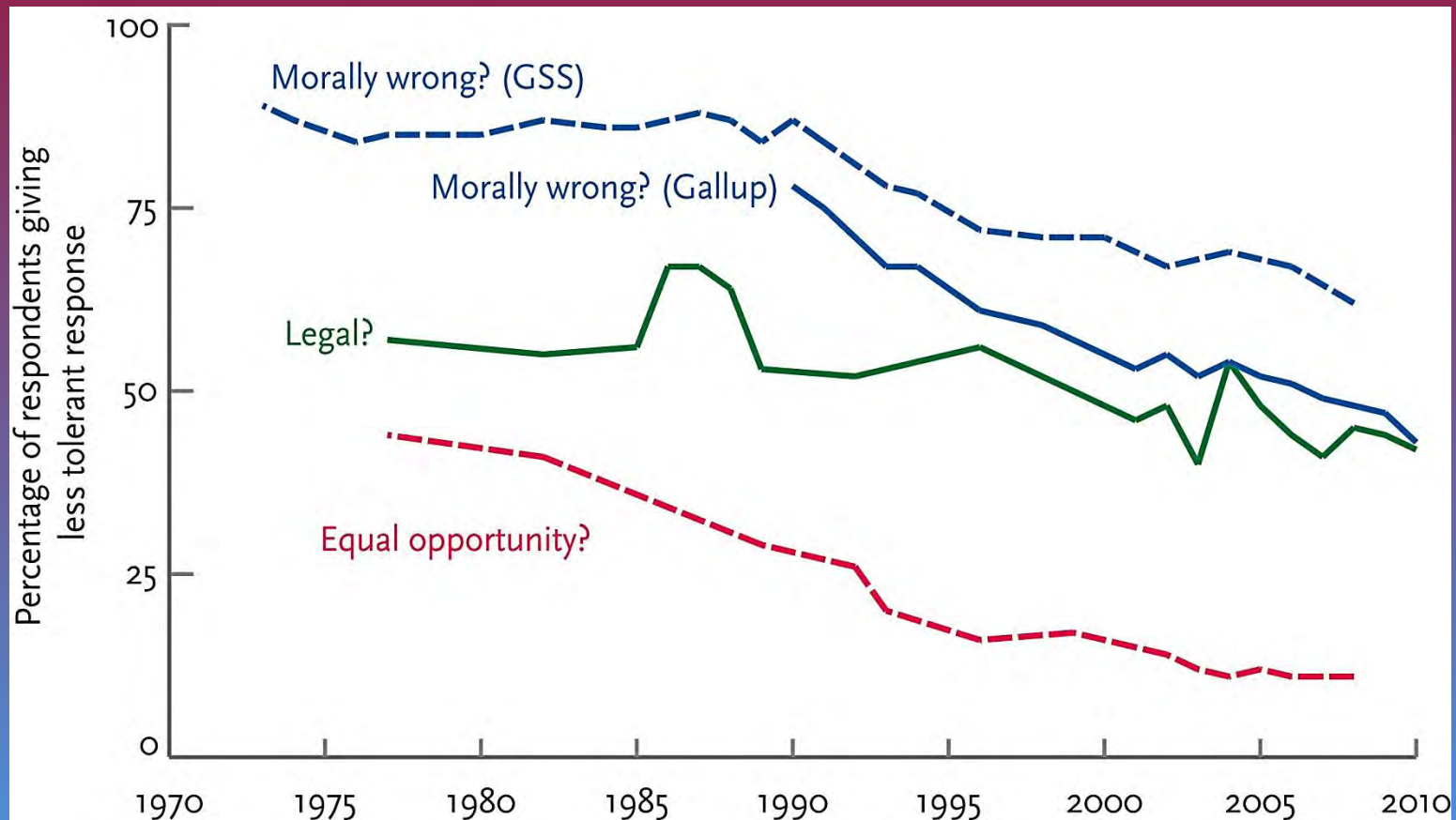
Gay Rights

States that have Decriminalized Homosexuality, 1791-2009



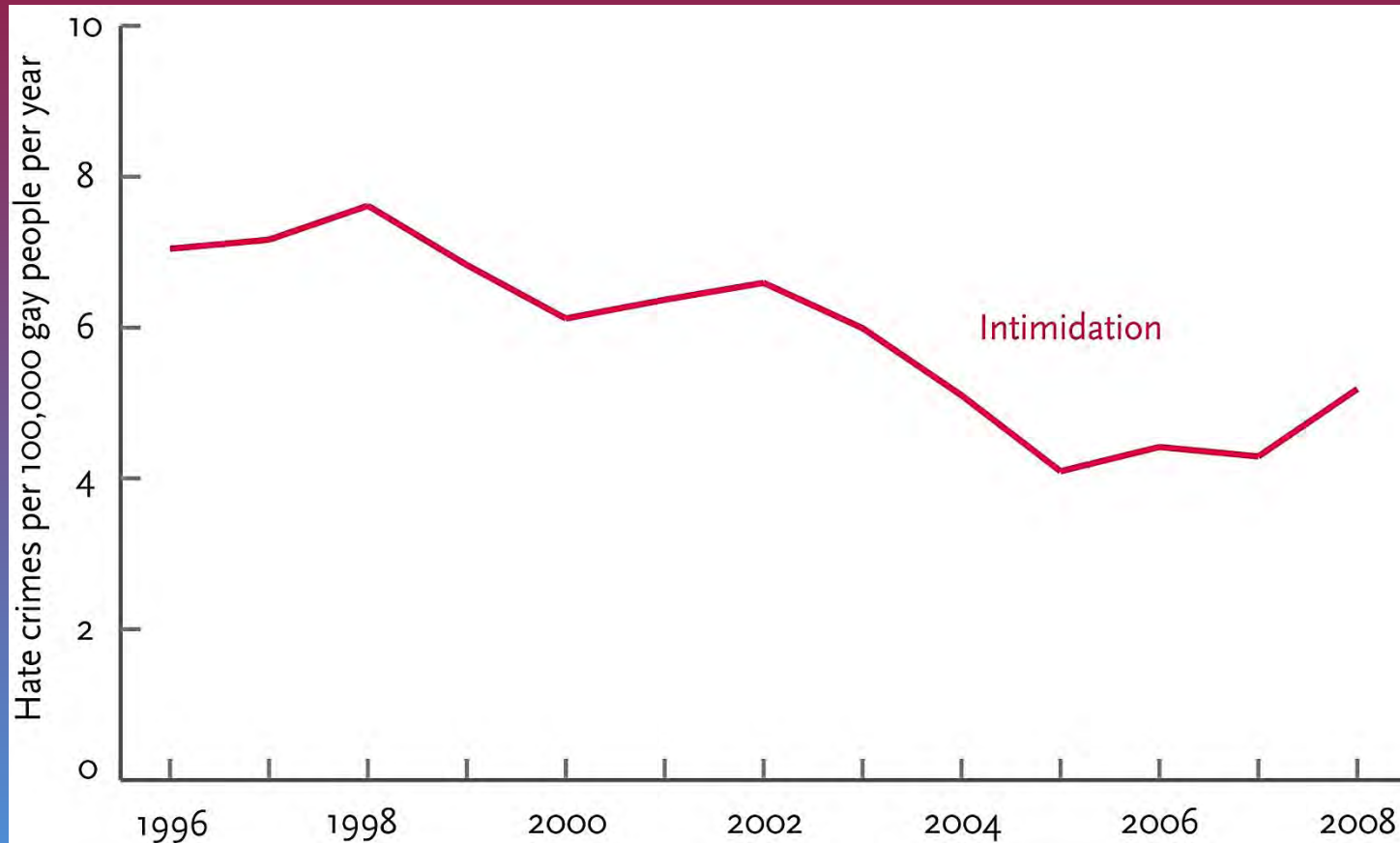
Source: Ottosson, 2006, 2009

Anti-Gay Attitudes, US, 1973-2010



Sources: General Social Survey; Gallup, 2001, 2008, 2010

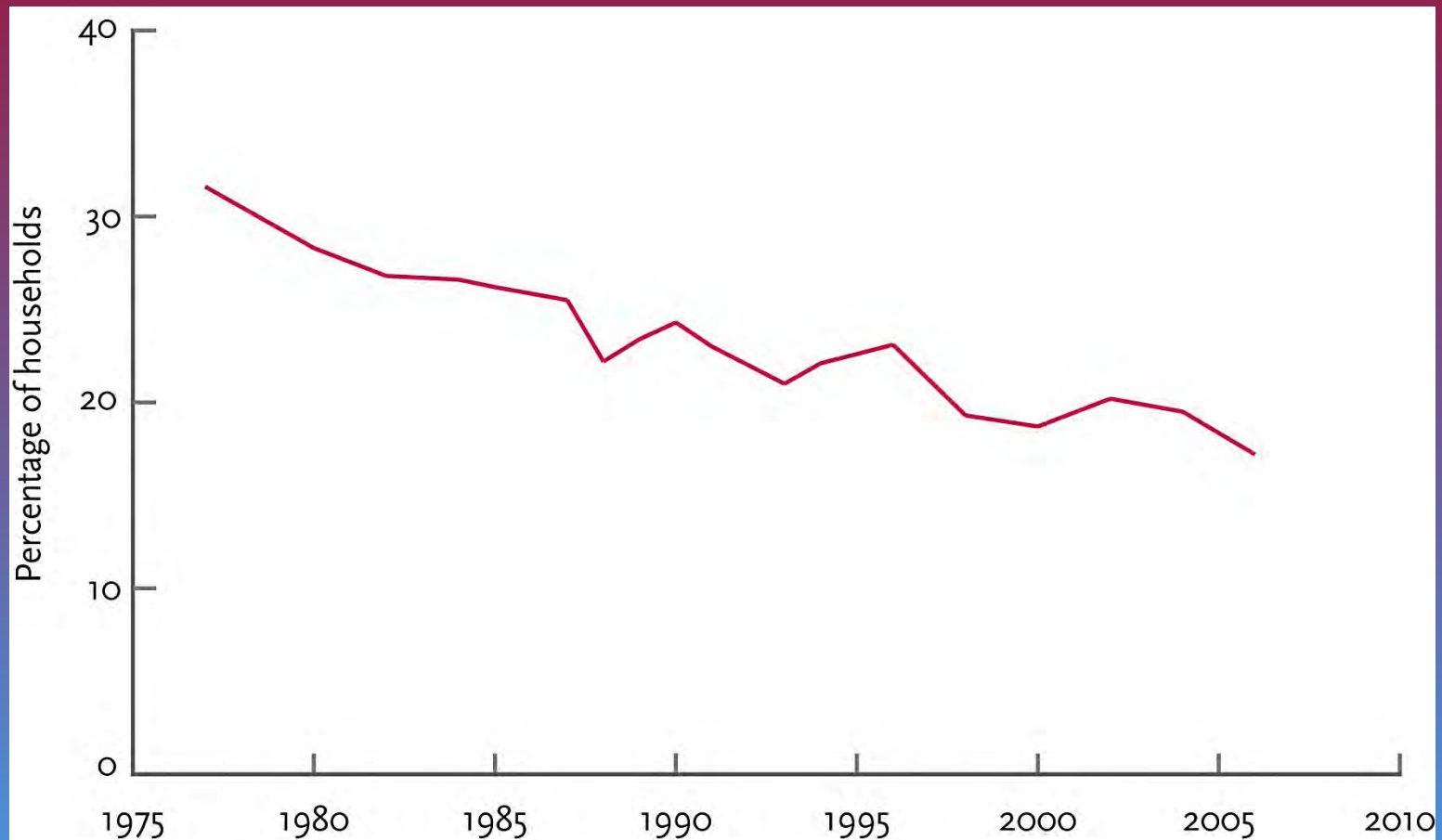
Anti-Gay Hate Crime Intimidation, US, 1996-2008



Source: FBI Hate Crime Statistics

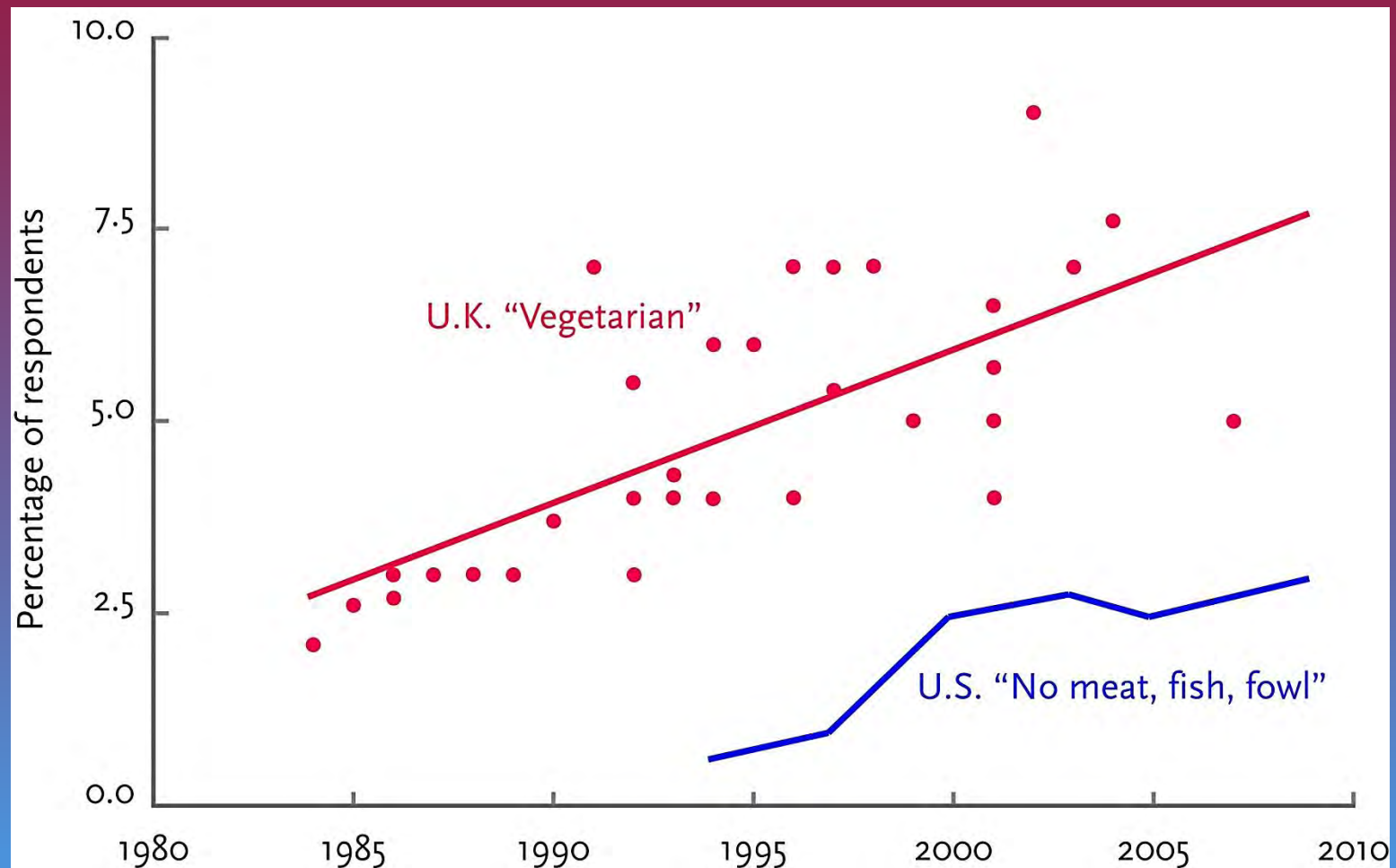
Animal Rights

Hunting, 1977-2006



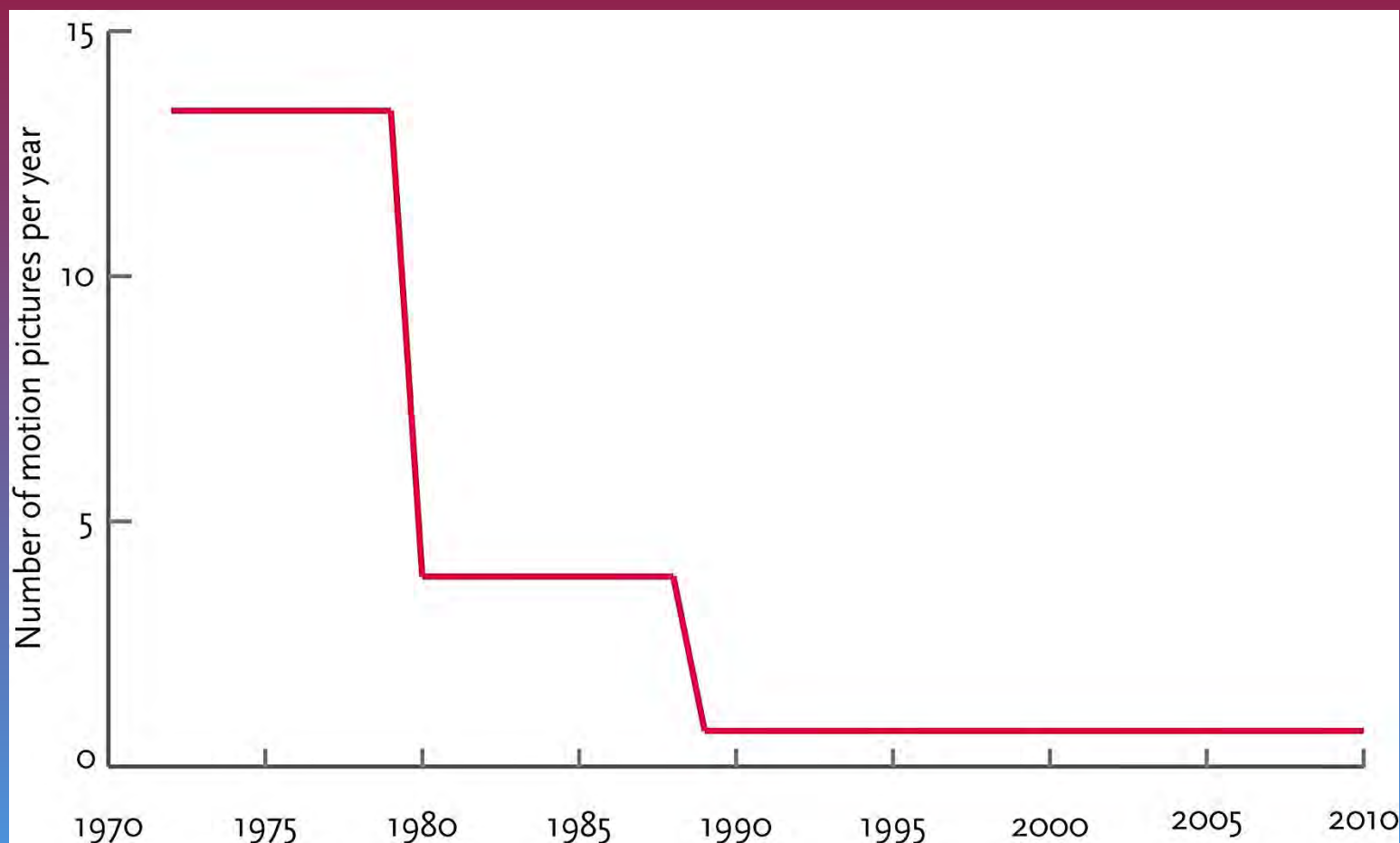
Source: General Social Survey

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?

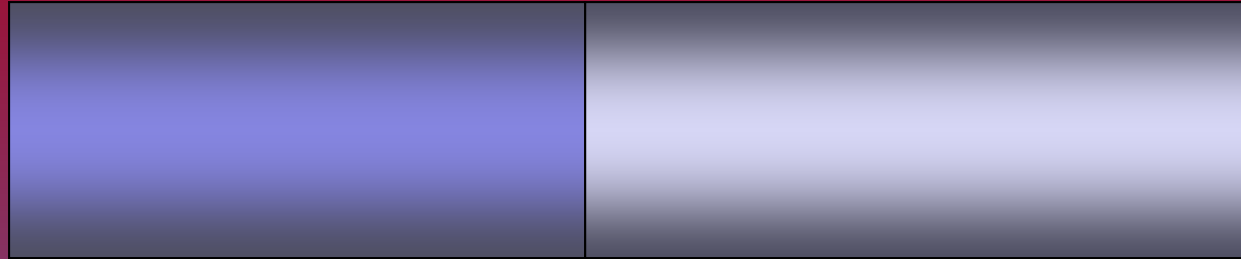
Why Has Violence Declined?

- 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:

Frequently

Occasionally

Males



Females



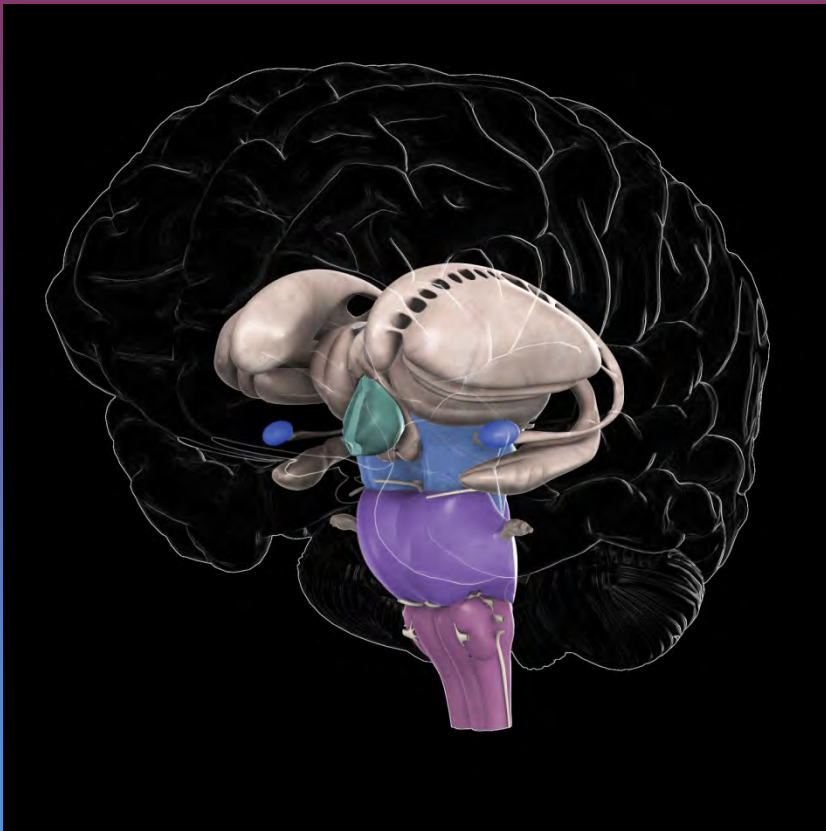
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

% 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

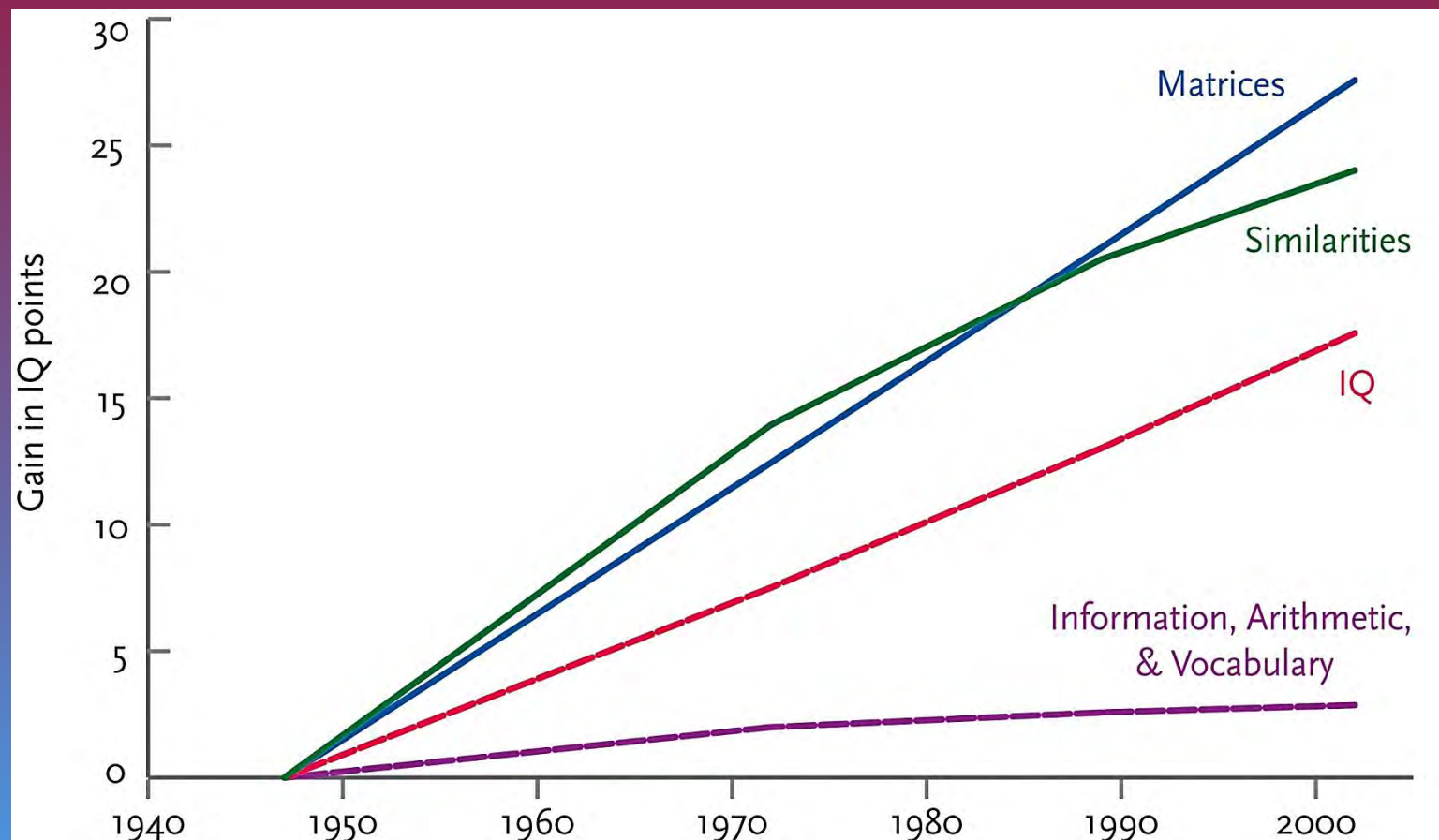
Sources: Batson et al., 2002, 2005, 2008; Hakemulder, 2000

- Historical evidence:
 - 17th-18th century:
 - Humanitarian Revolution preceded by the “Republic of Letters”
 - 20th century, second half:
 - Long Peace, Rights Revolutions occurred in “The Global Village”
 - 21st 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

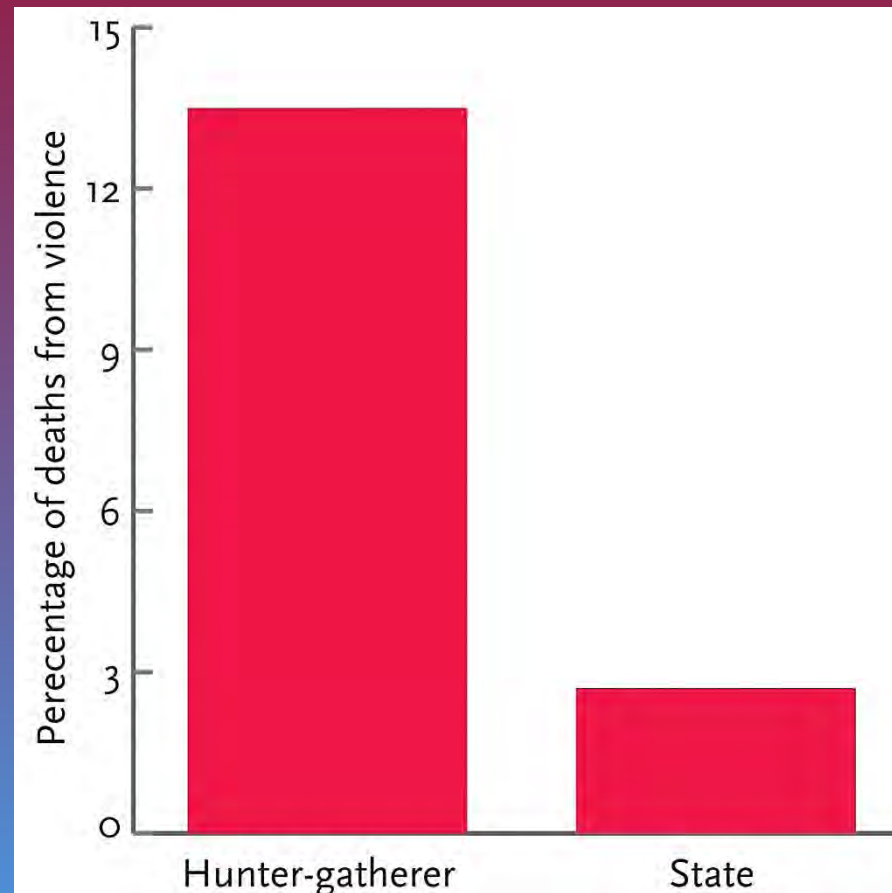
- But despite impressions, the long-term trend (though halting and incomplete) is that violence of all kinds is *decreasing*
- Rehabilitation of the concept of modernity and progress
- Cause for gratitude for the institutions of civilization and enlightenment



Miscellaneous extra slides:

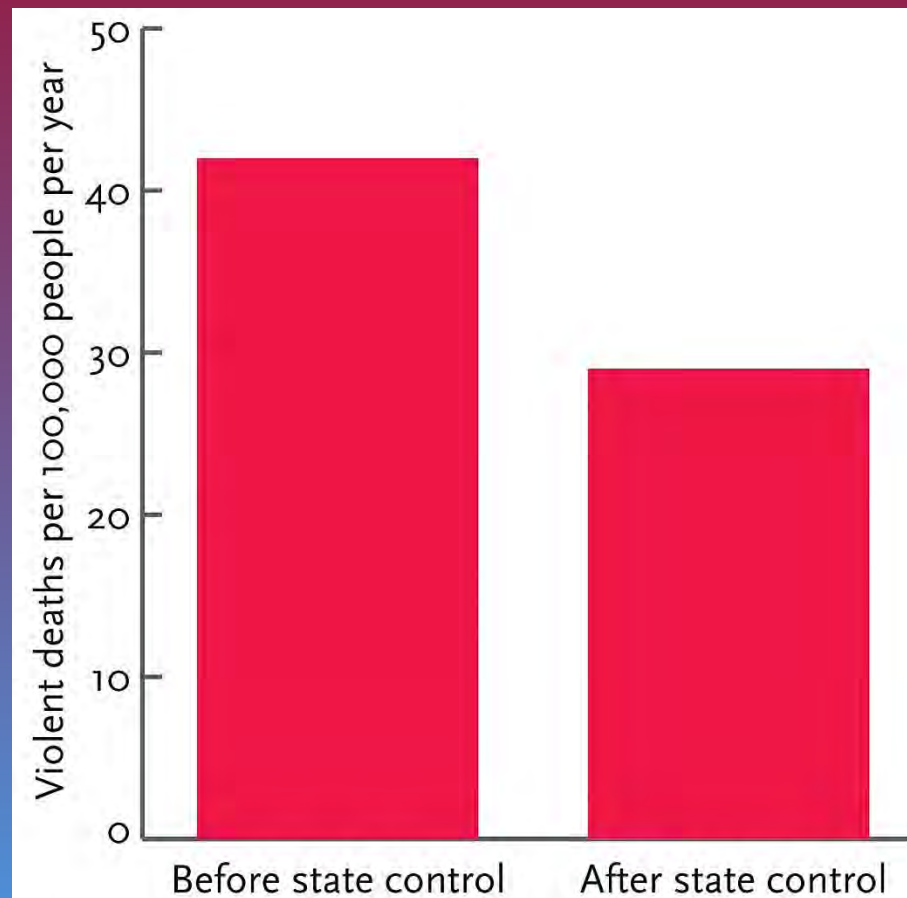
Two Direct Comparisons:

% 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