

Reality Denial : Apologetics for Western-Imperial Violence

Review of Steven Pinker's Book

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*It is amusing to see how eagerly the establishment media have welcomed Steven Pinker's 2011 tome, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*,^[1] which explains not only that "violence has been in decline for long stretches of time," but that "we may be living in the most peaceful era in our species' existence."^[2]*

A professor in the Department of Psychology at Harvard University since 2002 and a two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist in the general nonfiction category,^[3] Pinker's lovable theme coincides with the Nobel Peace Laureate's current engagement in wars on at least four separate continents (Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America); his regretful partial withdrawal from invaded and occupied Iraq; his victorious termination of the 2011 war in Libya; his buildup and threats to engage in even larger wars with Syria and Iran, both already underway with aggressive sanctions and an array of covert actions;^[4] his semi-secret and ever-widening use of remote-controlled aerial gunships and death squads in global killing operations;^[5] and his declaration of the right to kill any person anywhere for "national security" reasons—officially making the entire world a U.S. free-fire-zone.^[6] The Barack Obama regime, and before it the Bush-Cheney regime, have also supported and protected Israel's escalated ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and the hostile U.S. actions and threats involving Iran and Syria are closely geared with those of Israel.

Whereas in Pinker's view there has been a "Long Peace" since the end of the Second World War,^[7] in the real world there has been a series of long and devastating U.S. wars: in the Koreas (1950-1953), Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (1954-1975), Iraq (1990-), Afghanistan (2001- or, arguably, 1979-), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1996-), with the heavy direct involvement of U.S. clients from Rwanda (Paul Kagame) and Uganda (Yoweri Museveni) in large-scale Congo killings; and Israel's outbursts in Lebanon (1982 and 2006), to name a few. There were also very deadly wars in Iran, invaded by Saddam Hussein's Iraq (1980-1988), with Western encouragement and support. And with the stimulus-excuse of 9/11, the U.S. political and "defense" establishment was able to declare a global "War on Terror," open-ended and still ongoing, to assure that the "Long Peace" would not be interrupted by a conflict that met the Pinkerian standards for a real war.

In the same time frame as Pinker's "New Peace," alleged to have begun with the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, the Warsaw Pact, and of the Soviet Union itself (1989-1991), we have also witnessed the relentless expansion of the U.S.-led NATO bloc, its 1990s war on and dismantlement of Yugoslavia,^[8] its acceptance of new "out of area" responsibilities for "security,"^[9] its steadily enlarging membership from 16 to 28 states, including the Baltic

and former Eastern European satellites of the Soviet Union, and a growing U.S. and NATO encirclement of and threats to China and Russia.[10] And during the first decade of the 21st century, the United States openly embarked on the systematic use of “enhanced interrogations” (i.e., torture) and the frequent resort to “extraordinary renditions” that send captives to torture-prone clients for some not-so-angelic working over.[11]

Pinker’s standard for an interruption of the “Long Peace” would be a war between the “great powers,” and it is true that the major Axis and Allied powers that fought each other during World War II have not made war among themselves since 1945. But Pinker carries this line of thought even further: He contends not only that the “democracies avoid disputes with each other,” but that they “tend to stay out of disputes across the board,” (283) an idea he refers to as the “Democratic Peace.”[12] (278-284) This will surely come as a surprise to the many victims of U.S. assassinations, sanctions, subversions, bombings and invasions since 1945.[13] For Pinker, no attack on a lesser power by one or more of the great democracies counts as a real war or confutes the “Democratic Peace,” no matter how many people die.

“Among respectable countries,” Pinker writes, “conquest is no longer a thinkable option. A politician in a democracy today who suggested conquering another country would be met not with counterarguments but with puzzlement, embarrassment, or laughter.” (260) This is an extremely silly assertion. Presumably, when George Bush and Tony Blair sent U.S. and British forces to attack Iraq in 2003, ousted its government, and replaced it with one operating under laws drafted by the Coalition Provisional Authority, this did not count as “conquest,” as these leaders never stated that they launched the war to “conquer” Iraq, but rather “to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger.”[14] What conqueror has ever pronounced as his goal something other than self-defense and the protection of life and limb? It is on the basis of devices such as this that Pinker’s “Long Peace,” “New Peace,” and “Democratic Peace” rest. (See “Massaging the Numbers,” below.)

And it is in this kind of context Pinker throws-in his “gentle commerce” theme by advancing the so-called “Golden Arches Peace” idea—that “no two countries with a McDonald’s have ever fought in a war.” The “only unambiguous” exception that he can name occurred in 1999, “when NATO briefly bombed Yugoslavia.” (285) In an endnote he mentions that an “earlier marginal exception was the U.S. attack on Panama in 1989,” but he dismisses this U.S. war as too insignificant to make the grade—“its death count falls short of the minimum required for a war according to the standard definition,”[15] though according to the UN Charter and customary international law, there was nothing sub-standard about this unambiguous U.S. aggression against a sovereign country. Here as in many other places, Pinker selects the estimated death toll that minimizes the U.S.-inflicted casualties and fits his political agenda.[16]

Pinker mentions in passing that the post-World War II peace among the giants was possibly a result of the immense cost of wars that might involve a nuclear exchange—and it did extend to the Soviet Union during its post-World War II life—but his explanation focuses mainly on the cultural evolution and biological adaptations of the Civilized,[17] in contrast with the Uncivilized of the Third World. Why this new peaceableness of the Civilized does not stop their violent interventions abroad he fails to explain. The exclusion of wars against the Uncivilized from his definition of a “Long Peace” reflects gross political bias.

Pinker attributes the sense of increased violence to multiple “illusions,” one of which he

believes is caused by the development of media and other advanced forms of communication that allow a rushing to the spot of bloody events, and recording them and transmitting them to the world. As he explained in a guest appearance on CBS TV's *The Early Show* in mid-December 2011: "Not only can we send a helicopter with a film crew to any troubled spot in the world but now anyone with a cell phone is an instant reporter. They can broadcast color footage of bloodshed wherever it occurs and so we're very aware of it." [18] Apparently Pinker believes that the media cover the world on a non-discriminatory basis, reporting on Guatemalan peasants slaughtered by their army, civilian victims of U.S. drone warfare in Afghanistan, Honduran protesters shot dead by their own military, and dead and injured U.S. soldiers as aggressively as they report on civilian protesters shot dead on the streets of Tehran, or the victims of the Syrian government or of the late Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. [19] The naiveté here is staggering.

Pinker's "Long Peace" and "New Peace" and their alleged declines of violence not only coincide with the numerous and ongoing attacks by the giants on the midgets, the huge expansion in arms, and the new "burgeoning" of torture, [20] but runs parallel with the increasing *structural* violence of a global class war that has resulted in growing inequality within and between countries, systematic dispossession of vast numbers, a widespread seizure of the commons, major migrations, growing cities of slums, increased ethnic tensions and anti-Islamic fervor, deliberately stoked in a troubled, receptive environment, mass incarceration of minority populations, and more vocal oppositional forces both here and abroad. [21] These do not constitute "violence" in Pinker's accounting system.

Pinker's "Cold War"

Although Pinker covers a great deal of ground from the earliest humans to the present, with numerous figures and learned citations, *Better Angels* is an overwhelmingly ideological work, with biases that reveal themselves at every level—sourcing, language, framing, historical and political context, and substance—and on all topics.

Consider this example:

You would think that the disappearance of the gravest threat in the history of humanity [i.e., a NATO-Warsaw Pact nuclear war] would bring a sigh of relief among commentators on world affairs. Contrary to expert predictions, there was no invasion of Western Europe by Soviet tanks, no escalation of a crisis in Cuba or Berlin or the Middle East to a nuclear holocaust. The cities of the world were not vaporized; the atmosphere was not poisoned by radioactive fallout or choked with debris that blacked out the sun and sent *Homo sapiens* the way of the dinosaurs. Not only that, but a reunited Germany did not turn into the fourth reich, democracy did not go the way of monarchy, and the great powers and developed nations did not fall into a third world war but rather a long peace, which keeps getting longer. (295)

This is of course rhetoric, but it is saturated with political bias, straw persons, and literal errors: The nuclear war-threat has not disappeared, and two cities of the world were vaporized, with a quarter of a million civilians killed in two quick strokes, but this was done by Pinker's home country, just as nuclear war remains "on the table" and nuclear arms continue to be an integral part of the arsenal of the United States, NATO, Israel, and India (the last shielded outside the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons by the new "strategic partnership" between the United States and India since July 2005 [22])—and all despite the United States' and the other four original nuclear weapons-states' promise in

1968 to work toward the elimination of nuclear weapons.[23]

Pinker is also misinformed that “expert predictions” were that Soviet tanks would occupy Europe—he confuses expert opinion and Cold War propaganda. The Soviet Union had been devastated during World War II, and sought loans from the United States in the post-war negotiations; it was a conservative and cautious international actor, and had no nuclear weapon till 1949. John Foster Dulles himself noted that “I do not know of any responsible high official, military or civilian...who believes that the Soviet now plans conquest by open military aggression” (i.e., via Pinker’s “invasion of Western Europe by Soviet tanks”).[24] Writing in 1946-1947, U.S. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes clearly did not expect any Soviet military attacks on Western Europe.[25] He, Dulles, and other officials were mainly worried about Soviet political influence over Western publics, local leaders, and “infiltration” and “subversion,” which they countered with money, arms, agreements with local leaders, and their own “infiltrators” and “subversion.” Few if any real experts expected the resulting Federal Republic of Germany to turn into a “fourth Reich,” but some may have been surprised when the United States and West Germany violated early promises to Mikhail Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in early 1990 not to extend NATO further to the east, in exchange for Moscow’s acquiescence to the reunification of East and West Germany later in 1990.[26] Pinker fails to discuss this peace-threatening development, or even mention the existence of the early promise to Moscow. Indeed, he comments that German reunification and NATO expansion “had no discernible effect on the Long Peace among developed countries, and it presaged a New Peace among developing ones.” (674)

In another blatant display of internalized Cold War ideology, Pinker writes that a “romantic, militarized communism inspired the expansionist programs of the Soviet Union and China, who wanted to give a helping hand to the dialectical process by which the proletariat or peasantry would vanquish the bourgeoisie and establish a dictatorship in country after country. The Cold War was the product of the determination of the United States to contain this movement at something close to its boundaries at the end of World War II.” (244-245)

So, just as no U.S. politician would suggest “conquering” another country, the U.S. foreign policy regime has been strictly defensive, containing the expansionist enemy.

This is an Orwellian inversion of real history, as neither the Soviet Union nor China displayed any “expansionist program” after World War II—the Soviet Union never expanded beyond its postwar boundaries and the settlement at Yalta. They did give some modest, mainly rhetorical support to leftist and anti-U.S. forces at a distance, but the United States not only planned a postwar imperial expansion during World War II in its “Grand Area” strategies,[27] it actually *did* expand across the globe, as it fought to contain indigenous nationalist, independence, and social democratic movements, supporting counterrevolution and numerous rightwing and authoritarian regimes on every continent.[28] There are important publicly available documents describing U.S. plans and programs to destabilize, subvert and replace the Soviet Union,[29] and to intervene to shape and reshape the Third World in a manner that Pinker would surely call subversion and democracy-busting if attributable to communist powers.[30] But Pinker does not mention them. And for Pinker, the United States never pursued a “romantic” or self-serving agenda during the “Long Peace,” and it gave no “helping hand” to those who, like Mobutu in Zaire, Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, Suharto in Indonesia, and Augusto Pinochet in Chile, would support a “free [even if corrupt] market” and investor rights. The United States only responded to communist plans and threats.

But the Soviets made no distant moves comparable to the U.S. overthrow of Mossadegh and the installation of the Shah dictatorship in Iran in 1953,[31] its Korean and Indochinese wars, its close support of the Indonesian military coup and massacres in 1965-1966, its support of the South African apartheid regimes in Angola, Namibia and Mozambique, as well as South Africa itself (recall the CIA role in capturing and imprisoning Nelson Mandela), and its heavy involvement in the establishment of military and terror regimes in Brazil, Chile, and throughout Latin America in the post-World War II era.[32] In the case of the central U.S. role in the violent overthrow of a democratic government of Guatemala in 1954, there was a loud official and media claim of a Soviet threat there, but this was a false propaganda cover for the desire to control and establish a completely subservient client in place of one that contested the United Fruit Company's huge influence over policy.[33] But in the U.S. establishment ideology of the Cold War, which Pinker has internalized and repeats throughout his *Better Angels*, the United States was simply defending the Free World against communist expansionism!

Disappearing Imperialism, the Military-Industrial Complex, and Institutional Imperatives

Pinker's remarkable inversion of reality in portraying the post-World War II period as a "Long Peace," with residual violence stemming from communist ideology and actions, points up the relevance of Chalmers Johnson's comment that "When imperialist activities produce unmentionable outcomes,...then ideological thinking kicks in." [34] It kicks in for Pinker with communist expansionism and U.S. "containment." It also kicks in with his notion that communism, but not capitalism, was both "utopian" and "essentialist," "submerge[ing] individuals into moralized categories," and causing some of the worst atrocities of the modern period. (328-329) But weren't the racism and anticommunism of the Western powers and in particular the United States "essentialist" ideologies in the Pinkerian sense, and wedded to the "full destructive might" of these powers? And didn't these ideologies justify exterminations and massive ethnic cleansings of inferior and threatening peoples, replacing them with advanced peoples and cultures who put resources to a higher use? Weren't Friedrich von Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Milton Friedman, and many other members of the Chicago School of Economics "free-market" ideologues?

The U.S. push for markets and investor rights and political control, sometimes called Imperialism, is for Pinker just natural and doing good, taking advantage of positive-sum business games with "gentle commerce," as well as containing those with ideology who kill people freely. "The very idea of a capitalist peace is a shock to those who remember when capitalists were considered 'merchants of death' and 'masters of war'," (288) to give one example of Pinker's perspective.[35] Pinker doesn't mention any such thing as "aggressive commerce" or discuss the possibility (and reality) of the cross-border seizure of property by the more powerful states. There are 17 citations to "gentle commerce" in his Index, and writers who promulgate the related ideas of "gentle commerce," "Democratic Peace," "Liberal Peace," "Capitalist Peace," and "Kantian Peace" (in the Pinker-friendly version of it) are featured and referenced lavishly. But there are zero indexed citations to the word "imperialism" in *Better Angels*, and no mentions of Jagdish Bhagwati and Hugh Patrick's *Aggressive Unilateralism*, John Hobson's *Imperialism*, John Ellis' *The Social History of the Machine Gun*, Mike Davis' *Late Victorian Holocausts*, Penny Lernoux's *Cry of the People*, Gabriel Kolko's *Confronting the Third World*, Noam Chomsky's *Deterring Democracy*, Robert Engler's *The Politics of Oil*, or David Harvey's *The New Imperialism*.

Pinker's ideological thinking stresses the development of positive and humane attitudes by individuals—in the Civilized states—moving them towards humane policy, opposition to

slavery, concern for civilians in war, and moves toward democracy, while he essentially ignores the development of institutional forces that might overwhelm these individual factors and make for serious violence.

In addition to his neglect of “aggressive commerce” and cross-border seizures of people, property, and resources, Pinker ignores the post-World War II growth of U.S. militarism, with its vested interests in weapons and warfare, and the expanding and self-reinforcing power of the “iron triangle” of the military-industrial-complex to shape national policy. This may be why he never mentions, let alone discusses, the classics on this topic by Seymour Melman, Gordon Adams, Richard Kaufman, and Tom Gervasi,[36] or the more recent work of Chalmers Johnson, Andrew Bacevich, Henry Giroux, Nick Turse, and Winslow Wheeler.[37] These very knowledgeable individuals believe that Eisenhower’s warning in his 1960 Farewell Address about the threat of the military-industrial complex was on target, that the United States is dominated by an institutional structure with a huge vested interest in war rather than peace, and one that has succeeded in making this country into a war-demanding and war-making system. These and other analysts have also featured the encroachment of the permanent-war system on civil liberties and democracy,[38] suggesting that any neo-Fukuyaman perspective on “end-of-history” liberalism and Pinker’s streaky but steady decline in violence is Panglossian nonsense grounded in ideological thinking.

Pinker prefers James Sheehan to Chalmers Johnson and Andrew Bacevich. Sheehan’s theme in *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone: The Transformation of Modern Europe*[39] is that Europeans have changed their very conception of the state, and made the state “no longer the proprietor of military force” but rather “a provisioner of social security and material well-being” (in Pinker’s summary of the book (268)). But the soldiers are still there, NATO is still expanding, Modern Europe is contributing troops and bombs to the Afghan war, was heavily involved in the 2011 war in Libya, and along with the United States, currently threatens Syria and Iran. Europe’s social security systems have been under attack for years, and the well-being of ordinary citizens seems to be a declining objective of Europe’s leaders, as well as those in the United States. Following the U.S. lead, Europe is moving from “cradle-to-grave nurturance” back to “military prowess”—exactly the opposite direction from that Pinker believes they have taken. (685)

Vietnam and the Antiwar Protests

Pinker’s proof of a march toward peace has other amusing features. He says that “another historic upheaval in the landscape of 20th century values was a resistance by the populations of the democratic nations to their leaders’ plans for war,” (263) and he spends a fair amount of space describing the growth of peace movement activism in the 1960s and in advance of the war on Iraq. Yet, elsewhere in his book he blames the 1960s movements for their “decivilizing” impact (see our section on “Class, Race, and the ‘Science of Self-Control’”), but in the present context they allow him to claim their actions as evidence of the march toward the “Long Peace.” Pinker claims that in the 1960s the peace movement helped elect Nixon, who “shifted the country’s war plans from a military victory to a face-saving withdrawal (though not before another twenty thousand Americans and a million Vietnamese had died in the fighting).” (264) Elsewhere in his book Pinker writes that the “war was ferociously prosecuted” by Nixon—and that *plus* 20,000 Americans and a million more Vietnamese would seem like big-time war-making. (683) But the peace movement’s alleged help in getting Nixon elected is Pinker’s evidence for the advance of the “better angels.”

Pinker fails to explain why before, during, and after the Vietnam war the elites have been so little influenced by the masses marching in the streets. Why must the masses even march in the streets? Why must the elites continue to engage in military buildups and serious violence, at heavy economic cost, when according to his preferred expert James Sheehan the state is abandoning military force and focusing on the material well-being of the public? If institutional forces are not the explanation, why don't the "better angels" trickle up to the leadership, especially when in his view the higher morality trickles down from the elite to the general population?

According to Pinker, "The three deadliest postwar conflicts were fueled by Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese communist regimes that had a fanatical dedication to outlasting their opponents." (308) As regards Vietnam, he goes on to show that the Vietnamese were willing to absorb large casualties inflicted on them by the U.S. invaders. For Pinker, this is the fanaticism that fueled the Vietnam war. There is not a word of criticism of the invaders who were willing to inflict those deaths in a distant land; certainly nothing "fanatical," no mention of the UN Charter, no word like aggression is applied to this attack; and there is no mention anywhere in the book that the United States had supported the French effort at re-colonization, then supported a dictatorship of its own choosing; and that U.S. officials recognized that those fanatical resisters had majority support as we killed vast numbers of them to keep in power our imposed minority government. While acknowledging 800,000 or more "civilian battle deaths" in the Vietnam war, Pinker does not stop to explain how vast numbers of civilians could be killed in "battle" and whether these deaths might possibly represent a gross violation of the laws of war, or how this could happen in an era of rising morality and humanistic feelings, and carried out so ruthlessly by the dominant Civilized power.

Nowhere does Pinker mention the massive U.S. chemical warfare in Vietnam (1961-1970), and the estimated "three million Vietnamese, including 500,000 children,...suffering from the effects of toxic chemicals" used during this ugly and very unangelic form of warfare.[40] What makes this suppression especially interesting is that Pinker cites the outlawing and non-use of chemical and biological weapons as evidence of the new evolving higher morality and decline of violence (273-277)—so his dodging of the facts on the massive use of such weapons in Operation Ranch Hand and other U.S. programs in Vietnam is remarkable dishonesty.

Pinker would never think of accepting Vietnamese communist estimates of casualties, just as he does not hesitate to use numbers provided by the U.S. State Department.[41] But nowhere are Pinker's biases more blatantly obvious than in this allocation of Vietnamese "civilian battle deaths" to the fanaticism of the communist resistance in not surrendering to an invader unleashing incredible violence from abroad for reasons its own leaders had difficulty settling on.

Iraq and the Democratic Republic of Congo

Pinker's bias is also extremely clear when he gets to explaining the new morality applied by his country in assaulting Iraq. According to Pinker, the "Vietnam syndrome" has caused the U.S. leadership to shy away from wars that will cause many U.S. casualties or impose massive civilian casualties on foreigners. He writes that "Military leaders at all levels have become aware that gratuitous killing is a public relations disaster at home and counterproductive abroad alienating allies and emboldening enemies. The Marine Corps has therefore instituted a martial-arts program in which leathernecks are indoctrinated in a new

mode of honor, the Ethical Marine Warrior," whose "catechism" is that the warrior is a "protector of life," including not just self and others but "all others." (264-265) After he recounts a long story ("allegory") with a humanistic touch applied to the behavior of U.S. soldiers, Pinker says that "The code of the Ethical Warrior, even as an aspiration, shows that the American armed forces have come a long way from a time when its soldiers referred to Vietnamese peasants as gooks, slops, and slants and when the military was slow to investigate atrocities against civilians such as the massacre at My Lai." (265-266)

Pinker provides no evidence that U.S. warriors today don't refer to Iraqis and other invaded peoples with derogatory terms (e.g., "Haji"[42]), or that the Marine Warrior Code is even a genuine "aspiration" as opposed to a P.R. effort, or that it is actually "indoctrinated," let alone taken seriously. He ignores the fact that back at the time of the Vietnam War there was a written military code as well as international law on the treatment of civilians that had no apparent impact on actual policy.[43]

He also offers no evidence that the military is more ready now than in the past to investigate atrocities, or that they don't see the main route to dealing with gratuitous (or strategically convenient and useful) civilian killings as non-investigation, denial, and cover-up. Pinker does not mention the repeated official assertion by Gen. Tommy Franks, the original commander of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, that "we don't do body counts,"[44] nor does he discuss the U.S. brutalities and blatantly illegal actions in the destruction of Fallujah in 2004,[45] the cold-blooded killing in 2005 of 24 Iraqi civilians by U.S. Marines in the city of Haditha and its long cover-up,[46] or former U.S. Afghanistan force commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal's admission before his own troops in 2010 that they had "shot an amazing number" of innocent Afghans at checkpoints, "but to my knowledge, none has ever proven to be a threat."[47] Pinker does mention WikiLeaks, but only once and in relation to what he describes as a "previously classified civilian casualty database of the American-led military coalition," that not surprisingly attributed the "majority (around 80 percent) [to] Taliban insurgents rather than coalition forces." (267) He does not discuss the well-publicized WikiLeaks release of the formerly "classified U.S. military video depicting the indiscriminate slaying of over a dozen people in the Iraqi suburb of New Baghdad." [48] Nor does he mention any of WikiLeaks' other substantial troves of documents.[49]

In short, for this stream of pro-war apologetics Pinker relies on pure assertion, the uncritical acceptance of official and implausible claims, and a refusal to report inconvenient evidence.

However, when he deals with claims of mass civilian deaths brought about by U.S. policy in Iraq Pinker becomes much more demanding on the quality of evidence and methodology. One device that he uses here and elsewhere is to distinguish between the aggression-based killings by the United States during the initial stage he calls "quick" and "low in battle deaths," and deaths during the "intercommunal violence in the anarchy that followed." (266) He fails to mention the Nuremberg condemnation of aggression that ties it closely to deaths that follow: "To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole." [50] He ignores the facts that the civil conflicts were unleashed by the U.S. attack, and that the United States was an ongoing and large direct killer long after the "mission" was declared "accomplished" by George Bush on May 1, 2003. Fallujah and Haditha were just two of many U.S.-inflicted horrors that followed the announcement of an accomplished mission, and the U.S. invader-occupier was also an active manipulator of the civil conflicts that it unleashed. On the assumption that Nuremberg principles apply, this entire death-dealing and hugely violent enterprise is the

legal and moral responsibility of Pinker's home country leaders—a point that Pinker evades.

Pinker goes to some pains to discredit the higher-end mortality estimates for both the Iraqi theater of conflict under the U.S. war and occupation and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) after its 1996 invasion by Rwanda and Uganda, two key U.S. allies in Central Africa. Specifically, he criticizes the work of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health researchers, published in the British medical journal *The Lancet* in October 2006, which reported that 655,000 Iraqis had died during the roughly 40-month period from the March 20, 2003 U.S. invasion through July 2006, with some 601,000 of these deaths due to violence.[51] He also criticizes the January 2008 report by the Brussels-based International Rescue Committee and the Burnet Institute of the University of Melbourne, which estimated 5.4 million excess deaths from all causes in the eastern DRC for the period 1998 to April 2007.[52]

Pinker asserts that these mortality estimates are “not credible,” and refers to both of them with the derogatory term “*revisionist*” (his emphasis). “Revisionist” in this case means essentially not in accord with estimates that Pinker prefers. “Rather than counting bodies from media reports and nongovernmental organizations,” Pinker writes, “surveyors ask a sample of people whether they know someone who was killed, then extrapolate the proportion to the population as a whole....Without meticulous criteria for selecting a sample, extrapolations to an entire population can be wildly off.” (317-318) Thus in these two cases he rejects a method that is the current standard in epidemiological research—and that Pinker himself uses when it serves his methodological purposes (see “Massaging the Numbers,” below)—and that in our opinion is the soundest way of estimating mortality rates in large-scale armed conflicts, with their dangerous, high-risk settings and the frequent unreliability of governmental record-keeping.

Pinker and his preferred sources contend that the John Hopkins survey suffered from a “main street bias” that caused a substantial overestimation of Iraqi deaths.[53] These critics fail to mention that the John Hopkins team deliberately excluded the city of Fallujah from their sample. Fallujah had suffered two major U.S. military assaults in 2004, the second, in November and December, having devastated this city of some 250,000 people. When the Johns Hopkins team carried out its first survey of Iraqi mortality rates in September 2004, no fewer than two-thirds of all the violent deaths that it found for all of Iraq were reported in just one cluster of households in Fallujah. The researchers decided to exclude the Fallujah data from their 2004 mortality estimate, believing that its inclusion would skew the overall results;[54] and when they carried out their second, more extensive survey in 2006, they excluded Fallujah altogether. This gave their estimate a substantial downward bias.[55]

Pinker prefers the estimates produced by Iraq Body Count, an organization that relies largely on newspaper reports, and admittedly undercounts deaths with this unscientific methodology.[56] For the same period covered by the John Hopkins study (March 2003 – July 2006), IBC estimated 53,373 Iraqi deaths due to violence,[57] making the Johns Hopkins estimate of deaths caused by violence (601,000) more than eleven-times greater than the IBC's. As Gilbert Burnham, who led the second of the Johns Hopkins teams, observes, “I can't think of any country that would estimate its national mortality rates by obituary notices in the newspapers.”[58] Pinker also favors the 2008 report by the Iraq Family Health Survey Study Group—essentially, by employees of the puppet government of the U.S. military occupation—that estimated the number of violent deaths in Iraq to have been 151,000 from March 2003 through June 2006 (or roughly the same period as covered by the

Johns Hopkins study).[59] Unlike the Johns Hopkins team, the Iraq Family Health Survey did not request copies of death certificates from surviving family members to help verify their claims; and the field research was carried out by employees of highly politicized Iraqi ministries serving under the U.S. occupation regime. So again here as elsewhere, Pinker uses the preferential method of research, selecting his sources on the basis of their congenial findings, accepting methodologies that are often laughable, and admonishing researchers who come up with the wrong conclusions for the technical flaws in methods entirely ignored by the Truthers.

In what on Pinkerian logic might be described as the ultimate in “revisionism,” Pinker completely ignores the “sanctions of mass destruction” imposed on Iraq by the UN but under U.S.-dominant influence and command, which in varying degrees of severity lasted from August 1990 into the U.S. invasion-occupation of 2003. It has been estimated that these sanctions may have caused a million Iraqi deaths, and in a notable incident, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright said in a *60 Minutes* interview in 1996 that the sanctions-based deaths of an estimated “half a million” Iraqi children were “worth it.”[60] In another notable statement on the Iraq sanctions, John Mueller and Karl Mueller wrote in the journal *Foreign Affairs* that this sanctions regime caused more deaths than “all so-called weapons of mass destruction throughout history.”[61] U.S. officials knew that their destruction of Iraqi sanitation and water facilities by bombing raids during the 1991 war might well cause disease and deaths, but this did not impede the bombing or prevent the follow-up refusal to allow Iraq to buy replacement equipment during the sanctions era.[62] Pinker never mentions these unangelic sanctions and this massive death toll, and though he thanks John Mueller in his Preface to *Better Angels* and cites Mueller 20 times in his Index and lists 10 different works by Mueller in his References, Pinker somehow misses Mueller’s co-authored *Foreign Affairs* article that throws grisly light on a major case of mass killing—but by the United States, hence invisible to Pinker.

Pinker is equally committed to minimizing the human cost of the violence in the DRC, and therefore dismissive of higher-end estimates of mortality rates there. John O’Shea of the Irish relief agency GOAL has called the DRC the “worst humanitarian tragedy since the Holocaust,”[63] and Reuters contends that the war in the DRC “has claimed at least 10 times as many lives as the December [2004] tsunami yet remains almost unheard of outside of Africa.”[64] As of 2005, the eastern DRC already had suffered a decade of violence, and the August 2010 UN “mapping exercise” on the most serious violations of human rights in the DRC reported that the “apparently systematic and widespread nature of the attacks, which targeted very large numbers of Rwandan Hutu refugees and members of the Hutu civilian population, resulting in their death, reveal a number of damning elements that, if they were proven before a competent court, could be classified as crimes of genocide.”[65]

But Pinker’s preferred sources on the DRC—the International Peace Research Institute of Oslo, Norway; the Uppsala Conflict Data Program in Sweden; and the Human Security Report Project at Simon Fraser University in Canada—are alike in contending that, in Pinker’s words, the IRC-Burnet estimate was “inflated” by “about thirty-five times the PRIO battle-death estimate,” and by more than six-times the estimate produced by the HSRP (which includes both direct and indirect causes of deaths). (317) In their reliance on “public sources” such as international and non-governmental organizations, and most important, news agencies,[66] the “passive surveillance” methods employed by both PRIO and UCDP parallel Iraq Body Count’s methods, and HSRP largely depends on the work of PRIO and UCDP. But no matter how many different media sources one checks, even working from

comprehensive databases such as Factiva and Nexis, this is a limited and unscientific methodology, almost guaranteed to yield undercounts, especially in large-scale, multiyear theaters of conflict such as the DRC and Iraq. With its estimates of mortality restricted to the category of “battle-related deaths,”[67] we believe that the adoption of this methodology is motivated to serve political ends. (For more on PRIO and the UCDP, see “Sources and Methods,” below.)

Following the lead of the Human Security Report Project’s 2009/2010 *The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War* (which thanks Pinker by name in its acknowledgements section), Pinker charges the IRC-Burnet estimate with working from a “prewar death rate that was far too low,” and “subtracting it from an estimate of the rate during the war that was far too high.”[68] (319) The HSRP, Pinker adds, “cautions against accepting estimates of excess deaths from retrospective survey data, since in addition to all of their sampling pitfalls, they require dubious conjectures about what would have happened if a war had not taken place.” (319)

The IRC-Burnet researchers produced compelling replies to these charges, pointing out that even if they had used the higher baseline mortality rate of 2.0 deaths per 1,000 preferred by HSRP and Pinker, the “estimated deaths would be 3.3 million since 1998”[69]—nearly four times as many as the HSRP’s “best estimate” of 860,000 deaths for the shorter period from May 2001 through April 2007.[70] But these competing claims have no bearing on a separate survey on behalf of the UN, which had already estimated that through September 2002, some 3.5 million excess deaths had occurred in the eastern provinces as a “direct result of the occupation of the DRC by Rwanda and Uganda.”[71] We should add that, just as the Johns Hopkins surveys excluded Fallujah, thereby injecting a conservative factor into their results, the IRC-Burnet survey excluded from its samples locations where the violence and the risk to the researchers were greater than in the locations included in the samples, giving the IRC-Burnet results a conservative tilt as well.

But something else is almost surely at work behind Pinker’s advocacy for lower death tolls in Iraq and the DRC, and his reliance on sources that attack the work of researchers who have produced the higher-end estimates. Namely, his “New Peace” and “waning-of-war” agenda requires it. Two large-scale bloodbaths like those in Iraq and the DRC must be downsized to fit his agenda. Pinker therefore locates the lower-end numbers that he wants, ignores the “sanctions of mass destruction” in Iraq, attributes responsibility for the Iraq invasion-occupation deaths to “intercommunal” violence, thereby taking the United States off-the-hook, and clings to a “battle death” estimate for the DRC that ignores the many more indirect deaths from malnutrition and otherwise treatable diseases that characterized life in the eastern DRC over much of the past two decades, and comprise the major component of the DRC toll.

Afghanistan

In the case of Afghanistan, once again Pinker’s apologetics for his own country’s violence is noteworthy. He tells us that as in Iraq “the interstate war phase was quick,” (266) but he fails to mention that the follow-up pacification process involved continued warfare and violence for at least the next decade, and was hardly “intrastate”—it was mainly military operations by the United States, helped along by its NATO allies, and extending into warfare operations in Pakistan. This not-very-quick assault was sufficiently violent and inept to provide the basis for a Taliban recovery and

resurgence. Amusingly, and paralleling his claims about the new humanitarian “aspirations” of the Marines in Iraq, Pinker also finds a new ethical component in U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, with “humanitarian protocols” applicable to the anti-Taliban bombing campaign. (266) He quotes a *Wired Magazine* article[72] about a Human Rights Watch report written by senior military analyst Marc Garlasco that lauded the U.S. Air Force for its “very good record of minimizing harm to civilians.”[73] (266) William Arkin, a leading Human Rights Watch analyst who has also taught at the U.S Air Force School of Advanced Airpower Studies, puts the word “victims” in quotation marks when referring to Afghan civilian casualties, and he resents the excessive attention given this subject. Arkin asks Afghans: “When are you going to pay the US for the cost of the bombs and the jet fuel and the American lives selflessly given to topple the Taliban and rout Al Qaeda, all done so that you can have a future?”[74]

Before joining HRW, Marc Garlasco was for some years a target selector for the US Air Force. The use of such analysts helps us understand why HRW is notorious for its apologetics for U.S. wars and for its consistently low-end estimates of casualties inflicted by U.S. forces.[75] Given this, and Pinker’s bias, it does not surprise that while Pinker was quick to contest the methods and findings of the Johns Hopkins group on Iraq and the IRC-Burnet report on the DRC, he raises no questions about HRW’s methodology. He also completely ignores alternative sources that claim larger numbers of civilian killings in Afghanistan. Most notably, he never mentions Marc Herold’s detailed studies of these numbers, which yielded at least triple HRW’s estimates and pointed to targeting practices that assured a high civilian toll. In one study, Herold identified 12 mosques struck by U.S. bombs just between October 10 and December 20, 2001, only two claimed by the Pentagon to have been “mistakes.” Herold listed by name several hundred separate villages struck by U.S. bombs, some repeatedly, all of which suffered civilian casualties; his count of documented deaths ran to over 3,000 just between October 7, 2001 and March 30, 2002.[76] The idea that most of these civilians were killed by “errant” bombs or “targeting errors” is not credible—they were killed in accord with a deliberate policy of sending missiles to, and dropping bombs on, targets in populated areas based on reports of a Taliban or al Qaeda presence.

“Every vehicle is a target for the American bombers as they hunt down the stragglers of the Taliban and Al Qaeda,” Suzanne Goldenberg reported from Zhawar, an area of mountain hamlets where the villagers described to her the indiscriminate devastation they suffered: “The village [Shudiaki] is completely flattened. My house was destroyed and my neighbors were killed....The dead remain there in the village. Everybody else has left.”[77] One air assault was based on the sighting of a tall man who seemed to be authoritative, therefore maybe Bin Laden, and no more information was needed to kill six peasants.

Pinker not only ignores such alternative sources as these, he ignores statements by U.S. officials themselves that suggest that “humanitarian protocols” were P.R. for the benefit of the media and people like Pinker. “This is an area of enormous sympathy for the Taliban and Al Qaeda,” said General Gregory Newbold, about the killings at the wedding ceremony at Kakrak; or “The people in the vicinity clearly were connected to those activities,” as Donald Rumsfeld said about a mass killing of civilians at Karam village; or even that “The people there are dead because we wanted them dead,” as an unidentified Pentagon official asserted on CNN about the scores of civilian killed at Chowkar-Karez).[78] The media never pressed them on such remarks or considered their relevance to evaluating Pentagon claims of care to avoid civilians. And of course Steven Pinker never mentions them any more than he does Herold.

“Genocide”

In his treatment of “genocide,” (320-343) Pinker’s selectivity—his focus on Western target-victims and neglect of the victims of the West itself—and his gullible and ignorant treatment of the facts are remarkable. For example, he repeatedly refers to Bosnian deaths in 1992-1995 as a case of genocide, and at one point he gives 225,000 as the number of victims. (340) Although he writes in an accompanying endnote that the “Bosnian massacres...probably killed closer to 100,000 than 200,000 people,”[79] in his text, he adds parenthetically that though “Recent studies have shown that some of [the figures he uses for ‘genocides’] may be overestimates, [he] will stick with the datasets” in which the overestimates are to be found! (340) But two establishment studies of the deaths in Bosnia during the 1992-1995 period of armed conflict, one undertaken on behalf of the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the other funded by the Norwegian government, respectively, lowered the earlier propaganda-based estimates of Bosnian deaths *on all sides* to 100,000, and Bosnian Muslim civilians killed to approximately 33,000.[80] Furthermore, when Pinker introduces the topic of genocide, he speaks of the awfulness “that someone would want to slaughter millions of innocents, including women, children and the elderly...[and that it] shocks the imagination by the sheer number of its victims” (320-321) But Bosnia hardly involved “millions,” and in the most famous episode there, at Srebrenica in July 1995, the Serbs bussed all the women, children and elderly to safety.

Pinker also follows the party-line on Rwanda. He takes it as unquestionable that mass killings of 1994 were a Hutu-based slaughter of “700,000 Tutsis...in just four months by about 10,000 [Hutu] men with machetes....,” and that poor Bill Clinton “was haunted by his own failure to act” to stop the killings. (339) Pinker is clearly unaware of the fact that Clinton *did* act—to get the UN to remove its troops just as the mass killing was escalating in April 1994, contrary to the desires of the Hutu leaders, but in line with the demands and interests of the U.S.-supported and militarily dominant Rwandan Patriotic Front, led by the Tutsi Paul Kagame.[81] Pinker is also evidently ignorant of the facts that Paul Kagame was responsible for the April 6, 1994 shooting-down of the jet carrying Hutu president Juvenal Habyarimana that triggered the mass killing, that Kagame’s forces moved into action within two hours of the shoot-down, and easily conquered Rwanda within one hundred days; and that the Clinton administration then and U.S. officials now are staunch supporters of the Kagame regime.[82] There is good reason to believe that more Hutus than Tutsis were killed during this Kagame conquest of state power in Rwanda.[83] Pinker also fails to tie this successful U.S.-supported conquest and genocide with the sequel Kagame invasion of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which was the second U.S.-supported genocide in this region. It is no coincidence that here also, as with the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Pinker takes issue with higher-end estimates of the death toll.

Each of the Iraq cases—the “sanctions of mass destruction,” then the U.S. invasion-occupation—involved vastly larger killings than in Bosnia, but they were initiated and largely carried out by the wrong parties, so we will not find the word “genocide” applied to these cases by Steven Pinker. It is amusing to read his description of a world “aghast” at Saddam Hussein’s swallowing of Kuwait and making “short work of pushing him out.” (260) But although millions marched in the streets before the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Pinker shows not the slightest indignation at this attack and he fails to note that although the public may have been “aghast” at the prospect of the violence of choice by his government, there was no effort to “push Bush out” of that invaded, occupied, and devastated country.

Pinker is aligned with his leaders here, and uses a word like “aghast,” as with “genocide,” only when it is consistent with their actions.

A much larger number of civilians were killed in the 600-plus massacres of Mayan Indians in Guatemala in the early 1980s than during the civil wars in Bosnia, 1992-1995, with the total number of Mayan victims uncertain but possibly 200,000 or more. These killings, which included many women and children, were described in a 1999 Truth Commission report as “scorched-earth operations...planned by the State, [and resulting] in the complete extermination of many Mayan communities.”[84] This Truth Commission concluded that “many massacres and other human rights violations committed against these groups obeyed a higher, strategically planned policy, manifested in actions which had a logical and coherent sequence,” adding that “agents of the State of Guatemala, within the framework of counterinsurgency operations carried out between 1981 and 1983, committed acts of genocide against groups of Mayan people.”[85] But Guatemala is and was a U.S. client state, and the killings in Guatemala are never mentioned anywhere in Pinker’s book.

Pinker also fails to discuss the 1975 Indonesian invasion of East Timor in his section on “genocide.” The death-toll from this 24-year military campaign against the former Portuguese colony after it had won its independence was perhaps 200,000 people overall, and for the most violent years, from 1975 through 1981, between 150,000 and 170,000 out of an initial population of approximately 700,000.[86] This means that over a quarter of the Timorese may have perished at that time,[87] making East Timor the number one case of genocide since World War II, its percentage toll exceeding that of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and vastly greater than that of the famines in the Soviet Union and China during the Stalin and Mao years. (See “Communism versus Capitalism,” below.)

But in *Better Angels*, Pinker mentions East Timor twice only and with great brevity and apologetic slant. The first time he tells his readers that the “Indonesian takeover of East Timor” was a case of “conquest” that eventually was “reversed,” (259) sparing them any information on the casualties there or any negative language attaching to Indonesia. The second time he mentions East Timor, Pinker asserts that the “infamous civil wars and genocides of the 1990s were largely perpetrated by gangs of drugged or drunken hooligans.” (312) For Pinker to list East Timor among the “civil wars” in this manner is to engage once more in a multi-leveled deception: There was no “civil war” in East Timor at any time from 1975 through 1999, when the Timorese finally freed themselves from Indonesia, but rather an initial war of resistance and a later war of liberation to throw-off the Indonesian occupation and yoke; and the so-called “hooligans” rampaging across East Timor in the late 1990s were agents of Indonesia, trained by the Indonesians, on their payroll, and under their general command. Nowhere in his book does Pinker mention that it was the Indonesian army that carried out the mass killings that began in East Timor in 1975. Nor does he mention that this invasion and occupation were supported by the United States right from the start[88]—a fact that might explain his lack of interest in this real genocide.

Pinker does mention a “regression analysis of 122 civil wars between 1945 and 1999,” (312) whose authors explain why they categorized the Timorese resistance to Indonesia’s military occupation as a “civil war”: “If a state seeks to incorporate and govern territory that is not a recognized state, we consider it a ‘civil war’ only if the fighting continues after the state begins to govern the territory (thus, Indonesia/East Timor 1975, yes...).”[89] So here Pinker manages to find a source that rationalizes Indonesia’s invasion-occupation, and buries its genocidal results beneath some fabricated notion of a “civil war”: Indonesia could not have invaded East Timor, because in 1975 East Timor was not a recognized “state,” even though

the Timorese went on fighting and dying after Indonesia seized their territory by force, and international law is explicit that “No territorial acquisition or special advantage resulting from aggression is or shall be recognized as lawful.”[90] So via his preferred source, Pinker ignores the law on aggression. Pinker also misses the fact that Indonesia’s invasion and genocidal rampage across this tiny island was motivated by Timor’s off-shore oil reserves—a case of “aggressive commerce” driven home by the 1989 Timor Gap Oil Treaty between Indonesia and Australia, a treaty that granted Australian firms the right to drill in the oil-rich “Indonesian province of East Timor,”[91] hence unmentionable by Pinker.

“Terrorism”

Pinker mentions “terrorism” frequently in *Better Angels*, and as with “genocide,” devotes a section to the topic, (344-361) but here again he sticks closely to the party-line of the Western establishment in which terror is violence carried out only by nonstate actors and opponents of the West, engaging in “asymmetrical warfare,” a “tactic of the weak against the strong,” (345) and striving to attract attention to their cause.

However, there is also a tactic of the strong against the weak called “state terrorism,” sometimes called “wholesale” as opposed to “retail” terrorism,[92] but Pinker ignores it, although “state terrorism” involves the killing of more people and the use of more ferocious means of violence—such as torture—than does the nonstate terrorism on which Pinker focuses.[93] Thus Pinker never allows that U.S. “shock and awe” bombing or other direct or indirect attacks on civilian sites such as are now carried out by remote-controlled aerial gunships, or Israeli attacks on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as in Israel’s 2009 war on the Gaza Palestinians, where schools and hospitals were targeted and some 1,400 Palestinians killed, were acts of terrorism, although these attacks were designed to traumatize the population as well as kill people. Nor does the extremely violent nature of U.S. and Israeli actions cause him to use other invidious words, such as “aggression” or “mass murder,” to describe them. No, it is implied that the U.S. and Israeli violence is in some way justified, whether “defensive,” or “policing actions,” or perhaps “retaliation,” so words like “terrorism,” “murder,” and “genocide” are reserved for the actions of Western targets.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has defined terrorism as the “deliberate and systematic murder of innocent civilians to inspire fear for political ends,”[94] and U.S. law defines it even more explicitly according to its intent “to intimidate or coerce a civilian population” and to “to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion....”[95] Netanyahu and U.S. lawmakers like their definitions because they allow a focus of attention on victims of hijackings and shootings in airports, who are frequently not even known to the terrorists and clearly innocent. But the civilians killed by U.S. forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, or by Israel in its Gaza bombing raids, or in army and death-squad slaughters in Guatemala and Sri Lanka, are also innocents, and they vastly outnumber the highly publicized victims of hijackers and airport attackers. These considerations are ignored by Pinker as he follows the party-line in using this invidious word.

“Islamic violence”

Pinker’s treatment of the “Muslim world” is also perfectly aligned with that of his government’s and Israel’s policy, and seriously misrepresents past and current events. In what we regard as no better than an anti-Muslim rant, he devotes six pages to Islam’s alleged historical, political, and cultural backwardness, as well as to its violent

proclivities—and even its “genocidal” ideology.[96] (362-368)

He imagines “four threats to the New Peace,” and assesses their likelihood: These include a “civilizational clash with Islam, nuclear terrorism, a nuclear Iran, and climate change.” (362) Although he dismisses the gravity of the last three, Pinker believes that the first of them, “militant Islamism,” as he calls it in one place, (377) poses the gravest threat to international peace and security going forward.

In a remarkable feat of suppressing facts that conflict with his beliefs, Pinker never mentions that it has been centuries since a regime governing a Muslim population has attacked the territory of a Western country, and that there is no Muslim regime in the world today that occupies a Western country. No Muslim regime administers an international network of rendition and torture centers—though some do participate in the U.S.-organized “spider’s web” that does these things.[97] No Muslim regime sends remote-controlled aerial gunships to strike targets in the United States or its allies. Nor in contrast to the sanctions imposed by Western regimes during the past two decades on Muslim countries such as Libya, Iraq, Somalia, the Sudan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Syria, the “Muslim world” has not held a Western country under economic siege. These are among the many categories of mass violence and criminality that the “Muslim world” does not need to outgrow, because no Muslim regime is guilty of engaging in them.

“Though about a fifth of the world’s population is Muslim,” Pinker writes, “and about a quarter of the world’s countries have a Muslim majority, more than half of the armed conflicts in 2008 embroiled Muslim countries or insurgencies.” (362-363) But was Poland “embroiled” in an armed conflict with Germany in 1939? Was Lebanon “embroiled” with Israel in 1982 and again in 2006? Can a street victim be “embroiled” with his assailant? Pinker’s use of the word “embroiled” in relation to “Muslim countries or insurgencies” obscures the difference between perpetrator and victim, such that the victim appears as a co-belligerent in an armed conflict.

Here Pinker is echoing the work of PRIO, UCDP, HSRP, and other researchers closely aligned with a decades-old U.S. and Western agenda, accepting that, in the words of PRIO’s Nils Petter Gleditsch, “in the general trend towards more peace, Muslim countries and Islamic opposition groups seem to be lagging behind....”[98] In an endnote, Pinker cites the UCDP-PRIO database for 2008,[99] and list the 19 armed conflicts that he alleges “involved a Muslim country,” but he fails to mention that in many of the 19 cases listed, the United States or its clients also were crucially implicated.[100] These were either armed movements resisting violent U.S.- and allied-directed state repression in countries where the victim population is Muslim (e.g., Iraq, the Philippines, Turkey), or U.S. and allied-supported insurgencies that fly Islamic banners in countries where the United States seeks to destabilize a regime (e.g., the Justice and Equality Movement in the Sudan, the Jandullah in Iran). In another endnote, Pinker writes that “Thirty of 44 foreign terrorist organizations in the U.S. State Department’s Country Reports on Terrorism 2008” were “Muslim terrorist organizations,” underscoring yet again his *Islam-equals-violence* theme, while in this case parroting the State Department’s official designation of who engages in “terrorism,” and who suffers from it.[101]

The UCDP-PRIO database upon which Pinker relies is systematically and crudely biased. Thus for example it lists the U.S.-led war and occupation in Afghanistan for 2008 as an “internationalized internal” armed conflict[102] between the government of Afghanistan and two opposition groups, the Hezb-i-Islam and the Taliban.[103] The armed forces of the

United States and indeed the entire NATO bloc are classified as “secondary” parties to this conflict,[104] merely lending their support to an Afghan government that is a puppet they installed following the October 2001 invasion of the country, and continued to prop-up through 2008 (and now 2012). Similarly for 2008, the UCDP-PRIO lists the U.S.-led war and occupation in Iraq as an “internationalized internal” armed conflict between the government of Iraq and two opposition groups, the Al-Madhi Army and the umbrella organization known as the Islamic State of Iraq, which includes Al-Qaeda as well as several other armed resistance groups.[105] Here again the UCDP-PRIO classified the U.S. and allied role in Iraq as that of “secondary” parties to the conflict, lending their support to the Iraqi government, rather than as the invader-occupier that had driven the previous regime from power and unleashed huge and ongoing violence in the country. But for the UCDP-PRIO as well as for Pinker, Afghanistan and Iraq were two of the 19 theaters where alleged “Islamic” conflicts were taking place in 2008, and this helps to show that an “increasing proportion of the world’s armed conflicts have involved Islamic countries and insurgencies over the past two decades, while the rest of the world got more peaceful.” (366) This carries Pinker beyond the preferential method of research.

In contrast with the UCDP, PRIO, and Pinker, Robert Pape (whose name never appears in Pinker’s book) and his Project on Security and Terrorism at the University of Chicago have shown that the number one factor instigating what Pinker mislabels “Islamic” violence is not something about *Islam*, but about the fact that the United States wages wars against “Islamic” countries, militarily occupies them, terrorizes and kills lots of Islamic peoples, and frequently supports dictatorships in their countries to enforce the political outcomes it wants. “[S]uicide terrorism such as that of 9/11 is particularly sensitive to foreign military occupation, and not Islamic fundamentalism or any ideology independent of this crucial circumstance,” Pape writes in a summary of his findings. “[T]otal suicide attacks worldwide have risen dramatically” since the launching of the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq—“from about 300 from 1980 to 2003, to 1,800 from 2004 to 2009....[O]ver 90 percent of suicide attacks worldwide are now anti-American.” [106] So-called “militant Islamism” is not a cause of violence inside Muslim countries—much less an “endogenous” variable in the modern world, to use the kind of language Pinker enjoys—but a simple effect of the many decades of brutal and bloody Western interference in them—and, crucially, the U.S.-led NATO bloc’s ratcheting-up of *its* violence since the collapse of the Soviet bloc and especially since 2001.

In another classic of misrepresentation, Pinker writes that “In defiance of the rising tide of democracy, only about a quarter of Islamic countries elect their governments, and most of them are only dubiously democratic....The laws and practices of many Muslim countries seem to have missed out on the Humanitarian Revolution....” (363) Pinker fails to mention that for decades the United States and its allies have supported unelected governments in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, Bahrain, Morocco, Tunisia, Pakistan, and even Iraq (through August 2, 1990); that they overthrew a democratically elected government in Iran in 1953, and installed a dictatorship; that they rejected the results of free elections in Palestine in 2006 won by Hamas, imposed sanctions on the Gaza Palestinians to punish them, and launched covert operations against Hamas;[107] and that the “Arab” contributions to the “Global Spring” were and remain largely outbursts of popular revolts against unelected, U.S.-supported and -aided regimes.[108] This is one more case of the Civilized West working to decivilize the weaker societies, but Pinker claims that the consequences are all rooted in Islamic culture.

“The Muslim world...is sitting out the decline of violence,” Pinker writes. “More than two decades of headlines have shocked Westerners with acts of barbarity in the name of Islam.” (362) His catalog of headline-grabbing barbarisms include the “1989 clerical death threat against Salman Rushdie,” the “fatal stabbing in 2004 of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh,” the “lethal 2005 riots after a Danish newspaper printed editorial cartoons that were disrespectful to the prophet,” and, of course, 9/11.

Here again Pinker takes the Western media’s headlines and choruses of moral outrage as unbiased, and he apparently believes that equivalent or far more deadly events that they do not feature are properly downplayed or ignored. But if the *New York Times* and CNN rank the threat of violence against Salman Rushdie as more important and newsworthy than the actual U.S. bombing of mosques in Afghanistan, or warehouses bearing Red Cross insignia, or wedding parties, or broadcasting facilities, or episodes of mass killing in Iraq and the growing evidence of extensive genetic damage to babies born in Fallujah since this city of some 250,000 inhabitants was destroyed by U.S. forces in 2004,[109] this speaks far more to the U.S. and Western media’s biases and propagandistic role than it does to the inherent importance of the Rushdie affair. No serious analyst or scholar would take U.S. media headline-treatment as the proper and authentic measure of the importance of global events.

“The impression that the Muslim world indulges kinds of violence that the West has outgrown is not a symptom of Islamophobia or Orientalism but is borne out by the numbers,” (362) Pinker reassures us. “The historian Bernard Lewis is not the only one who has asked, ‘What went wrong?’...Whatever the historical reasons, a large chasm appears to separate Western and Islamic cultures today.” (364-365)

In fact, the “chasm” was Western-created, and what really went wrong over the past two centuries was that the West developed far more lethal military weapons than did Islamic regimes, and Western regimes have long been deploying these lavishly against Islamic territories and peoples, who have suffered far greater losses than their more violent and domineering tormentors. But now these victimized peoples are standing-up against the undemocratic and repressive regimes sponsored and supported by the Civilized. They seek their own Humanitarian Revolution, though they continue to run up against Western interests, interventions, and growing Islamophobia. Pinker proudly carries the Western torch against “Militant Islam” and helps enlarge the chasm.

Class, Race, and the “Science of Self-Control”

It should come as no surprise that in a work defending the imperial states as benevolent, with declining rates of violence internally and the alleged “democratic peace” between them serving as a model for the lesser peoples and powers of the world, we find a racist underpinning.

“The Rights Revolutions are the liberal revolutions,” Pinker tells us. “Each has been associated with liberal movements, and each is currently distributed along a gradient that runs, more or less, from Western Europe to the blue American states to the red American states to the democracies of Latin America and Asia and then to the more authoritarian countries, with Africa and most of the Islamic world pulling up the rear.” (475) We doubt that the canonical Orientalist map of the world has ever been expressed more succinctly.[110]

Within the Western imperial powers, Pinker believes that a similar process runs from the

earliest civilizers among the upper strata of society (royalty and aristocrats and elites in general) downward to the “lower strata of the socioeconomic scale,” the savages in whom the “Civilizing process never fully penetrated,” (81) with many of them ending up behind bars—where Pinker thinks a lot of them belong.[111] He acknowledges that the “Civilizing Process did not eliminate violence” altogether but, he adds, “it did relegate it to the socioeconomic margins,” as it “spread not only downward along the socioeconomic scale, but outward across the geographic scale, from a Western European epicenter.”[112] (85)

Pinker’s notion of the “Civilizing Process” is based in part on his reading of a book originally published in Germany in 1939, titled *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. [113] This book’s author, Norbert Elias, Pinker calls the “most important thinker you have never heard of.” (59; 64-81) Something called “self-control” is the central component of this alleged process. *Better Angels* contains many paeans to “self-control.”

Conveniently for Pinker’s decline-of-violence stories, “self-control” is a fuzzy notion—a many-headed metaphor that, like “terrorism,” can be used as a weapon either to denigrate targets (Palestinians, “Islamists,” young inner-city black males) or to cover-up the sins of favored parties (the United States and its allies, power-elites throughout the West). Pinker maintains that “self-control” is a variable trait that is heritable, and that those who possess more “self-control” generally do better in the world than do those who possess less of it. Following Elias, he argues that the consolidation of states in Europe (fewer and fewer discrete political units, larger and more centralized authorities) and an “economic revolution” that replaced “zero-sum plunder” with “positive-sum cooperation” (a division of labor, money, markets, and “gentle commerce”) were the two “exogenous factors” that triggered the “Civilizing Process” over many centuries, and reduced homicide rates. “And to prosper within that whole,” Pinker adds, “one had to cultivate faculties of empathy and self-control until they became, as [Elias] put it, second nature.” (78)

Pinker has no serious evidence for this neatly-tailored story, even though his sources’ evidence for the decline in homicide rates in European countries over many centuries is solid.[114] Nevertheless, he goes on to devote a section of his book to the so-called “science of self-control.” (592-611) “Lapses of self-control can...cause violence on a larger scale,” he tells us. “The burning and looting of African-American neighborhoods by their own residents following the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, and Israel’s pulverizing of the infrastructure of Lebanon following a raid by Hezbollah in 2006, are just two examples.” (592) But might not the widespread riots that occurred after King’s death have been the final result of unbearable social conditions needing only a spark to ignite them, as were the major riots four years earlier in New York City (Harlem), North Philadelphia, and Los Angeles (Watts), and not the result of some kind of maladaptive impulses among the rioting savages? Was the July-August 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon really an uncontrolled response to a provocation, or was the alleged provocation an excuse for an already planned, large-scale military action? In each of these cases, Pinker’s “lapses of self-control” substitutes a psychologizing about what makes human individuals tick for serious institutional analysis. The results are gross misrepresentations of history.

In his 1997 book, *How the Mind Works*, Pinker had likened “IQ” to “some crude consumer index,” and observed dismissively of James Q. Wilson and Richard Herrnstein’s 1985 book *Crime and Human Nature* that they “attributed [the cause of crime] to low intelligence.” Neither innate nor historical differences were at the forefront of Pinker’s 700-page tract. His definition of “intelligence” as an “ability to attain goals in the face of obstacles by means of decisions based on rational (truth-obeying) rules” made no use of “IQ.” Nor did he discuss

“intelligence” in relation to “racial” categories that have long been at the forefront of the “mismeasures of man,” and conspicuously display racist biases.[115]

But in his 2002 book *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, Pinker sought to vindicate in the language of evolutionary biology whole sets of junk-scientific claims about human psychology as well as the economic, social, and political arrangements that he prefers. This was especially clear in his attacks on what he called the “hard-left ideology” of the “radical science movement” of the previous three decades, whose partisans had criticized “sociobiology”[116] and whom Pinker accused of running from scientific truths about the “innate differences among people,” because they feared the “political implications” these differences might entail.[117] “Moral” and “scientific” doctrines have been so badly “conflated,” he charged, that genuine “discoveries about human nature [have been] greeted with fear and loathing because they were thought to threaten progressive ideals.” Indeed, “politically motivated reactions to the new sciences of human nature” sought to deny that such a thing as human nature exists.[118]

In contrast with his earlier views on this subject, Pinker now treated “IQ” as a real “trait that can vary,” not as a “‘reification’ unrelated to the brain, personality and social behavior without any genetic basis,” in his successive misrepresentations of Stephen Jay Gould (1981) and a work jointly-authored by Richard Lewontin, Steven Rose, and Leon Kamin (1985).[119] Of course, none of these figures—nor any other serious figure from the history of inquiry into human affairs—has ever believed anything like the “blank slate” conjured-up by Pinker. But it was rhetorically necessary for him to pretend that “blank slatists” were running the academy and policing its fields of research into human psychology and behavior so that he could ride to the rescue of the new “discoveries”—the old “sociobiology” and its more recent “adaptationist” offshoots.[120]

Now Richard Herrnstein’s work (whether individually or jointly with Charles Murray or James Q. Wilson) was not dismissed but cited favorably. Pinker wrote that Herrnstein’s work on “IQ” in particular, as expressed by his notorious “syllogism,” should be accepted because it is “banal” rather than controversial, and “based on a mathematical necessity: as the proportion of variance in social status caused by nongenetic factors goes down, the proportion caused by genetic factors has to go up...[W]hen a society becomes more just, it will also become more stratified along genetic lines. Smarter people will tend to float into the higher strata, and their children will tend to stay there.”[121] That the numbers for all factors, and the “IQ” tests themselves, reflect self-fulfilling cultural influences, is rejected by Pinker, as he fully embraces a crude biological determinism. Also, he never suggests that the Herrnstein-Murray findings might reflect a “hard-right” bias favoring policies that protect class and racist inequities, cutbacks in social spending, and an end to affirmative action-type programs. These writers are serious scientists, after all, like Pinker himself—not human-nature-denying, politically-driven leftists!

“[T]he people who commit crimes are those with the least self-control,” Pinker writes, mentioning again the work of Richard Herrnstein and James Q. Wilson, along with others who engage in the classic method of blaming-the-victims. (600) “Self-control is partly correlated with intelligence (with a coefficient of about 0.23 on a scale of -1 to 1),” Pinker continues. “Intelligence itself is highly correlated with crime—duller people commit more violent crimes and are more likely to be the victims of a violent crime....” (601) But Pinker is referring to street-crimes only, not the crimes of speculators, self-dealing looters, or war criminals, all of whom are exempt from Pinker’s analysis of “self-control”—unless they stick-up a 7-Eleven or shoot somebody in a crack-cocaine turf war.

"[O]rganisms are equipped with an internal variable, like an adjustable interest rate, that governs how steeply they discount the future," Pinker writes, citing the work of Martin Daley and Margo Wilson. "[T]he shorter the expected life span (from all causes of violence), the higher the rate of violent crime." (607) But doesn't street-crime also correlate with poverty and the systematic lack of educational and job alternatives for an underclass? And when one shifts one's perspective to the higher violent crimes, like making war and killing people with troops and bombs in cities from Hiroshima to Fallujah, how would Pinker explain the ferocity of the larger-scale violence of Harry Truman, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and David Petraeus, given their longer expected life spans?

"I think [James Q.] Wilson was on to something when he linked the 1960s crime boom to a kind of intergenerational decivilizing process," Pinker writes. "In many ways the new generation tried to push back against the eight-century movement described by Norbert Elias." (109) Much of what Pinker contends in this and the next section ranks among the most laughable material in *Better Angels*. "The Civilizing Process had been a flow of norms and manners from the upper classes downward," he continues. "But as Western countries became more democratic, the upper classes became increasingly discredited as moral paragons, and hierarchies of taste and manners were leveled." (109-110)

Pinker claims that as U.S. society became more egalitarian and democratic, it also became less civilized ("Decivilization in the 1960s"); then he argues later that as U.S. society became less egalitarian and democratic, and considerably more repressive and reactionary, it was recivilized ("Recivilization in the 1990s"). But the Sixties saw the height of the U.S. Civil Rights movement, the rise of feminism, and growing demands of ordinary citizens to participate in political decision-making—a "crisis of democracy" in the eyes of elites and, in their corner, Steven Pinker.[122]

Pinker quotes both Charles Murray and Daniel Patrick Moynihan to support his view: "[O]ne side effect [of the decivilizing 1960s] was to undermine the prestige of aristocratic and bourgeois lifestyles that had...become less violent than those of the working class and underclass. Instead of values trickling down from the court, they bubbled up from the street, a process that was later called 'proletarianization' [Murray] and 'defining deviancy down' [Moynihan]." [123] (110) Moynihan's 1965 report for the Johnson administration, *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action*, with its "tangle of pathology" rhetoric, and its warning that the "matriarchal structure" of the black American family, the "reversed roles of husband and wife," spelled doom for black Americans below the middle class,[124] was "eventually vindicated," Pinker contends. "The decivilizing effects hit African American communities particularly hard." (115)

It wasn't until three decades later, in the 1990s, that "civilizing offensives" started to right the listing Leviathan. The homicide rate in the United States was in fact higher in 1980 than in 2010 (i.e., 10.2 homicides per 100,000 people compared to 4.8). For Pinker, "two overarching explanations" account for the decline. "The first is that the Leviathan got bigger, smarter, and more effective. The second is that the Civilizing Process, which the counterculture had tried to reverse in the 1960s, was restored to its forward direction. Indeed, it seems to have entered a new phase." (121)

In real-world terms, this meant "putting more men behind bars for longer periods of time...especially African Americans." (121-122) It also meant a "ballooning of the police" in the 1990s. (123) But above all, it meant "difficult-to-quantify cultural and psychological changes" that, Pinker believes, "can fairly be called a recivilizing process." (125) The

“licentiousness” and “informalization” and leveling of the 1960s were reversed. “Deviancy” stopped being “defined downward.” The “perverse incentives” of the welfare state were removed. “Self-control” as a positive value was restored. So was “trust” in official institutions—cops in particular. The federal and state law enforcement agencies engaged in the “second stage of a civilizing process, enhancing the legitimacy of government force.” (126) Potential criminals not yet living behind bars learned that the risk of an arrest, conviction, and punishment for illegal conduct was greater than it had been since the mid-1960s.[125] Not only did homicide decline in the 1990s, but “so did other indicators of social pathology, such as divorce, welfare dependency, teenage pregnancy, dropping out of school, sexually transmitted disease, and teenage auto accidents and gun accidents.” (127)

Never mind that by the end of 2010, the adult U.S. prison population stood at 2,266,800 (or one out of every 104 adults), with an additional 7,076,200 adults on parole or probation.[126] Racial and ethnic minorities have borne the brunt of this “recivilizing process,” with blacks and Hispanics accounting for at least 60 percent of all inmates today. Under the badly mislabeled 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act and the racially discriminatory “War on Drugs,” the number of people behind bars for non-violent “drug crimes” rose by 1,137 percent from 1980 to 2010, and some two-thirds of this exploding prison population were blacks. Although it was finally overturned in June 2012 by the U.S. Supreme Court,[127] more than 25 years of mandatory minimum prison terms for the possession of one-one-hundredth as much crack as would similarly penalize the possession of powdered cocaine caused a situation in which black males had a 1-in-3 chance of winding up behind bars at some point in their lifetimes, compared to 1-in-6 for Hispanic males, and 1-in-17 for white males.[128] By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, roughly 23 percent of all prisoners in the world languished behind bars in the United States, this country boasting the “highest prison population rate in the world.”[129] But there are no lamentations from Pinker about the lack of “self-control” running amok among U.S. lawmakers and the enforcers of the criminal justice system. As one group of critics noted about the rise of the “penal state” in America: “No thug, no dictator, no psychopathic madman anywhere in the world can touch the United States in this department.”[130]

The criminologist Randall Sheldon (whose name appears nowhere in Pinker’s book) has written that the new millennium began as the previous one had ended, with the institutional growth, spread, and deepening of the “crime-control industry,” its many state and private subsidiaries engaged in a self-perpetuating struggle for resources—more inmates and tax dollars above all. “What has occurred during the last one third of the twentieth century,” Sheldon observes, “is that crime and its control has become one of the fastest-growing businesses in world history. As the manufacturing base of America has declined, we have seen in its place the rise of a fast-growing service industry.”[131] In ranking the “order of importance” of the eleven factors that contribute to jail overcrowding in the United States, Jerome Miller ranked the “actual amount of crime committed” eleventh overall—dead-last.[132] A “recivilizing process” indeed.

Communism versus Capitalism

Pinker’s establishment ideology kicks-in very clearly in his comparative treatment of communism, on the one hand, and democracy and capitalism, on the other. He is explicit that whereas communism is a “utopian” and dangerous “ideology” from which most of the world’s serious violence allegedly flowed during the past century, democracy, capitalism, “markets,” “gentle commerce,” and the like, are all tied to liberalism—or more exactly to “classical liberalism.”[133] These institutional forms are not the result of ideologies, much

less utopian and dangerous; they are the historically more advanced permutations of the Leviathan that help to elicit those components of the neurobiology of peaceableness (or “better angels” as opposed to “inner demons”) for which the human brain has been naturally selected over evolutionary time. Hence, they are sources of the alleged decline in violence, and their spread is a force for positive and more peaceful change in the world.[134]

Not so communism. At the outset of Chapter 6, “The New Peace,” Pinker approvingly quotes Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s line that, unlike the communists, “Shakespeare’s evildoers stopped short at a dozen corpses [b]ecause they had no ideology” driving them. (295) In discussing the alleged mental traits of the members of a society mobilized to commit genocide, he argues that “Utopian creeds that submerge individuals into moralized categories may take root in powerful regimes and engage their full destructive might,” and highlights “Marxism during the purges, expulsions, and terror-famines in Stalin’s Soviet Union, Mao’s China, and Pol Pot’s Cambodia.” (328) In his 2002 book, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, he devoted several pages to what he called the “Marxist genocides of the twentieth century,” and noted that “Historians are currently debating whether the Communists’ mass-executions, forced marches, slave labor, and man-made famines led to one hundred million deaths or ‘only’ twenty-five million.”[135] And in the section of the current book titled “The Trajectory of Genocide,” Pinker cites the authority of the “democratic peace” theorist and “atrocitologist” Rudolph Rummel, who in his 1994 book *Death By Government* wrote that whereas “totalitarian communist governments slaughter their people by the tens of *millions*[,]...many democracies can barely bring themselves to execute serial murderers.”[136] (357)

As we have seen, Pinker rewrites history to accommodate this familiar establishment perspective, so that the Cold War was rooted in communist expansionism and U.S. efforts at containment, and the several million deaths in the Korean and Vietnam wars were attributable to the communists’ fanatical unwillingness to surrender to superior force, not to anti-communist and racist attitudes that facilitated the U.S. military’s mass killings of distant peoples. He deals with U.S. state-capitalism’s support and sponsorship of the corrupt open-door dictatorships of Suharto, Marcos, Mobutu, Pinochet, Diem, the Greek Colonels, and the National Security States of Latin America (among many others), and the “burgeoning” of torture following the end of the Cold War, by eye aversion.

In Pinker’s view, the Third World’s troubled areas are suffering from their failure to absorb the civilizing lessons modeled for them in the United States and other advanced countries. He ignores the eight-decades-long massive U.S. investment in the military and ideological training, political takeovers, and subsequent support of Third World dictators in numerous U.S. client terror states, including Guatemala, transformed from a democracy to terror state in 1954, Brazil, shifted from a democracy to military dictatorship in 1964, the Philippines in 1972, and Chile the same in 1973, among many others. A tabulation by one of the present authors in 1979 found that 26 of the 35 states in that era that used torture on an administrative basis were U.S. clients, all of them recipients of U.S. military and economic aid.[137] These clients were capitalist in structure, but threatened and employed force to keep the lower orders disorganized and more serviceable to the local elites and transnational corporations investing there. One Latin American Church document of that period spoke of the local U.S.-supported regimes as imposing an economic model so repressive that it “provoked a revolution that did not exist.”[138] This was a deliberate “decivilizing” process, with the civilized serving as co-managers.

We have seen that Pinker finds the modern era peaceful by focusing on the absence of war between the major powers, downplaying the many murderous wars carried out by the West (and mainly the United States) against small countries, and falsely suggesting that the lesser-country conflicts are home-grown, even where, as in the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan, it was U.S. military assaults that precipitated the internal armed conflicts, with the United States then actively participating in them. The Israeli occupation and multi-decade ethnic cleansing of Palestine he misrepresents as a “cycle of deadly revenge,” with only Israel fighting against “terrorism” in this cycle. He speaks of Islamic and communist ideology as displaying violent tendencies, and congratulates the U.S. military for allegedly overcoming the kind of racist attitudes reported at the time of the Vietnam war (U.S. soldiers referring to Vietnamese as “gooks,” “slopes,” and the like)—but the military’s new humanism is another piece of Pinker misinformation and pro-war propaganda. And he fails to cite the numerous instances of Israeli leaders referring to Palestinians as “grasshoppers,” “beasts walking on two legs,” “crocodiles,” “insects,” and a “cancer,” or Israeli rabbis decrying them as the “Amalekites” of the present era, calling for extermination of these unchosen people.[139]

As regards Israel, Pinker never mentions the Israeli belief in a “promised land” and “chosen people” who may be fulfilling God’s will in dispossessing Palestinians.[140] Although the lack of angelic behavior in these assaults and this language, ethnic cleansing, and dispossession process is dramatic, and has had important effects on the attitudes and behavior of Islamic peoples, it fails to fit Pinker’s ideological system and political agenda, and therefore is not a case of conflict with ideological roots.

For Pinker, there is also nothing ideological in the “miracle of the market” (Reagan), no “stark utopia” in Friedrich von Hayek’s assertion that the “particulars of a spontaneous order cannot be just or unjust,”[141] no ideology in the faith that an unconstrained free market will not produce intolerable inequalities and majority resistance that in turn require the likes of Pinochet, Suharto, or Hitler to reassert the requisite “stability.” It is simply outside of Pinker’s orbit of thought that liberalism and neoliberalism in the post-Soviet world are ideologies that have serviced an elite in a class war; that the major struggles and crises that we have witnessed, over climate change, the massive upward redistribution of income and wealth, the global surge of disposable workers, and the enlargement of NATO and the police-and-surveillance state, are features of a revitalized consolidation of class power, under more angelic names like “reform,” “free markets,” “flexibility,” “stability,” and “fiscal discipline.” For Pinker, the huge growth of the prison population shows the lack of “self-control” of the incarcerated savages still with us; and it is one merit of the liberal state that it gets the bad guys off the streets.

Another device that Pinker uses when weighing capitalism versus communism is to take notorious state abuses committed in the name of communism (e.g., under Joseph Stalin), not as perversions of communism, but as inherent in its ideology, and flowing directly from it. Many historians and leftists have long argued that Stalinism constituted a radical betrayal and perversion of genuine communism, and that it emerged out of crises and stresses that made anything approaching genuine communism unreachable.[142] Pinker never addresses this kind of explanation and exemption of real-world communism, but he does this implicitly for real-world degenerate forms of capitalism. Thus, Nazi Germany and its mass murders are not credited to capitalism’s account, even though Germany under the Nazis was still capitalist in economic form and surely a variant of capitalism arising under stress and threat from below, with important business support.[143] Suharto’s Indonesia

and Pinochet's Chile could be said to fit this same pattern. Rightwing believers in the crucial importance of free markets, such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, approved of Pinochet's rule, which ended political freedom and freedom of thought, but worked undeviatingly for corporate interests and rights. But it took only one decade of the Chicago Boys' privatizations and other "reforms" for Chile's economy and financial system to collapse. In the harsh depression that ensued, the banks were re-nationalized and their foreign creditors bailed-out in a process sometimes called the "Chicago Road to Socialism," but then shortly thereafter they were re-privatized all over again, at bargain-basement prices.[144] (Pinochet does not show up in Pinker's index; Chile does, but never as a free market state loved by von Hayek, Friedman, and the Chicago School of Economics, and supported by the United States.)

In one of his book's more outlandish moments, Pinker even allocates Nazism and the holocaust to communism. He writes that since "Hitler read Marx in 1913," Marxism led definitively if "more circuitously" to the "[dekamegamurders] committed by the Nazi regime in Germany." [145] (343) But while there is no evidence that Hitler really examined Marx or accepted any of his or his fellow Marxist writers' ideas,[146] it is incontestable fact that Hitler held Marxism in contempt, and that communism and communists ranked very high among Hitler's and the Nazi's demons and targets (along with Jews) when they held power in Germany.[147] So is the fact that racist theories and "mismeasure of man" literature in the Houston Stewart Chamberlain tradition—of which Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray arguably are heirs—were fanatically embraced by Hitler, and therefore linked to Nazism—and not very "circuitously," either.

Pinker not only doesn't credit the Nazi holocaust to capitalism, he also fails to give capitalism credit for the extermination of the Native Americans in the Western Hemisphere and the huge death tolls from the Slave Trades,[148] which should have been prevented by the rising "better angels." As noted, he also ignores democratic capitalism's responsibility for the surge of colonialism in the 18th and 19th centuries, the associated holocausts,[149] and the death-dealing and exploitation of the Western-sponsored terror states in Indonesia, the Philippines, Latin America and elsewhere. He also fails to address the huge toll of structural violence under capitalism flowing from its domestic and global dispossession processes, and, interestingly, intensifying with the post-1979 transformation of China and the breakup of the Soviet bloc and Soviet Union (1989-1991), which reduced any need on the part of Western capitalism to show concern for the well-being of its own working class majority. This helps explain the significant global increases in inequality and dispossession and slum-city enlargement over the past two decades, a period that Pinker calls the "New Peace" and depicts as an age of accelerating "Civilization"!

Pinker refers to the deaths during China's Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) as a "Mao masterminded...famine that killed between 20 million and 30 million people." [150] (331) For Pinker, clearly, the dead were victims of a deliberate policy that demonstrates the evil behind communist ideology. But as the development economists Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen have pointed out, China under Mao installed a massive and effective system of public medical services, as well as literacy and nutrition programs that greatly benefitted the general population in the years prior to the famine—a fact that is difficult to reconcile with the allegation that Mao regarded mass starvation as an acceptable means to some other end. Instead, Drèze and Sen blamed this tragedy on the lack of democracy in China, with the absence of pressure from below and a lack of timely knowledge of policy failure significantly offsetting the life-saving benefits of communist China's medical and other social

welfare programs.[151]

Drèze and Sen also compared the number of deaths caused by this famine under Mao with the number of deaths caused by what they called the “endemic undernutrition and deprivation” that afflicts India’s population year-in and year-out. “Estimates of extra mortality [from China’s famine] vary from 16.5 million to 29.5 million,” they wrote, “arguably the largest in terms of total excess mortality in recorded history.”[152] But “despite the gigantic size of excess mortality in the Chinese famine,” they continued, the “extra mortality in India from regular deprivation in normal times vastly overshadows the former. Comparing India’s death rate of 12 per thousand with China’s 7 per thousand, and applying that difference to India’s population of 781 million in 1986, we get an estimate of excess normal mortality in India of 3.9 million per year. This implies that every eight years or so more people die in India because of its higher death rate than died in China in the gigantic famine....India seems to manage to fill its cupboard with more skeletons every eight years than China put there in its years of famine.”[153] Indeed, by 2005, some 46 percent (or 31 million) of India’s children were underweight, and 79 percent suffered anemia. “Forty years of efforts to raise how much food-grains Indians are able to eat has been destroyed by a mere dozen years of economic reform,” Jawaharal Nehru University economist Utsa Patnaik observes.[154]

China’s death rate increased after 1979, with the surge of capitalist reforms and the associated sharp reduction in public medical services.[155] A recent review of China’s past and current demographic trends showed that its rate of death was higher in 2010 than in 1982, and that the greatest declines in mortality occurred well prior to the reforms, with a national decline occurring even during the decade that included the famine (1953-1964).[156]

So Pinker misrepresents the truths at a number of levels in dealing with the Chinese starvation episode. He avoids the need to reconcile allegedly deliberate starvation deaths with a prior and continuous Chinese state policy of helping the masses by simply not discussing the subject. He ignores the evidence that policy failure and ignorance rather than murderous intent was the source of those deaths. He fails to mention the rise in mortality rates under the post-Mao new capitalist order. And Pinker carefully avoids Drèze and Sen’s China-India comparison, which suggests that every eight years or so since India won its independence in 1947, its democratic capitalist system may well have caused greater levels of excess mortality than did China under the worst years of its famine—a lesson that could be extrapolated to other theaters of structural violence, were the author’s concern with such outcomes less driven by his own ideology.

Similarly, while Pinker regularly cites killings and genocide under communist rule in the Soviet Union, he never mentions the huge body count in Russia after the overthrow of communism and the installation of a capitalist state from 1992 onward, with aggressive social re-engineering pressed by the democratic states of the West. This “failed crusade”[157] was deliberately imposed on Russia, its human costs thought acceptable by Western sponsors and their local collaborators (most notably Boris Yeltsin) in order to assure the irreversibility of the overthrow of socialism.

The destruction of the social welfare and health-care institutions of communism made Russia perhaps the “first country” in history to undergo a spike in mortality rates “for reasons other than war, famine or disease,” the Russian specialist David Powell wrote in 2002.[158] Noam Chomsky observed that as the UN Development Program had estimated

“ten million excess male deaths during the 1990s,” this death toll was “approximately the toll of Stalin’s purges sixty years earlier, if these figures [were] near accurate....The general collapse [was] so severe that even monstrous Stalin [was] remembered with some appreciation: more than half of Russians ‘believe Stalin’s role in Russian history was positive, while only a third disagreed’, polls indicated in early 2003.”[159] As David Kotz and Fred Weir described the impact of the “reforms,” “There is no place for most of Russia’s population in the new economic system.”[160]

Now more than a decade after this initial flood of human deaths, arguments rage over how far Russia’s demographic crisis will cause its national population to fall by 2030 or mid-century, all due to the catastrophic shocks of the 1990s.[161] Not only is there no mention in *Better Angels* of a Western-sponsored neoliberal shock-therapy killing millions of Russians during the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st, but the only Russia that interests Pinker is the one from the early 17th century (i.e., the “Time of Troubles”) or the one from early last century, which fought in World War I and ended up with communism.

Sources and Methods

As we have noted, Pinker employs the “preferential method” of research, uncritically using sources that support his claims and ideological agenda, and ignoring or criticizing harshly those that take positions incompatible with his. In our favorite example, he often cites John Mueller’s work, but never mentions this same author’s 1999 article with Karl Mueller that claims the UN-U.S. “sanctions of mass destruction” against Iraq were historically unique mass killers of civilians, a strategic silence almost surely determined by the fact that the U.S. and its democratic allies were the killers.[162]

Pinker never mentions Amartya Sen or Jean Drèze, both distinguished scholars whose work often covers ground similar to Pinker’s in *Better Angels*, again almost surely because Sen and Drèze deal with structural violence under capitalism, do not regard the Mao-era famine in China as a case of deliberate mass killing, and contend that deaths in India under the “endemic undernutrition and deprivation” of its capitalist system greatly exceeded China’s famine deaths. Separately, Sen also stresses the diversity and tradition of tolerance within Islam, as Pinker never does, and writes that the “hard sell of ‘Western liberalism’” notwithstanding, the “valuing of freedom is not confined to one culture only, and the Western traditions are not the only ones that prepare us for a freedom-based approach to social understanding,”[163] Instead, Pinker and his sources focus only on Islam’s backwardness and violent proclivities, and “What went wrong?”

There is no index reference to Sen or Drèze in *Better Angels*, but there are eight indexed references to Rudolf Rummel in Pinker’s book, and four works by Rummel are listed in Pinker’s bibliography, including the website for Rummel’s work at the University of Hawaii. A far-right fanatic, Rummel’s blog, *A Freedomist View*, rivals that of the Birchers. In the first year of the Obama presidency, Rummel called Obama a “1960’s anti-war, socialist-radical activist” who believes “in love not war,” and he assailed Obama for putting a crimp in the use of torture, thereby “undermining intelligence operations” by the good guys. Rummel also warned that Obama’s plans called for “unnecessarily closing Guantanamo detention camp by January 22, 2010 as a sop to world and domestic leftist opinion”—a fear that has yet to be realized.[164] Rummel even wrote that Obama and his associates were carrying

out a *coup d'état* in the United States, and he was worried that under leftwing pressure the United States might fail to save Afghanistan, just as the left had forced a regrettable U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam four decades earlier.[165]

In what purports to be his scholarly work, Rummel writes that “U.S. democide in [the Vietnam] war is most difficult to calculate,” but finds that “A prudent figure may be 5,500 overall.”[166] In contrast, he estimated that the “communist” government of North Vietnam was responsible for 1,669,000 democidal deaths in the war, or more than 300 times as many as killed by the U.S. war machine. This remarkable pair of claims is based on two factors: Rummel’s requirement that in order for deaths to count as “democide,” the killing of non-combatants must be carried out by agents acting on behalf of a government, with the clear intent to kill members of a targeted population;[167] and Rummel’s own deep ideological belief that whereas communist regimes target and kill non-combatants on a regular and systematic basis, the U.S. government meticulously upholds the laws of war and strives to protect civilians (with the rarest exceptions). Free-fire zones,[168] high-level saturation bombing, destruction of villages in order to “save them,” napalm, cluster bombs, the use of “six times” the tonnage of “bombs and shells” against Vietnam (South and North) than it used during all of World War II (acknowledged by Rummel[169]), and the widespread application of chemical weapons to destroy civilian crops (Operation Ranch Hand), the last causing crippling damage to hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese children,[170] fail to resonate with Rummel, for whom it remains an article of faith that the United States did not deliberately harm civilians in the war (and does not as a matter of policy). “[W]hat many...sources label as [U.S.] atrocities or massacres may, by the Geneva Conventions and other accepted rules of warfare, be legitimate military actions or accidents of war,” he counters. Indeed, the “most important fact of this bombing was the scrupulous care with which targets were selected and bombed,” with the United States limiting “attacks to purely military targets....” “Civilians were killed,” he concedes, “but these deaths were collateral to bombing military targets....”[171] These are truths that Rummel accepts for no reason other than that they pertain to his government and to the communist enemy, and possess a kind of self-evident status for him. This is extreme fanaticism masquerading as scholarship.

In contrast with Sen and Drèze, Rummel writes that more than 35 million people were “murdered” in the “Chinese Communist Anthill,” and of the famine victims he writes that “27 million starved to death,” every one of them “sacrificed for the most massive, total social engineering projects ever forced on any society in modern history....”[172] But Rummel says what Pinker wants to hear, so while Sen is ignored, Rummel is promoted to serious authority and his numbers are used profusely and uncritically in *Better Angels*.

In a similar fashion, Pinker makes lavish use of the estimates of a contingent of mainly government- and foundation-funded experts devoted, like him, to showing that war has been declining in importance—especially in the more civilized, lighter-skinned parts of the world—and is becoming less harmful even to the darker-skinned peoples in the countries under attack. The claims of these individuals and groups are often as preposterous as Rummel’s—even if they are better at keeping their right-wing biases under wraps.

One of Pinker’s major government-funded sources is the Human Security Report Project (HSRP) at Simon Fraser University (Vancouver, Canada).[173] HSRP’s *Report 2009/2010* advanced many of the global themes reiterated in *Better Angels*, in particular the decline of interstate wars since the “end of the Cold War” and the development of a new “global security architecture.”[174] It is revealing that HSRP makes only one mention of NATO in its entire report: As one of the “international organizations...[that] have increased the number

of their peace operations” during the same years.[175]

Like Pinker, HSRP lauds the alleged “democratic peace” that has seen the number of “democracies” double while the number of dictatorships was cut-in-half. HSRP admits that the “democratic peace thesis” has some holes in it, because although “democracies” no longer fight wars among themselves, “they frequently fight nondemocracies.”[176] Nevermind who starts these wars, what real purposes they advance, and whether they are consistent with the UN Charter and international law, their targets are bad guys—“non-democracies,” “rogue states,” “failed states,” “terrorist havens,” and the like. The 50 NATO member and partner states contributing troops and materiel to the U.S. war in Afghanistan as of early 2012[177] were engaged in “counterterrorism,” “peacemaking,” “security,” and “state-” and “democracy-building.” The fact that troops from this many countries were participating in these alleged missions thus cannot be regarded as counter-evidence for the “New Peace” and the “democratic peace,” but rather as support for both of them.[178] The Western Great Powers are good.

The development of “Islamic political violence” is a “particular source of disquiet for security planners in the West,” the HSPR adds, as “in 2008 four of the five most deadly conflicts in the world—Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Somalia—pitted Islamic insurgents against national governments and their U.S. and other supporters.”[179] Like the “democratic peace,” which remains peaceful even though the “democracies” go right on attacking other countries, the Iraqi, Afghan, Pakistani, and Somali theaters remain deadly due to “Islamic political violence,” not due to the attacks by the United States and its allies.

Among Pinker’s sources, definitional sleights-of-hand such as these abound. A 2011 paper by the International Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO) concluded in its comparison of its own work and that carried out by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program in Sweden (UCDP) that both “datasets agree that the severity of war, as measured by the annual battle deaths, has decreased over the past twenty years,” and that “it seems evident that war is waning.”[180] But the strength of these claims is exaggerated greatly by the fact that the UCDP and PRIO focus on direct or “battle-related deaths” to the exclusion of deaths that can be far more numerous during wartime, but are not directly related to actual battles.[181] “Direct deaths...conform to our basic intuition of what it means for an agent to be responsible for an effect that it causes,” Pinker argues in defense of this method, “namely that the agent foresees the effect, intends for it to happen, and makes it happen via a chain of events that does not have too many uncontrollable intervening variables.” He continues:[182]

The problem with estimating indirect [or non-battle-related] deaths is that it requires us to undertake the philosophical exercise of stimulating in our imagination the possible world in which the war didn’t occur and estimating the number of deaths that took place in that world, which then is used as a baseline. And that requires something close to omniscience....If Saddam Hussein had not been deposed, would he have gone on to kill more political enemies than the number of people who died in the intercommunal violence following his defeat?...Estimating indirect deaths requires answering these sorts of questions in a consistent way for hundreds of conflicts, an impossible undertaking. (299-300)

Not only is this a disingenuous argument, and Pinker’s counter-example of Iraq outlandish, but Pinker himself doesn’t believe it, as he and his sources violate it whenever they deal with communist regimes. For these regimes (e.g., Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot), attributing

indirect, non-combat-related deaths to a deliberate plan requires no imaginative leap at all—the communists are maximally guilty for all of them, and estimating deaths poses no methodological problems. (See “Communism versus Capitalism,” above.)

Like Rummel, the HSRP, UCDP, and PRIO minimize U.S.- and Western-led warmaking and killing. Indeed, so systematic are the UCDP and PRIO labors to this end[183] that they treat the U.S. role in the wars in the Koreas (1950-1953)[184] and Vietnam (1954-1975)[185] as “secondary,” that is, as merely providing support to the governments of South Korea and South Vietnam, even though the United States established these governments (in 1945 and 1954), and bore overwhelming responsibility for most of the killing and destruction in the wars. (Also see “‘Islamic Violence,’” above, for how the UCDP-PRIO minimizes the U.S. role in Afghanistan and Iraq in the past decade.)

In the same dataset, the U.S. overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 is treated as an “internal” armed conflict between the Arbenz government and the “Forces of Carlos Castillo Armas,” with the U.S. role suppressed.[186] The violence generated by the counterinsurgency regimes of Guatemala (1965-1995)[187] and El Salvador (1979-1991)[188] is once again treated as the result of “internal” armed conflicts, with no mention of the crucial U.S. role in arming, training, and supporting these regimes. In Nicaragua, the U.S. role first in supporting the Somoza dictatorship against the Sandinistas rebels (1978-1979) and later in creating and supporting the Contras and the FDN against the Sandinista government (1980-1989) is also suppressed.[189] Many other examples could be added.

In contrast, the Soviet role in Hungary (1956)[190] and later Afghanistan (1979)[191] is treated as “primary,” with these armed conflicts classified as “interstate,” that is, as occurring between the Soviet Union and Hungary and Afghanistan, with both initiated by acts of cross-border Soviet aggression.

It is on the basis of methodologies as politicized as these that the “Long Peace,” the “New Peace,” and the “Democratic Peace” have been constructed. Among Pinker and the rest of the “waning of war” cadre, the imperial role of the United States simply disappears.

Massaging the Numbers: Pinker’s Non-Proofs of Long-Term Violence Reduction

Better Angels contains 115 “Figures” (line graphs and point graphs, tables, charts, and diagrams)—roughly one for every six pages of text. With statistical flourishes on this scale, Pinker creates the impression of an author in command of a powerful numeracy. Indeed, this is one of *Better Angels*’ most successful illusions. But the book’s figures frequently fail to teach the lessons that Pinker claims they do, and quite often their lack of substance is disguised by the bravado with which he discusses them.

Given limited space, we will zero-in on four of Pinker’s most important figures.

The first is Figure 2-2, “Percentage of deaths in warfare in nonstate and state societies” (49), a bar diagram that purports to show the various odds that a “person died at the hands of another person rather than passing away of natural causes” at different times and places in history.[192] (48)

The distinction between “state” and “nonstate” carries a heavy burden in *Better Angels*. Against the belief that “humans are peaceable by nature and corrupted by modern

institutions,”[193] and that the “world we made has contaminated us, perhaps irretrievably,”[194] (xxi) ideas that he identifies with “romantic” writers such as Rousseau,[195] Pinker argues that a “logic of violence”[196] (31-36) pervades human affairs, and that humans spent almost their entire life on the planet trapped in a violent world. Invoking Hobbes, Pinker agrees that the “natural state of men, before they entered into Society, was a mere War, and that not simply, but a War of all men, against all men.”[197] Hence the symbolic and emotional significance of “nonstate” and “state” for Pinker: The first means a ubiquitous war of all against all stretching back into the dark and distant past; the second, humans learning to live more peaceably as they developed agriculture and permanent settlements, and the central authority of states replaced the “state of anarchy.”[198]

In Figure 2-2, Pinker purports to illustrate this grand scheme. He does this by comparing the percentages of violent deaths from 39 graves he identifies with “nonstate” societies, and the percentages in eight “state” societies. Needless to say, the reported percentages in the 39 “nonstate” graves, on average, are dramatically higher than in the “state” societies. Pinker then provides the lesson that he wants us to learn from Figure 2-2: “The major cleft in the graph”—that is, between the higher and lower percentages of deaths caused by violence—“separates the anarchical [nonstate] bands and tribes from the governed states.” (51)

Some of Pinker’s small number of early critics noted how misleading it is to lump the disparate human groups associated with the first 39 graves into the same “nonstate” category, as even the most complete forensic inquiry into their mortal remains could hardly tell the story of what life and death had been like prior to the advent of “civilization.”[199]

Also revealing is the cavalier attitude that he takes towards his data, and the huge fudge-factors he entertains. He offers a 0-to-60 percent range for the bodies recovered from one subset of 21 “nonstate” graves he labels “Prehistoric,” and claims that this series of estimates that are literally all over the map can be reduced to a meaningful final average of 15 percent. Similarly, he offers a 14 percent average for violent deaths among the 8 graves he designates as “Hunter-gatherers,” and a 24.5 percent average for the 10 “Hunter-horticulturalists” graves.

But were the bodies that Pinker alleges can be associated with violent deaths combat-related deaths, sacrifices, or accidents? Were the artifacts recovered with these bodies evidence of weapons or other kinds of tools? In cases when they are clearly weapons, were they also causes of death or the purely symbolic accoutrements of burial? Indeed, in one careful assessment of “Pinker’s List” of the 21 “Prehistoric” graves, the anthropologist R. Brian Ferguson concludes that this list “consists of cherry-picked cases with high casualties,” and that in passing-off these “highly unusual cases” as representative of “prehistory,” Pinker distorts “war’s antiquity and lethality.”[200]

Recall that when Pinker deals with the Johns Hopkins research into Iraqi mortality rates under the U.S. war and military occupation, he is quick to dismiss their work because of its alleged “main street bias”! Also that in rejecting the careful work of these researchers, his stated reasons included the complaint that, “Without meticulous criteria for selecting a sample, extrapolations to an entire population can be wildly off”—unless, of course, the extrapolation is from 39 graves out of an unknown but vast population base to the claim that humans had been making war forever.

Still other fundamental problems afflict Pinker's story. In *Better Angels*, he argues that the violent potential for which he believes the components of human intelligence and the emotions had been naturally selected over evolutionary time have been softened or "pacified" by the development of permanent human settlements (cities) and the centralized authorities that governed them during the past 10,000 to 12,000 years. The "logic of the Leviathan" displaced the "logic of violence" wherever central authorities took hold. (41-42)

But in one of the rare informed reviews of this "trite Hobbesian message," the anthropologist Douglas P. Fry argued that Pinker's history of violence and war is upside-down. "[T]he archaeological facts speak clearly," Fry noted, "showing for particular geographic areas exactly when war began. And in all cases this was recent, not ancient activity—occurring after complex forms of social organization supplanted nomadic hunting and gathering." [201] Among the "artifices of civilization" we must count war.

In fact, a whole alternative expert literature rejects Pinker's view on this matter. [202] "[W]arfare is largely a development of the past 10,000 years," R. Brian Ferguson has written. "[T]he multiple archaeological indicators of war are absent until the development of a more sedentary existence and/or increasing sociopolitical complexity, usually in combination with some form of ecological crisis and/or steep ecological gradients." [203] Other crucial factors falling under the "complexity" rubric were the earliest manifestations and subsequent development of class structures, divisions of labor and social status, concentrations of wealth and poverty, and hierarchies of power and subordination, including religious and military power structures—all of the sins still very much with us in the modern world.

Thus while a certain "logic of violence" may be natural to human life at an interpersonal level, there is no evidence that violence and war were central to the development of humans for the first 95 percent of the past 200,000 years—or any time before. In "reverse-engineering" *Homo sapiens* and projecting war forever backwards, "older than the human species," something that "our ancestors have been practicing war for at least 6 million years," and turning war into a "selective pressure acting on the chimpanzee-hominid common ancestors and their descendants," the academic survivalists among Pinker's sources are playing "Time Machine," transporting humans whose psyches have been distorted by modern civilization back into the past. [204] Pinker's theory that the development and spread of central governments associated with the early cities "ushered in the first major historical decline in violence" (35) fails its test—and fails it spectacularly.

The second figure that we want to look at is not indexed among the book's "List of Figures" (xvii-xx). However, it appears in a section where Pinker purports to answer the question, "Was the 20th Century Really the Worst?" (193-200) "[T]he enduring moral trend of the [twentieth] century," he writes, "was a violence-averse humanism that originated in the Enlightenment, became overshadowed by counter-Enlightenment ideologies wedded to agents of growing destructive power, and regained momentum in the wake of World War II." (192) Proving this point, and proving that the massive death toll, suffering, and destruction associated with the Second World War does not blow-holes in his declining-violence/"better-angels" narrative, are two of the purposes of the longest chapter in his book, "The Long Peace."

Pinker calls this figure "(Possibly) The Twenty (or so) Worst Things People Have Done to Each Other." (194) Adapted from the work of the "atrocitologist" Matthew White, the table lists 21 "hemoclysms" ("blood floods"), attributes each one to a "cause" (e.g., the Second

World War, the Fall of Rome), provides an estimated death toll for each one, and adjusts these estimates from the world's population at the time of each "hemoclysm," up to their "mid-20th century equivalent"—the world's population as of 1950, when it stood at roughly 2.5 billion people. (Today, only 62 years later, it officially stands at slightly above 7 billion.[205])

Perhaps the most striking feature of this figure is that whereas in his own book, White ranks the Second World War in the Number One spot with 66,000,000 deaths, calls it the "most destructive man-made event in history,"[206] and rejects the method of adjusting death tolls to reflect a constant world population, under Pinker's adjusted rankings, the Second World War ranks no higher than ninth place overall, less lethal than the An Lushan Revolt, the Mongol Conquests, the Mideast Slave Trade, the Fall of the Ming Dynasty, the Fall of Rome, the reign of Timur Lenk (Tamerlane), the Annihilation of the American Indians, and the Atlantic Slave Trade.

Pinker insists that adjusted-rankings are needed to correct for two illusions. "The first is that while the 20th century certainly had more violent deaths than earlier ones, it also had more people." (193) The other is what he calls "historical myopia" (also "availability bias"): The further in the past an era is from our own, the fewer details we know about it. Taking the An Lushan Revolt, Pinker claims that it would have cost the lives of 429,000,000 people, adjusted from the world's population around 750 AD to 1950. As Pinker credits World War II with an unadjusted 55,000,000 deaths, this means that by his reckoning, World War II was only one-eighth as lethal as the An Lushan Revolt.[207] Hence our technologically more advanced modern era has not been the most violent after all. Our thinking is rife with "illusions."

But once again serious problems abound with Pinker's reasoning and data. In what sense are his earlier destructive events genuinely and consistently *events*? Whereas World War II is relatively easy for us to define, four of Pinker's higher-ranking "hemoclysms" span multiple centuries—the Mideast Slave Trade, the Fall of Rome, the Annihilation of the American Indians, and the Atlantic Slave Trade. If this is how he wants us to think about "violence," then we should also enumerate the *structural violence* of the kind that Sen and Drèze analyze, and that takes into account the human losses which follow from the policy actions and inactions of the global capitalist structures, but which Pinker passes over because it falls outside his conception of violence. (Though not where he can associate the structural violence with "Marxism" and "communism.") Given that many more people are alive today, and that our scientific and technological capacities would enable us to remedy much of the avoidable suffering and loss that remains with us, were our political capacities equally as developed, surely our modern world is awash in unacknowledged hemoclysms.[208]

Also important is the fact that the estimated death tolls in well over half of the cases Pinker lists in this figure are extremely uncertain, but he can live with them—it is only the higher-end mortality estimates for Iraq and the Democratic Republic of Congo in our day that he feels compelled to challenge on technical grounds of exactitude.

Perhaps most important, the absolute numbers of people who die because of armed conflicts are a first-order measure of the true human cost of violence, and we should never permit the moral gravity of this loss and suffering to be relativized by the juggling of numbers until they all match the same global population in any given year.[209] After all, what relationship did the mass deaths in the China of the 750s and 760s A.D. have with the

human population then spread across the rest of the earth, whatever its size? Similarly, what relevance did the large population of Asia in the first-half of the 20th century (accounting for more than one-in-two people worldwide) have to the fact that the machinery of death available at the time of the Second World War set new records in mass violence, with the most civilized countries leading the killing process? Should the Nazi holocaust be downgraded in importance because the populations of China and India were so large?

Pinker's population adjustments enable him to achieve two ends: To inflate death tolls from the past and to minimize those in the modern period. But he is not suffering from some kind of reverse-historical myopia or expanding-denominator illusion. Rather, he is massaging the numbers. As another one of the rare critical reviews of Pinker's book to have appeared in an establishment source put the matter: "Pinker plays down the technical ability of modern societies to support greater numbers of human lives. If carrying capacity increases faster than mass murder, this looks like moral improvement on the charts, but it might mean only that fertilizers and antibiotics are outpacing machine guns and machetes—for now." [210] And nuclear weapons.

This brings us to the third figure that we want to examine: Figure 5-3, "100 worst wars and atrocities of human history." (197)



In his treatment of this scatter plot of 100 datapoints, Pinker's discussion is perhaps the most dishonest in his book. (Though his handling of Figure 5-6, discussed below, may be tied with it.) Based on Matthew White's list of the "one hundred events with the largest man-made death tolls," [211] and arranged in chronological order from the earliest to the most recent, Pinker introduces one crucial change in White's numbers: Pinker adjusts each reported death toll to its percentage of the world's population around the time the event occurred. As we saw above, the effect of this kind of adjustment is decisive: It makes smaller death tolls appear much larger when the world's population was much smaller; and it makes larger death tolls appear much smaller when the world's population was much larger. To express the same criticism in a different way: The further away from the year 2000 (i.e., our era) an event is plotted, the greater its death toll will appear; and the closer to the year 2000 an event is plotted, the smaller will be its apparent death toll.

Thus Figure 5-3 plots ten events that in Pinker's adjusted rankings turn out to be more lethal than the First and Second World Wars. "Circled dots [at the very top of this figure] represent events with death rates higher than the 20th century world wars," Pinker explains: From left to right, these are associated with the Xin Dynasty (9-24 A.D.), the Three Kingdoms of China (189-280), the Fall of the Western Roman Empire (395-455), the An Lushan Revolt (755-763), the reign of Genghis Khan (1206-1257), the Mideast Slave Trade (7th-19th centuries), the reign of Timur Lenk (1370-1405), the Atlantic Slave Trade (1452-1807), the Fall of the Ming Dynasty (1635-1662), and the Conquest of the Americas (1492-). [212] (197)

Because the data are plotted on a base-ten logarithmic scale, what numerical values the datapoints represent on the vertical axis are impossible to determine. Nevertheless, Figure 5-3 conveys visually and with an air of statistical certitude the two main points that Pinker wants to drive-home about the 20th century: That it wasn't the most violent overall, and that World War II wasn't the "most destructive man-made event in history" (contrary to what White himself writes). But this is methodology with a political rather than scientific

purpose. Pinker adopts it not because it helps him to illuminate atrocities throughout human history, but because it enables him to reduce the apparent scale of atrocities in the recent past.

In his discussion of Figure 5-3, Pinker writes that the “cloud of data tapers rightward and downward into smaller and smaller conflicts for years that are closer to the present,” and he asks: “How can we explain this funnel?” (198) But in asking this question, Pinker is admitting that Figure 5-3 shows that a greater number of “hemoclysms” have occurred in the recent past than in the distant past, with their frequency accelerating over the past 100-200 years. Simply looking at what Pinker calls the “funnel,” in the lower right-hand-corner, below the 100 deaths per 100,000 line, we can see that roughly one-half of this graph’s total of 100 datapoints are plotted there. This means that Figure 5-3 shows the opposite of what Pinker contends it does: The frequency and absolute levels of violence have been increasing into the modern era, as more and more datapoints cluster there. This is what explains the “funnel.”

And poor Pinker cannot explain what went wrong. So once again he resorts to our alleged “historical myopia.” (198) He quotes the speculation of Matthew White: “Maybe the only reason it appears that so many were killed in the past 200 years is because we have more records from that period.” (198) And he adds to this his own speculation, as well as that of the political scientist James Payne:[213]

[O]f course for every massacre that was recorded by some chronicler and then overlooked or dismissed, there must have been many others that were never chronicled in the first place.....As James Payne has noted, any study that claims to show an increase in wars over time without correcting for historical myopia only shows that “the Associated Press is a more comprehensive source of information about battles around the world than were sixteenth-century monks.” (198)

But this, too, is methodology with a political purpose—and with it, Pinker has done no better than resort to a Donald Rumsfeld-class excuse for the missing “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq: the “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.” In fact, in his treatment of Figure 5-3’s failure to show what he claims that it shows, Pinker outdoes even Rumsfeld: the absence of evidence counts as veritable proof. “[A]s you go back into the past,” he pleads, “historical coverage hurtles exponentially downward for two and a half centuries, then falls with a gentler but still exponential decline for the three millennia before....If more conflicts fell beneath the military horizon in the anarchic feudal societies, frontiers, and tribal lands of the early periods than in the clashes between Leviathans of the later ones, then the earlier periods would appear less violent to us than they really were.” (199)

For Pinker, war simply must have been more frequent and more lethal in the distant past than in the modern era. When the 100 datapoints of his own graph not only fail to show this, but show the opposite, they must be explained-away as the result of “historical myopia”—and Pinker dismisses Figure 5-3 even as he hangs onto it. In the words of the physicist Wolfgang Pauli, Pinker’s excuses are “not even wrong.”

The last figure that we want to examine is Figure 5-6, “Richardson’s data,” (205) which alludes to the work of the 20th century mathematician, meteorologist, and pacifist Lewis Fry Richardson. Pinker is quite fond of Richardson, whose posthumously published—and ponderous—*Statistics of Deadly Quarrels*[214] is featured prominently in *Better Angels*.

Pinker devotes two dense sections to Richardson's work, one on the "Timing of Wars" (200-210) and the other on the "Magnitude of Wars." (210-222) Figure 5-6 depicts the 315 wars (civil as well as interstate) that Richardson identified as having either ended or started sometime between 1820 and 1950.[215] (205)



On the page in Pinker's book where Figure 5-6 appears, many of the 315 lines of data are a blur to the eye, just as they are here. But as the lessons that Pinker strains to impose on these data are even blurrier, let Pinker explain them:

The segments in figure 5-6 represent events of various durations, and they are arranged from left to right in time and from bottom to top in magnitude. Richardson showed that the events are governed by a Poisson-process: they stop and start at random. Your eye may discern some patterns—for example, a scarcity of segments at the top left [1800-1900], and the two floaters at the top right [WW I and WWII]. But by now you have learned to distrust these apparitions. And indeed Richardson showed that there was no statistically significant trend in the distribution of magnitudes from the beginning of the sequence to the end [1800-1950]. Cover up the two outliers [WWI and WW II] with your thumb, and the impression of randomness is total. (204-205)

These are remarkably deceptive claims—and no amount of hocus-pocus can save them.

Recall that in his discussion of Figure 5-3, Pinker acknowledges but then dismisses the dramatic increase in datapoints marking armed conflicts in the recent past, and he speculates about the occurrence of conflicts in the distant past for which he has no evidence.

So it is with Figure 5-6: He acknowledges that the two most lethal conflicts in the past several hundred years were the First and Second World Wars, but he dismisses this fact by labeling them "floaters" and "apparitions," dazzles his readers with "Poisson processes,"[216] "cognitive illusions," and "power-law distributions,"[217] and urges us to "cover up the two outliers with [our] thumbs." *Voila!* They disappear. Both world wars were "statistical illusions." (222)

Throughout, Pinker contends that the alleged "randomness" of events such as the Second World War renders both its timing (in the living memory of some of us) and its magnitude (unprecedented and in some ways unimaginable) irrelevant to our understanding of it. He pretends that Figure 5-3 and Figure 5-6 show what they manifestly do not show, and that they don't show what they really do. He asks us to believe that as the "randomness" of World War I and World War II is "total," and the fact that they occurred in modern times teaches us nothing about the modern world. And he ignores his own contention that since our "better angels" are gradually triumphing over our "inner demons," and that modern institutions are the major "exogenous" cause of this victory, then our "better angels" should be skewing this data over time towards fewer and smaller wars, rather than leaving "random" results.

What is more, in writing about the "drivers of war," those "psychological or game-theoretic dynamics that govern whether quarreling coalitions will threaten, back down, bluff, engage, escalate, fight on, or surrender apply whether the coalitions are street gangs, militias, or armies of great powers," Pinker concludes that "*size doesn't matter*" (his emphasis (216)).

He offers a number of eccentric comparisons between war and forest fires and landslides (“self-organized criticality”), game theory (the “War of Attrition” game),[218] Weber’s Law, and the Pareto Principle, all in the hope of persuading his readers that, to repeat his point again, war “involves a set of underlying processes in which size doesn’t matter.” (220) And he adds that war escapes our “desire for a coherent historical narrative,” our “tendency to see meaningful clusters in randomly spaced events,” and the “bell-curve mindset that makes extreme values seem astronomically unlikely, so when we come across an extreme event, we reason that there must have been extraordinary design behind it....The two world wars were, in a sense, horrifically unlucky samples from a statistical distribution that stretches across a vast range of destruction.” (222)

Pinker wants us to believe that the relative power of warmakers and the institutional forces developing within and between them don’t matter. After all, was it not the emergence and consolidation of Leviathans that made it possible for our “better angels” to assert themselves and peaceableness to grow? Manchuria was just as likely to invade Japan in 1931 as was Japan to invade Manchuria; Poland just as likely to invade Germany in 1939 as Germany to invade Poland; and Iraq just as likely to invade the United States in 2003 as the United States to invade Iraq. He also wants us to believe that the existence of a military-industrial complex, rooted in the richest and most powerful country to emerge from the ruins of the Second World War, is irrelevant to the probability that it will engage in wars, and to the deadliness of the wars in which it does. (At least Richardson could plead that he died in 1952, and was no longer around to analyze the institutions and practices of permanent warmaking.[219])

“Suppose,” Pinker writes, “for the sake of argument, that World War II was the most destructive event in history....What does that tell us about long-term trends in war and peace? The answer is: nothing. The most destructive event in history had to take place in *some* century, and it could be embedded in any of a large number of very different long-term trends.” (191)

With comments such as these, Pinker is imploring us to ignore major pieces of evidence that violence has reached new and more lethal heights in modern times.

This is the final triumph of ideology.

Concluding Note

Steven Pinker’s *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* is a terrible book, both as a technical work of scholarship and as a moral tract and guide. But it is extremely well-attuned to the demands of U.S. and Western elites at the start of the 21st century, with its optimistic message that the “better angels” of *their* nature are taking charge, and its lament over the other peoples of the world, whose “inner demons” and cultural backwardness have prevented them from keeping-up.

With his country engaged in a record-breaking number of simultaneous wars and interventions on four continents, with NATO expanding and asserting its military dominance globally, with Israeli settlement and dispossession policies unabated on the West Bank, with the United States and Israel threatening to attack Iran, and with some critics (not cited by Pinker) expressing profound concern over a deteriorating institutional environment in which it has become “hard to imagine any president or Congress standing up to the powerful vested interests of the Pentagon, the secret intelligence agencies and the military industrial

complex,”[220] along comes Pinker bearing his 832-page gift on the declining relevance of war.

Pinker’s book also coincides with the surprising emergence of an Occupy Movement that is protesting a wide range of political, economic, and social developments that have increased human insecurity, inequality, and unemployment, filled U.S. prisons, and diminished the democratic substance of elections and political power. This is also a period in which civil liberties have been under serious attack, the right to *Habeas Corpus* suspended, torture openly employed and given legal sanction by the executive branch, and free speech rights of protest subject to increasing restriction.

The convenience of Pinker’s themes and the warm reception of his work reminds us of the similar treatment of Claire Sterling’s book *The Terror Network* back in 1981,[221] when her stress on an alleged Soviet responsibility for cross-border terrorism fit so well the Reagan administration’s intensified focus on terrorism and the threats posed by the “Evil Empire.” Sterling’s work was ludicrously sourced and biased (e.g., she had the Apartheid regime of South Africa combating the African National Congress’ and Nelson Mandela’s “terrorism,” but not itself engaging in terrorism), and easily shown to be intellectually indefensible,[222] but *The Terror Network* was given great attention and treated with respect in the media, and excerpts from it were published in establishment journals and presented as credible and authoritative.[223]

It is true that Pinker’s book employs a much larger scholarly apparatus, but this is a misleading façade. He relies heavily on the work of the International Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO) as well as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)—two organizations whose findings largely overlap and, as we have seen, categorize the overwhelming U.S. role in the Afghan and Iraqi theaters of violence over the last decade as “secondary” to internal and “intercommunal” warfare.[224] Pinker also relies on the Vancouver-based Human Security Report Project (HSRP), whose work draws heavily from that of PRIO and UCDP, and whose interrelated themes of a decline in great-power violence and the “shrinking costs of war,” reversed in recent years by a surge in “Islamist political violence,”[225] fit well the foreign and domestic policies of the Western imperial powers.

Pinker relies also on the work of Matthew White, who in his own book on the worst atrocities in history asserts that the “Western philosophy of war-making tries to avoid killing civilians.” Under this philosophy, White explains, the “1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima is justified as a legitimate act of war, while the 1983 suicide bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut is condemned as terrorism.” The “key difference,” White adds, was that “one was performed openly against a declared enemy who had the opportunity to fight back or surrender, while the other was sneaky”[226]—that is, not an act of resistance to occupying armies that had just killed some 20,000 people and were still indiscriminately shelling the hills around Beirut. Pinker also relies on Rudolph Rummel’s work, a man who believes that Barack Obama is a left-wing appeaser of global tyrants, and busily engineering a *coup d’état* in the United States.[227] Rummel’s twin-volumes on “democide” are so badly deformed by bias that he estimated that all but 5,500 Vietnamese civilians killed by U.S. forces during the war were “collateral damage” and thus the unintended victims of a civilian-protective war policy, whereas North Vietnam had deliberately targeted and killed vastly greater numbers, all as a matter of policy.[228] Pinker himself claims that “at least 800,000 civilians died” in Vietnam, (267) but he also adds that these were “battle deaths,”[229] and that the deaths ultimately were a result of the Vietnamese Communists’ “fanatical dedication to outlasting their opponents”—that is, to their refusal to submit to superior force. (308)

Better Angels has been received even more warmly than was Claire Sterling's book, garnering many positive reviews and its author invited to lecture about it and to appear on numerous radio, television, and Podcast interviews.[230] The *New York Times* treated the book to at least five prominent mentions prior to the flattering front-page account it received in the Sunday Book Review in early October 2011 by philosopher Peter Singer, in which Singer called it "supremely important" and a "masterly achievement." [231] Overall, the *Times* reviewed, excerpted, discussed, blogged, mentioned, or invited Pinker himself to reiterate its themes in more than 20 different items.[232] That was quite a positive push by the United States' most prominent newspaper.

Even more noteworthy is the fact that so many liberals and leftists have been taken-in by *Better Angels*. The British philosopher Simon Blackburn praised the "riveting and myth-destroying" book, with its "positive history of humanity" and its "wealth of historical, anthropological and geographical data." [233] The British political scientist David Runciman called it a "brilliant, mind-altering book," and swallowed "Pinker's careful, compelling account of why the 20th century does not invalidate his thesis that violence is in a long decline"—because the "violence of the 20th century is best understood as a series of random spasms," according to Runciman, and because the "two world wars were essentially freak events, driven by contingency and in some cases lunacy." [234] Both reviewers display the same inability or unwillingness to engage in serious institutional analysis as does Pinker.

In this country, Stephen Colbert had Pinker as a guest on his popular Comedy Central program, but asked him no serious questions; Pinker himself repeated without challenge his mantra that "we may be living in the most peaceful era in our species' existence." [235] Colbert did, however, find the courage to add that "Stalin killed 20 million people. Mao killed 70 million people. Hitler racked-up six million Jews alone and then like a cluster-of-millions of everybody else he didn't care for...."

David Sirota also interviewed Pinker on his Colorado-based radio show. Sirota's webpage at the KKZN radio station announces that Pinker's book is "startling and engaging," and adds in what appears to have been reproduced from the promotional literature of the Pinker camp that "Pinker shows (with the help of more than a hundred graphs and maps)...[that] we may be living in the most peaceful time in our species' existence." [236]

In introducing Pinker on his MSNBC show, *The Nation's* Chris Hayes called *Better Angels* a "phenomenal book," and added later that the book is "very persuasive that things are getting better, that humans are actually getting less violent." Hayes asked no challenging questions about this book during his two-hour show. And in the show's closing "You should know" segment, Pinker said that the audience should know that "The rate of death in war has been going down since 1946"—to which Hayes added that, yes, all of us "should know that it's getting better, even in really bad weeks it's getting better." [237]

But do Colbert, Sirota, and Hayes (*et al.*) really go along with Pinker's view that the 1960s was a decade of "decivilization," and that the mushrooming of the U.S. prison population over the past 35 years is a sign of progress, as it further thinned the ranks of the Uncivilized roaming the streets? Do they accept that what those "overly indulgent" and future-discounting savages had suffered from was a lack of "self-control," rather than adverse social conditions? And that the "recivilizing" process from the 1990s on—which included intensive policing, mass incarceration, and the reduction of welfare-state pampering—was the key to this improvement?

Do they also accept Pinker's accolades to Charles Murray, Richard Herrnstein, James Q. Wilson, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan for emphasizing the alleged sociobiological roots of the class structure and inequality of U.S. society, and go along with his denunciations of the "hard-left" deniers of human nature whom, [238] in contrast to Pinker and his allies, have "radical" political agendas and want to protect the welfare state's undermining of "self-control" and reversal of the "Civilizing Process"? Are they not aware that Pinker completely ignores the structural violence of the global class war that has increased inequality and interacted with systems of state violence to enlarge "internal security" operations and prison populations? That many of the Western so-called "democracies" are really national security states? And that Pinker classifies these as the advanced-guard of the "Civilizing Process"?

Do they accept that the post-World War II era was a "Long Peace," and for Pinker's reason that the great powers fought no wars among themselves? Do they buy-into Pinker's view that the role of the United States in this era was merely the "containment" of an expansionist Communist enemy, and had no self-interested purpose or ideological base? Do they agree with his shifting of responsibility for Korean and Vietnamese civilian deaths in those distant wars from the United States to the communist sides? What do they think about Pinker's citing the peace movements of the 1960s and during the run-up to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq as evidence of the growth of our "better angels," while failing to explain why those "angels" neither prevented nor stopped the wars? Could it be that institutional factors—the global interests of transnational corporations and the military-industrial complex, the refusal of the nuclear weapons-states to give up their advantage, a permanent-war system that is more resource-commanding than ever, and possesses the potential for unprecedented destruction—carry more weight in policy decisions than does the sociobiological expansion in the powers of reason and empathy speculatively asserted by Pinker, but impossible to prove?

Can they not see the inversion of reality in the notion that it is a "militant Islam" that is the cause of Western intervention in Islamic countries? And that the "Islamic threat" that Pinker elevates to ominous levels is contrived and, like Soviet "containment," an excuse for a violent and forward-looking policy, necessary to meet Western institutional demands?

This critical failure to understand Pinker's misrepresentations no doubt rests in part on the sheer volume of the purported evidence that he throws at his readers, with more than 1,950 endnotes, some 1,100 references, and roughly one figure for every six pages of text. But selectivity and ideological bias dominate throughout, and his key evidence does not withstand close scrutiny.

We have shown that Pinker's most basic idea, that humans moved from a Hobbesian condition of chronic warfare via the growth of civilization and the Leviathan state to a slowly and unevenly developing peaceableness, is not sustained by credible evidence. In fact, the extant archaeological record flatly contradicts it, and in his review of *Better Angels*, the anthropologist Douglas P. Fry referred to this as "Pinker's Big Lie." [239] But without the counter-myth of the Violent Savage, there could be no "Pacification Process," and his story about the "better angels of our nature" would take on an entirely different cast than the one he gives us, in which "human history contains an arrow" and "violence meanders downward." (694)

Pinker calls the belief that the "twentieth century was the bloodiest in history" a "cliché" and an "illusion." (193) He deals with the fact that World War II was the historical peak in

war-related deaths, and World War I a big-time killer as well, by several tricks. One is to relativize deaths by adjusting the numbers killed in earlier conflicts to later and much larger population bases, so that although the absolute death toll from World War II tops all others, he can depict it as far less deadly than several other wars and conflagrations from centuries long ago. But while Pinker makes violence into a relative matter in order to prove his main theme, he often mentions the long historical diminution in violence without making explicit that he is talking about relative, not absolute, levels of violence. But increases in absolute levels of violence might well be independent of the sizes of the population base. Surely the U.S. attacks on Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq were rooted in independent factors, not the number of people then living on the planet. Nor was there any link between the Nazi holocaust and the population of China.

Another Pinker-device is to claim that the great wars of the 20th century were “random” events, and in his book’s many figures where he cannot avoid the deadliness of the First and Second World Wars, he waves-off their magnitude as “statistical illusions”—they are “outliers” and even “apparitions”—and he urges us to forget that they both occurred in the past 100 years. They are unrelated to “modernity,” whose “forces” for the “reduction of violence” remain sacrosanct in spite of these and subsequent wars—and the evident failure of the “better angels” to do their work.

Yet another trick is to start the “Long Peace” conveniently at the end of World War II, and to define it as a period in which there have been no wars between the great powers. But the First and especially the Second World War had taught them that with their advancing and life-threatening means of self-destruction, they could not go on playing their favorite game of mutual slaughter any longer. But this didn’t prevent them from carrying out numerous and deadly wars against the Third World, which filled-in the great-power war-gap nicely. Thus the “Long Peace”—a brief 67 years through 2012—has been peaceful only in a Pinkerian sense, and it appears to have very shallow or even no roots in our “better angels.” Furthermore, as we have stressed, it is increasingly threatened by a Western elite-instigated global class war and a permanent-war system fueled by “threats” manufactured by institutional structures that continue to overwhelm these “better angels.”

In the final analysis, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* is an inflated political tract that misuses data and rewrites history in accord with its author’s clear ideological biases, while finding ideology at work only in the actions of his opponents. Pinker fears that readers will find his book “Whiggish and presentist and historically naïve,” (692) but this secular theodicy is animated by the spirit of Dr. Pangloss more than anyone else,[240] and with its deep commitments to an elitist, Western-imperial point of view, it transcends even Voltaire’s character in the fantasy that everything done by the Holy State and its minions is leading to the best of all actual worlds.

Small wonder, then, that the message of *Better Angels* pleases so well the editors of the *New York Times* and the large U.S. permanent-war establishment. It is regrettable that despite its manifest problems, the book has bamboozled so many other people who should know better.

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(Pantheon, 2002).

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NOTES

[1] Steven Pinker, [The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined](#) (Viking, 2011). Hereafter, we will refer to this book as *Better Angels*, and to the idea behind the book as “better angels.”

[2] Asked in an email interview by the British journalist John Naughton “to explain in a nutshell what the book [*Better Angels*] is about,” this was part of Pinker’s reply.—Pinker continued: “The decline [in violence] has not been steady; it has not brought violence down to zero; and it is not guaranteed to continue. But it is a persistent historical development, visible on scales from millennia to years, from world wars and genocides to the spanking of children and the treatment of animals. The fact that violence is so pervasive in history, but nonetheless can be brought down, tells us that human nature includes both inclinations toward violence and inclinations toward peace—what Lincoln called ‘the better angels of our nature’—and that historical changes have increasingly favoured our better angels. These changes include the development of government, commerce, literacy, and the mixing of ideas and peoples, all of which encourage people to inhibit their impulses, expand their empathy, extricate themselves from their parochial vantage points, and treat violence as a problem to be solved rather than as a contest to be won.” (“[Steven Pinker: Fighting talk from the prophet of peace](#),” *The Guardian*, October 15, 2011.)

[3] Pinker was twice a “finalist” in the running for the Pulitzer Prize in the General Nonfiction category: In 1998 for his book *How the Mind Works* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1997); and in 2003, for his book *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (Penguin Books, 2002).

[4] On Iran, see, e.g., Seymour M. Hersh, “[The Redirection](#),” *New Yorker*, March 5, 2007; Seymour M. Hersh, “[Preparing the Battlefield](#),” *New Yorker*, July 7, 2008; Seymour M. Hersh, “[Iran and the Bomb: How real is the nuclear threat?](#)” *New Yorker*, June 6, 2011; Leonid Savin, “[The Conundrum of Iran](#),” Strategic Culture Foundation, January 27, 2012; William Maclean, “[Not-so-covert Iran war buys West time but raises tension](#),” Reuters, January 18, 2012; and Richard Engel and Robert Windrem, “[Israel Teams With Terror Group to Kill Iran’s Nuclear Scientists, U.S. officials tell NBC News](#),” NBC News, February 9, 2012. On Syria, see, e.g., Tony Cartalucci, “[Extremists Ravaging Syria Created by US in 2007](#),” Information Clearing House, May 11, 2012; Karen DeYoung and Liz Sly, “[Syrian rebels get influx of arms with gulf neighbors’ money, U.S. coordination](#),” *Washington Post*, May 15, 2012; Jay Newton-Small, “[Hillary’s Little Startup: How the U.S. Is Using Technology to Aid Syria’s Rebels](#),” *TimeWorld*, June 13, 2012; “[Syria: The Military Nuances of the Conflict](#),” *Stratfor*, June 15, 2012; Scott Stewart, “[Are Syria’s Rebels Getting Foreign Support?](#)” *Stratfor*, June 21, 2012; Charles Glass, “[Syria’s many new friends are a self-interested bunch](#),” *The National*, July 11, 2012; Eric Schmitt and Helene Cooper, “[Stymied at U.N., U.S. Refines Plan to Remove Assad](#),” *New York Times*, July 22, 2012; and Adam Entous et al., “[U.S. Mounts Quiet Effort To Weaken Assad’s Rule](#),” *Wall Street Journal*, July 23, 2012.

[5] See, e.g., Nick Turse and Tom Engelhardt, *Terminator Planet: The First History of Drone Warfare, 2001-2050* (Dispatch Books, 2012).

[6] See, e.g., Tom Engelhardt, “[Obama’s Bush-League World](#),” *TomDispatch*, July 11, 2011; Jonathan Turley, “[Obama’s Kill Doctrine](#),” *Foreign Policy Blog*, March 6, 2012; Tom Engelhardt, “[America as a](#)

[Shining Drone Upon a Hill](#)," *TomDispatch*, May 13, 2012; and Nick Turse, "[The New Obama Doctrine, A Six-Point Plan for Global War](#)," *TomDispatch*, June 14, 2012.

[7] See John Lewis Gaddis, "[The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System](#)," *International Security*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Spring, 1986; and *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

[8] See Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, "[The Dismantling of Yugoslavia: A Study in Inhumanitarian Intervention](#)," *Monthly Review*, Vol. 59, No. 5, September, 2007.

[9] "Out of area" operations are also referred to as "non-Article 5" operations, Article 5 referring to the "collective self-defense" article of the North Atlantic Treaty of April 4, 1949. See [The Alliance's Strategic Concept](#), North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Washington, D.C., April 24, 1999, para. 47-49.

[10] See, e.g., Rick Rozoff, "[Central Asia: U.S. Military Buildup On Chinese, Iranian, and Russian Borders](#)," *Stop NATO*, August 11, 2010; Diana Johnstone, "[Encircling Russia, Targeting China: NATO's True Role in US Grand Strategy](#)," *CounterPunch*, November 18, 2010; Rick Rozoff, "[North Korea As Pretext: U.S. Builds Asian Military Alliance Against China And Russia](#)," *Stop NATO*, December 3, 2010; and Rick Rozoff, "[U.S. Tightens Missile Shield Encirclement Of China And Russia](#)," *Stop NATO*, March 4, 2012.

[11] See, e.g., Dick Marty et al., [Alleged secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers of detainees involving Council of Europe member states \(Doc. 10957\)](#), Council of Europe, June 12, 2006. Also see Christos Pourgourides et al., [Enforced Disappearances \(Doc. 10679\)](#), Council of Europe, September 19, 2005; and Dick Marty et al., [Secret detentions and illegal transfers of detainees involving Council of Europe member states: Second report \(AS/Jur/2007/36\)](#), Council of Europe, June 7, 2007.

[12] When advocating for the "Democratic Peace" theory in *Better Angels*, Pinker primarily cites the book by Bruce Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2001).

[13] See, e.g., the webpage maintained by William Blum, "[United States waging war/military action, either directly or in conjunction with a proxy army.](#)"

[14] "[President Bush Addresses the Nation](#)," White House Office of the Press Secretary, March 19, 2003.

[15] Pinker, *Better Angels*, n. 234, p. 712. Pinker adds that he is using the definition of "war" used by the International Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), according to whom a "war" requires "at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in a given year" as measured by one 12-month calendar period. (See Nils Petter Gleditsch et al., [UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook, Version 4](#), 2009, section 3.10, p. 7.)

[16] For an alternative treatment of the civilian death toll from the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama, see Noam Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy* (Hill and Wang, 1992), pp. 163-167.

[17] In *Better Angels*, the most important chapters on matters related to "human nature" and the "evolved" human mind are Ch. 8, "Inner Demons," pp. 482-570; Ch. 9, "Better Angels," pp. 571-670; and Ch. 10, "On Angels' Wings," pp. 671-696.

[18] Interview with Steven Pinker, *The Early Show*, CBS TV, December 16, 2011.

[19] See Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (Pantheon Books, 2nd. Ed., 2002), Ch. 2, “Worthy and Unworthy Victims,” pp. 37-86. Also see Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, “Legitimizing versus Delegitimizing Elections: Honduras and Iran,” in Gerald Sussman, Ed., *The Propaganda Society: Promotional Culture and Politics in Global Context* (Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 194-212; esp. pp. 203-207.

[20] See Gareth Peirce, *Dispatches from the Dark Side: On Torture and the Death of Justice* (Verso, 2nd. Ed. 2012).

[21] See, e.g., Jeff Faux, *The Global Class War: How America’s Bipartisan Elite Lost Our Future—and What It Will Take to Win It Back* (Wiley, 2006); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (Verso, 2007); and David Bollier, *Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of Our Common Wealth* (Routledge, 2003).

[22] Beginning with the July 2005 Joint Statement on civilian energy cooperation between the Bush administration and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India, and culminating in the United States-India Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Nonproliferation Enhancement Act of October 2008, the United States has effectively underwritten the survival of India’s civilian and military nuclear programs outside the NPT, creating India-specific exemptions under the 1954 U.S. Atomic Energy Act that will enable the United States to export nuclear technology and material to India, and pressuring the Nuclear Suppliers Group to lift its ban on the export of fissile material to India. The United States also pressured the International Atomic Energy Agency to negotiate a watered-down “safeguards” agreement with India, but only on condition that India not be forced to join the NPT. *The Hindu’s* Siddharth Varadarajan cited the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Ashley Tellis, who in 2005 had explained the logic behind United States’ preferential treatment of India as follows: “[D]on’t jettison the [non-proliferation] regime ‘but, rather, selectively [apply] it in practice’. In other words, different countries should be treated differently ‘based on their friendship and value to the U.S.’ With one stroke of the pen, India has become something more than a ‘major non-NATO ally’ of the U.S. It has joined the Free World. It has gone from being a victim of nuclear discrimination to a beneficiary. India is not alone. Israel is already there to give it company.” (See Siddharth Varadarajan, “[The truth behind the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal](#),” *The Hindu*, July 29, 2005. Also see Esther Pan and Jayshree Bajoria, “[The U.S.-India Nuclear Deal](#),” Council on Foreign Relations – Backgrounder, October 2, 2008.)

[23] See the [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons](#), adopted June 12, 1968; the Treaty entered into force on March 5, 1970. Article VI states: “Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.” At the time the Treaty went into force, the world’s five declared nuclear weapons states were the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, France, and China, and Article VI applied to them specifically.

[24] In Richard J. Barnet, *The Alliance: America-Europe-Japan: Makers of the Post-War World* (Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 130. Barnet adds that the year was 1949, and Dulles, then a U.S. Senator from New York, was addressing Senate hearings on the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

[25] See James F. Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly* (Harper & Brothers, 1947), esp. pp. 294-295.

[26] See Mark Kramer, “[The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia](#),” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 2, April, 2009, pp. 39-61; esp. pp. 47-49. Also see Mary Elise Sarotte, 1989:

The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe (Princeton University Press, 2009), esp. “NATO’s Jurisdiction Would Not Shift One Inch Eastward,” pp. 107-115; and Mary Elise Sarotte, “[Not One Inch Eastward? Bush, Baker, Kohl, Genscher, Gorbachev, and the Origin of Russian Resentment toward NATO Enlargement in February 1990](#),” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 34, No. 1, January, 2010, pp. 119-140. And see the summary of this scholarship in Noam Chomsky, *Hopes and Prospects* (Haymarket Books, 2010), pp. 278-280. Kramer—whose actual findings belie the title of his article—quotes West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher (Jan., 1990), who at a Washington press conference following talks with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, said that they “were in full agreement that there is no intention to extend the NATO area of defense and security toward the East.” He quotes Baker, who said to Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow (Feb., 1990) that “NATO’s jurisdiction or forces would not move eastward.” And he quotes both Soviet and U.S. transcripts of Baker saying to Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow (Feb., 1990) that “if the United States maintains its military presence in Germany within the NATO framework, there will be no extension of NATO’s jurisdiction or military presence one inch to the East” (according to the Soviet transcription), and that “there would be no extension of NATO’s jurisdiction or NATO’s forces one inch to the East” (according to Baker aide Dennis Ross’s notes from the meeting). (Kramer, pp. 47-49.) Sarotte writes that when he was in Moscow, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl (Feb., 1990) “assured Gorbachev that ‘naturally NATO could not expand its territory to the current territory of the GDR [East Germany],’” but, Sarotte adds, that “Gorbachev did something unwise—namely, fulfilling at least some of his part of the bargain without getting written assurances that the other side would do the same....But he did not, and by the end of February it would be apparent that he would never get them.” (Sarotte, 1989, pp. 112-114.) “Rather than bringing an end to the history that culminated in the Cold War, they had perpetuated key parts of it instead,” Sarotte writes in the Conclusion to her book. “As British Foreign Minister [Douglas] Hurd concluded, they did not remake the world. Rather, the struggle to recast Europe *after* the momentous upheaval of 1989 resulted in prefabricated structures from *before* the upheaval moving eastward and securing a future for themselves. Americans and West Germans had successfully entrenched the institutions born of the old geopolitics of the Cold War world—ones that the already dominated, most notably NATO—in the new era.” (*Ibid.*, p. 201.) Today, of course, the NATO bloc has also begun to move southward as well, into Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, with no end to its expansion in sight.

[27] See, e.g., Noam Chomsky, *On Power and Ideology: The Managua Lectures* (South End Press, 1987), esp. Ch. 1, “The Overall Framework of Order,” pp. 5-26; and Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, esp. the Introduction and Ch. 1, “Cold War: Fact and Fancy,” pp. 1-68.

[28] See, e.g., Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (South End Press, 1979); Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy 1945-1980* (Pantheon Books, 1988); and Audrey R. Kahin and George McTurnan Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia* (The New Press, 1995).

[29] See [United States Programs and Objectives for National Security \(NSC-68\)](#), April 7, 1950, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. I, U.S. Department of State, 1950.

[30] See, e.g., *United States Objectives And Courses Of Action With Respect To Latin America (NSC 144/1)*, March 18, 1953, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. IV, U.S. Department of State, 1952-1954; *U.S. Policy in the Event of Guatemalan Aggression in Latin America (NSC 5419/1)*, May 28, 1954, in *Ibid.*; [Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs \(Bundy\)](#), June 11, 1965, in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. XXXI, U.S. Department of State, 1964-1968; [Memorandum from the President’s Special](#)

[Assistant for National Security Affairs \(Bundy\)](#), October 26, 1964, in *Ibid.*; and [Record of Discussion and Decisions of 22nd Meeting of the Senior Interdepartmental Group](#), September 28, 1967, in *Ibid.*

[31] See, e.g., Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, Eds., *Mohammad Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse University Press, 2004).

[32] Also see Chomsky and Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*; Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People: United States Involvement in the Rise of Fascism, Torture and Murder and the Persecution of the Catholic Church in Latin America* (Doubleday, 1980); Michael McClintock, *The American Connection: State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador* (Zed Books, 1985); and Michael McClintock, *The American Connection: State Terror and Popular Resistance in Guatemala* (Zed Books, 1985).

[33] See, e.g., Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1949-1954* (Princeton University Press, 1991).

[34] Chalmers Johnson, *Dismantling the Empire: America's Last Best Hope* (Metropolitan Books, 2010), p. 90.

[35] Pinker adds: "The irony was not lost on the eminent peace researcher Nils Petter Gleditsch, who ended his 2008 presidential address to the International Studies Association with an updating of the 1960s peace slogan: 'Make money, not war'." (*Better Angels*, p. 288)

[36] See Seymour Melman, *The Permanent War Economy: American Capitalism in Decline* (Touchstone, Rev. Ed., 1985); Gordon Adams, *The Politics of Defense Contracting: The Iron Triangle* (Transaction Publishers, 1981); Richard F. Kaufman, *The War Profiteers* (Doubleday, 1972); and Tom Gervasi, *The Myth of Soviet Military Supremacy* (Harpercollins, 1987).

[37] See Chalmers A. Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (Metropolitan Books, 2nd. Ed., 2007); Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan Books, 2004); and Johnson, *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (Metropolitan Books, 2008); Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Long War: A New History of U.S. National Security Policy Since World War II* (Columbia University Press, 2009); Henry A. Giroux, *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex* (Paradigm Publishers, 2007); Nick Turse, *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (Metropolitan Books, 2009); and Winslow T. Wheeler, *The Wastrels of Defense: How Congress Sabotages U.S. Security* (U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2004).

[38] See, e.g., Jonathan Turley, "[Final Curtain: Obama Signs Indefinite Detention of Citizens Into Law As Final Act of 2011](#)," *Jonathan Turley Blog*, January 2, 2012; Turley, "[10 Reasons The U.S. Is No Longer The Land Of The Free](#)," *Jonathan Turley Blog*, January 15, 2012; and Glenn Greenwald, "[Federal court enjoins NDAA](#)," *Salon*, May 16, 2012.

[39] James J. Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008).

[40] Fred A. Wilcox, *Scorched Earth: Legacies of Chemical Warfare in Vietnam* (Seven Stories Press, 2011), p. 35. Also see Seymour M. Hersh, *Chemical and Biological Warfare: America's Hidden Arsenal* (Doubleday, 1969); and Peter Waldman, "Body Count: In Vietnam, the Agony Of Birth Defects Calls An Old War to Mind," *Wall Street Journal*, December 12, 1997. And see the webpage maintained by the Canadian environmental research firm, Hatfield Consultants, which is devoted to the firm's [Agent Orange Reports and Presentations](#) from 1997 through the present.

[41] See our discussion of Pinker's reliance on the U.S. Department of State's Country Reports on Terrorism to designate the "terrorists" for him in "'Islamic Violence'," below.

[42] One compilation of the uses of "Haji" by U.S. military personnel includes the following uses: "1: Arabic word for someone who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca; 2: used by the American military for an Iraqi, anyone of arab decent, or even of a brownish skin tone, be they afghanis, or even bangladeshis; 3: the word many soldiers use derogatorily for the enemy." This list continues: "haji armor: improvised armor, installed by troops hiring Iraqis to update the vehicles by welding any available metal to the sides of Humvees;" "haji mart: any small store operated by Iraqis to sell small items to Americans;" "haji patrol: 1: escort detail; 2: Local National unit is also referred to as the Haji patrol, with all the projects that are being performed by the local nationals;" "haji shop: even the smallest base has some form of what soldiers call a 'haji shop' or, in more politically correct terms, a shop run by locals. Frequently near the PX, the 'Haji' shop would sell everything from cigarettes to knockoff sunglasses to pirated DVDs." (See "[Slang from Operation Iraqi Freedom](#)," GlobalSecurity.org.) We have no doubt that this list could be expanded.

[43] At the time of the U.S. war on Vietnam, the U.S. Army's *Field Manual 27-10, The Law of Land Warfare*, contained extensive rules and citations from the Geneva and Hague conventions pertaining to the proper conduct of occupying forces and the treatment of prisoners of war as well as civilians and the like. (See [Field Manual 27-10, The Law of Land Warfare](#), U.S. Department of the Army, July 15, 1956.) But there is massive evidence that these rules were systematically violated, with the violations known and even on occasion reported in the media, institutionalized and implicitly approved from above. From among a vast literature on this topic, see John Duffett, Ed., *Against the Crime of Silence: Proceedings of the International War Crimes Tribunal* (Simon and Schuster, 1970); and Richard A. Falk, Gabriel Kolko, and Robert Jay Lifton, Eds., *Crimes of War: A legal, political-documentary, and psychological inquiry into the responsibility of leaders, citizens, and soldiers for criminal acts in war* (Vintage Books, 1971).

[44] Dexter Filkins and James Dao, "[Afghan Battle Declared Over And Successful](#)," *New York Times*, March 19, 2002.

[45] See the "[Resources](#)" webpage as compiled by The Justice for Fallujah Project, 2010. Also see [Remembering Fallujah: A dossier of the BRussells Tribunal](#), 2007.

[46] "[US Marine to serve no time over Haditha killings](#)," Agence France Presse, January 24, 2012. In a travesty of justice, Staff Sergeant Frank Wuterich was permitted to plead guilty to one count of "negligent dereliction of duty" and was sentenced to no time behind bars; his seven Marine co-defendants all were acquitted. The *Los Angeles Times* noted that the "Haditha case, like other notorious instances of civilian deaths at the hands of U.S. troops or contractors, had come to symbolize what many Iraqis viewed as the impunity of American forces." (Scott Gold and Carol J. Williams, "[Critics Say Haditha Sends Message That U.S. Won't Punish Military](#)," *Los Angeles Times* Blog, January 23, 2012.)

[47] Richard A. Opiel Jr., "[Tighter Rules Fail to Stem Deaths of Innocent Afghans at Checkpoints](#)," *New York Times*, March 27, 2010.

[48] See "[Collateral Murder](#)," WikiLeaks, April 5, 2010.

[49] See the [WikiLeaks homepage](#).

[50] See "[The Common Plan or Conspiracy and Aggressive War](#)," [Final Judgment of the International](#)

[Military Tribunal for the Trial of Major German War Criminals](#), September 30, 1946 (as posted to the website of the Avalon Project, Yale Law School).

[51] Gilbert Burnham *et al.*, "[The Human Costs of the War in Iraq: A Mortality Study, 2002-2006](#)," as posted to the website, *Iraq: the Human Cost*, MIT. (Originally published in *The Lancet*, Vol. 368, No. 9545, October 21, 2006, without the appendices.)

[52] Benjamin Coghlan *et al.*, [Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ongoing Crisis](#), International Rescue Committee – Burnet Institute, January, 2008.

[53] See Neil F. Johnson *et al.*, "[Bias in Epidemiological Studies of Conflict Mortality](#)," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 45, No. 5, September 2008.

[54] Les Roberts *et al.*, "[Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey](#)," *The Lancet*, October 29, 2004. As these authors explained: "[T]he Falluja cluster is an obvious outlier and might not belong with the others. When included, we estimate that the rate of death increased 2.5-fold after the invasion (relative risk 2.5 [95% CI 1.6–4.2]) compared with before the war. When Falluja was excluded, we estimated the relative risk of death for the rest of the country was 1.5 (95% CI 1.1–2.3)." (p. 5) "The cluster survey methodology we used may have, by chance, missed small areas where a disproportionate number of deaths occurred, or conversely, selected a neighbourhood that was so severely affected by the war that it represents virtually none of the population and thus has skewed the mortality estimate too high. The results from Falluja merit extra consideration in this regard." (p. 6) "In Falluja, the team noted that vast areas of the city had been devastated to an equal or worse degree than the area they had randomly chosen to survey. We suspect that a random sample of 33 Iraqi locations is likely to encounter one or a couple of particularly devastated areas. Nonetheless, since 52 of 73 (71%) violent deaths and 53 of 142 (37%) deaths during the conflict occurred in one cluster, it is possible that by extraordinary chance, the survey mortality estimate has been skewed upward." (p. 7)

[55] Also unmentioned by Pinker and his sources is the fact that the 2006 survey covered the same 18 months as did the 2004 survey (as well as an additional 22 months beyond it). For those original 18 months, the 2006 survey estimated 112,000 Iraqi deaths, roughly replicating the 98,000 deaths estimated for those same 18 months by the 2004 survey. See Burnham *et al.*, "The Human Costs of the War in Iraq," p. 6.

[56] Iraq Body Count explains that its estimates are "drawn from crosschecked media reports of violent events leading to the death of civilians, or of bodies being found, and...supplemented by the careful review and integration of hospital, morgue, NGO and official figures." See "[About the Iraq Body Count Project](#)," IBC website.

[57] See the "Monthly Table" option, on the "[Documented civilian deaths from violence](#)" Database, Iraq Body Count. Here we've added the IBC's monthly totals for the period March 2003, through July, 2006.

[58] Personal communication via email, January 23, 2012. For a comparison of the two competing methodologies (i.e., population survey-based versus news media report-based) as they apply to Iraqi mortality rates under the U.S. invasion and occupation, see Christine Tapp *et al.*, "[Iraq War mortality estimates: A systematic review](#)," *Conflict and Health*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 7, 2008.

[59] Mohamed Ali *et al.*, Iraq Family Health Survey Study Group, "[Violence-Related Mortality in Iraq from 2002 to 2006](#)," *New England Journal of Medicine*, Vol. 358, No. 5, January 31, 2008. In

commenting on this survey, Pinker adds that the 151,000 number “required inflating the original estimate by a fudge factor of 35 percent to compensate for lying, moves, and memory lapses. Their unadjusted figure, around 110,000, is far closer to the battle-death body count.” (319) In point of fact, the Iraq Family Health Survey’s so-called “fudge factor” was 100 percent, not 35 percent.

[60] Lesley Stahl, “Punishing Saddam,” *60 Minutes*, CBS TV, May 12, 1996.

[61] John Mueller and Karl Mueller, “[Sanctions of Mass Destruction](#),” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June, 1999.

[62] See, e.g., Hans C. von Sponeck, *A Different Kind of War: The UN Sanctions Regime in Iraq* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006). Von Sponeck resigned as the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs in Iraq in 2000 in protest of the U.S. and U.K. abuse of the sanctions regime and its catastrophic effect on Iraq’s population, which he regarded as genocidal. Importantly, von Sponeck’s predecessor to the same UN office, Denis Halliday, also had resigned in 1998 to protest what he regarded as the genocidal impact of the sanctions regime.

[63] “[Congo war tops AlertNet Poll of ‘forgotten crises’](#),” Reuters, March 10, 2005.

[64] “[Tsunami coverage dwarfs ‘forgotten’ crises—research](#),” Reuters, March 10, 2005.

[65] [Democratic Republic of Congo, 1993-2003: Report of the Mapping Exercise documenting the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed within the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between March 1993 and June 2003](#), United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, August, 2010, para. 515.

[66] See the description of PRIO and UCDP sources and methods in Ralph Sundberg, [UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset Codebook: Definitions, sources and methods for the UCDP Battle-related death estimates, Version 5](#), August 1, 2011, Uppsala Conflict Data Program. The author writes: “One important caveat is that the precision of the numbers belies the uncertainty of the estimates; while UCDP estimates are based on aggregated totals of all incidents recorded in our sources, we acknowledge that numerous events are not reported in the media.” (pp. 6-7)

[67] Both PRIO and UCDP define “battle-related deaths” as “deaths caused by warring parties that can be directly related to combat over the contested incompatibility....The target for the attack is either the military forces or representatives for the parties, though there is often substantial collateral damage in the form of civilians killed in the crossfire, indiscriminate bombings, etc. All fatalities—military as well as civilian—incur in such situations are counted as battle-related deaths.” In a footnote, the author adds: “Battle-related deaths, which concern direct deaths, are not the same as war-related deaths, which includes both direct as well as indirect deaths due to disease and starvation or attacks deliberately directed against civilians only (one-sided violence).” (*Ibid.*, p. 6.)

[68] See Andrew Mack et al., [Human Security Report 2009/2010: The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War](#) (Oxford University Press, 2011), Ch. 7, “The Death Toll in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” pp. 123-131.

[69] [IRC and the Burnet Institute Strongly Affirm Congo Mortality Study Findings](#), unpublished response to the Human Security Report Project’s criticism, 2010.

[70] See Mack et al., [Human Security Report 2009/2010](#), Ch. 7, pp. 129-131.—Whichever baseline mortality rate one uses (IRC-Burnet’s 1.5 deaths per 1,000, or the HSRP’s 2.0 deaths per 1,000), is it undeniably wrong of the HSRP to start its estimate as late as May 2001, as this misses the truly

lethal period from 1996 on. In contrast, the UN “mapping exercise,” cited above, begins its survey as early as 1993.

[71] Mahmoud Kassem *et al.*, [Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo](#) (S/2002/1146), UN Security Council, October, 2002, para. 96.

[72] See Noah Schachtman, [“How the Afghanistan Air War Got Stuck in the Sky,”](#) *Wired Magazine*, December 8, 2009.

[73] See Marc Garlasco *et al.*, [“Troops in Contact”: Airstrikes and Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan](#) (Human Rights Watch, September, 2009), p. 29.

[74] William M. Arkin, “Checking on Civilian Casualties,” *Washington Post*, April 9, 2002.

[75] For a critique of Human Rights Watch’s systematic apologetics for U.S. wars, see Edward S. Herman, David Peterson, and George Szamuely, [“Human Rights Watch in Service to the War Party,”](#) *Electric Politics*, February 26, 2007.

[76] See Marc W. Herold, [A Dossier on Civilian Victims of United States’ Aerial Bombing of Afghanistan](#), Rev. Webpage Ed.; and Marc W. Herold, [“Matrix of Death: A new dossier on the \(im\)precision of U.S. bombing and the \(under\)valuation of Afghan lives,”](#) *Frontline* (India), Vol. 26, No. 21, October 11-24, 2008.

[77] Suzanne Goldenberg, [“Day 100: another raid in the bombing war without end,”](#) *The Guardian*, January 15, 2002.

[78] Catherine Callaway *et al.*, “U.S. Bombing Runs Against Frontline Taliban Troop Positions Today; Pentagon Spokeswoman Says Small Afghan Village was a Terrorist Target,” *Live at Daybreak*, CNN, November 2, 2001.

[79] Pinker, *Better Angels*, n. 166, p. 716.

[80] See Ewa Tabeau and Jakub Bijak, [“War-related Deaths in the 1992–1995 Armed Conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Critique of Previous Estimates and Recent Results,”](#) *European Journal of Population*, Vol. 21, June, 2005, pp. 187-215.—In section 3.3., “Overall Numbers” (pp. 205-207), they estimated 102,622 total war-related deaths on all sides, of which 55,261 (54%) were civilians at the time of death, and 47,360 (46%) were military or combatants (p. 207). Also see Patrick Ball *et al.*, [The Bosnian Book of the Dead: Assessment of the Database](#), Research and Documentation Center, Sarajevo, June, 2007. Ball *et al.* estimate 96,895 total war-related deaths, of which 56,662 were military or combatants at the time of death (58.5%), and 39,199 were civilians (40.5%), with 1,034 (1.1%) listed as Policemen. (See Table 23a, “Victims Reported in BBD by Status in War,” p. 30.) Out of the 64,003 Muslims who perished in these wars, approximately 33,000 were civilians, and 31,000 combatants. (See Table 19, “Ethnicity of Victims Reported in BBD,” p. 29.)

[81] See Peter Erlinder, [“The U.N. Security Council Tribunal for Rwanda: International Justice, or Juridically-Constructed ‘Victor’s Impunity’?”](#) *Journal of Social Justice*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Fall 2010, pp. 131-214; esp. “RPF Military Superiority Established: January 1991-February 1993,” pp. 171-174.—As Erlinder describes the military superiority of the Tutsi forces: “By the time of the RPF’s [February] 1993 assault on Kigali the invading RPF had grown from the 3,000-4,000 Ugandan ‘deserters’ in late 1990, to a light infantry fighting force of at least 20,000 troops with unquestioned military superiority. By contrast, the defending FAR [Armed Forces of Rwanda] had the 6,000-7,000 ‘real’

troops who had defeated the initial small RPF/Ugandan invasion in late 1990, augmented by some 25-30,000 recent recruits, which the U.N. commander of U.N. troops, U.N. General Dallaire, characterized as 'rabble'" (pp. 172-173).

[82] See Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, [*The Politics of Genocide*](#) (Monthly Review Press, 2nd Ed., 2011), pp. 51-68.

[83] *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59. Also see David Peterson, , ["Rwanda's 1991 Census,"](#) ZBlogs, June 17, 2011.

[84] Christian Tomuschat et al., [*Guatemala: Memory of Silence: Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification*](#) (Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification, February 1999), specifically the "Conclusions," para. 86, and "Map: Number of Massacres by Department."

[85] *Ibid.*, specifically "Conclusions," para. 120; para. 122.

[86] See Ben Kiernan, ["The Demography of Genocide in Southeast Asia: The Death Tolls in Cambodia, 1975-1979, and East Timor, 1975-80,"](#) *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 2003, pp. 585-597; here pp. 593-594.

[87] As Kiernan explains: "[A] toll of 150,000 [for the 1975-1980 period] is likely close to the truth. If we include victims of post-1980 massacres and of the 1981-82 famine, the figure is substantially higher. Gabriel Defert, assuming a 1970-75 growth rate of 2.2 percent and 1.1 percent for 1975-81, calculates a toll of 170,000 deaths by December 1981. This would represent 24 to 26 percent of East Timor's 1975 population." (*Ibid.*, p. 594)

[88] See the treatment given to Indonesia's invasion of East Timor in Chomsky and Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, "East Timor: Genocide on the Sly," pp. 129-204; and in Noam Chomsky, *Powers and Prospects: Reflections on Human Nature and the Social Order* (South End Press, 1996), esp. Ch. 8, "East Timor and World order," pp. 204-221.

[89] James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, ["Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,"](#) *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1, February, 2003, pp. 75-90; here n. 4, p. 76.

[90] See "Definition of Aggression," UN General Assembly Resolution 3314, Twenty-ninth Session, December 14, 1974, Art. 5, para. 3.

[91] See John Pilger's documentary film, [*Death of a Nation: The Timor Conspiracy*](#) (Carlton Television, 1994).—As Pilger explains: "Perhaps 'genocide' is too often used these days, but by any standards, that's what happened here. And it happened mostly beyond the reach of the TV camera and the satellite dish, and with the connivance and complicity of Western governments—the same governments that were prepared to go to war against Saddam Hussein, but were not prepared under almost parallel circumstances to stop a rapacious invader that had broken every provision in the United Nations Charter, and that had defied no less than 10 United Nations sanctions resolutions calling on it to withdraw from East Timor....[T]he governments of Britain, the United States, Australia, and others supplied the means by which the regime in Jakarta has bled East Timor."

[92] See Edward S. Herman, *The Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and Propaganda* (South End Press, 1982).

[93] See *Ibid.* Also see William D. Perdue, *Terrorism and the State: A Critique of Domination Through Fear* (Praeger, 1989); Alexander George, Ed., *Western State Terrorism* (Routledge, 1991); and Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New: International Terrorism in the Real World*

(South End Press, Rev. Ed., 2003).

[94] Benjamin Netanyahu, *Terrorism: How the West Can Win* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986), p. 9.

[95] United States Code, [Title 18, Part I, Ch. 113B, Section 2331](#), 1984.

[96] In Pinker's exact words: "The radical fringe of Islam harbors an ideology that is classically genocidal: history is seen as a violent struggle that will culminate in the glorious subjugation of an irredeemably evil class of people." (*Better Angels*, pp. 363-364.)

[97] See Marty et al., [Alleged secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers of detainees involving Council of Europe member states \(Doc. 10957\)](#), Council of Europe, June 12, 2006, Annex, "The global 'spider's web'."

[98] Nils Petter Gleditsch, "[The Liberal Moment Fifteen Years On](#)," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 4, December, 2008, p. 702.

[99] See "[Main Conflict Table](#)," [Armed Conflicts Version 4-2009](#), UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset.

[100] Pinker, *Better Angels*, n. 241, p. 718. According to Pinker, the 19 alleged "armed conflicts...[that] involved a Muslim country" in 2008 were: Israel-Hamas, Iraq-Al-Mahdi, Philippines-MILF, Sudan-JEM, Pakistan-BLA, Afghanistan-Taliban, Somalia-Al-Shabaab, Iran-Jandullah, Turkey-PKK, India-Kashmir Insurgents, Mali-ATNMC, Algeria-AQIM, Pakistan-TTP, United States-Al Qaeda, Thailand-Pattani Insurgents, Niger-MNJ, Russia-Caucasus Emirate, India-PULF, and Djibouti-Eritrea.

[101] *Ibid.*, n. 243, p. 718.

[102] According to the UCDP/PRIO nomenclature, an "Internationalized internal armed conflict occurs between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) with intervention from other states (secondary parties) on one or both sides." (Nils Petter Gleditsch et al., [UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook, Version 4, 2009](#) (Uppsala Conflict Data Program / International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, 2002), p. 7.)

[103] See "[Main Conflict Table](#)," [Armed Conflicts Version 4-2009](#), Row 1423, Column L, and Columns C, D, and E, respectively.

[104] According to the UCDP/PRIO nomenclature, "UCDP distinguishes between primary and secondary parties [to armed conflicts]. Primary parties are those that form an incompatibility by stating incompatible positions....At least one of the primary parties is the government of a state. Secondary parties are states that enter a conflict with troops to actively support one of the primary parties. The secondary party must share the position of the primary party it is supporting in the incompatibility." (Gleditsch et al., [UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook](#), Version 4, 2009, p. 2.)

[105] See "[Main Conflict Table](#)," [Armed Conflicts Version 4-2009](#), Row 618, Column L, and Columns C, D, and E, respectively.

[106] See Robert A. Pape, "[It's the Occupation, Stupid](#)," *Foreign Policy*, October 18, 2010. Also see Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Random House, 2005); and Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman, *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[107] See David Rose, "[The Gaza Bombshell](#)," *Vanity Fair*, April, 2008; also see Seumas Milne, "[To blame the victims for this killing spree defies both morality and sense](#)," *The Guardian*, March 5, 2008; and Henry Siegman, "[Bring In Hamas](#)," *New York Times*, March 5, 2008. By the last days of December 2008, Israel would directly launch a major military offensive against the Gaza Palestinians in order to punish them further, killing some 1,400 people in three weeks, mostly civilians.

[108] See, e.g., Anya Schiffrin and Eamon Kircher-Allen, Eds., *From Cairo to Wall Street: Voices from the Global Spring* (The New Press, 2012).

[109] See, e.g., Chris Busby et al., [Cancer, Infant Mortality and Birth Sex-Ratio in Fallujah, Iraq, 2005-2009](#), *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 7, No. 7. July 6, 2010. Also see Martin Chulov, "[Research links rise in Falluja birth defects and cancers to US assault](#)," *The Guardian*, December 31, 2010; Mujahid Kamran, "[US use of DU: A war crime](#)," *The Nation* (Pakistan), January 4, 2011; Karlos Zurutuza, "[Those Laboratory Mice Were Children](#)," Inter Press Service, April 13, 2012; and Robert Fisk, "[The Children of Fallujah](#)," Four-Part Special Report, *The Independent*, April 25-27, 2012.

[110] In describing the "absolute demarcation between East and West," to which we in our day might add the demarcation between the South and the North, Edward Said wrote that a major "feature of Oriental-European relations was that Europe was always in a position of strength, not to say domination.... True, the relationship of strong and weak could be disguised or mitigated.... But the essential relationship... was seen... to be one between a strong and a weak partner." Said added: "To say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact." (Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1979), p. 40, p. 39.) Steven Pinker's power-oriented map of the "Civilizing Process" immediately leaps to mind.

[111] "[T]here is an optimum rate of incarceration," Pinker believes. But this rate is not at or very near zero, as many progressives believe. On the contrary: "Once the most violent individuals have been locked up, imprisoning more of them rapidly reaches a point of diminishing returns, because each additional prisoner becomes less and less dangerous, and pulling them off the streets makes a smaller and smaller dent in the violence rate. Also, since people tend to get less violent as they get older, keeping men in prison beyond a certain point does little to reduce crime. For all these reasons, there is an optimum rate of incarceration." (*Better Angels*, p. 123)

[112] Again, notice where Pinker thinks morally superior ideas and practices have originated, and notice the direction in which he thinks they have moved: From the top to the bottom and the center to the periphery; from the greater to the lesser powers and the strong to the weak; above all, from the few to the many. Throughout *Better Angels*, elite-oriented structures such as these animate and inform much of Pinker's story.

[113] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, Trans. Edmund Jephcott (Blackwell Publishing, Rev. Ed., 2000). A kind of systems-theorist of European table manners, Elias believed that the "standard and pattern of affect controls in societies at different stages of development, and even in different strata of the same society, can differ." He also believed that it is "possible to relate this long-term change in personality structures with long-term structural changes in society as a whole, which likewise tend in a particular direction, toward a higher level of social differentiation and integration." He believed that the "process of state formation... is an example of this kind of structural change." And he believed that the "civilizing process" entailed "long-term change in human personality structures towards a consolidation and differentiation of affect controls," as well as "long-term change in the figurations which people form

with one another towards a higher level of differentiation and integration”—a “lengthening of the chains of interdependence and a consolidation of ‘state controls’.” (See the “Postscript,” which in fact Elias wrote in 1968 to serve as the Introduction to the reprint of his German original; here pp. 449-451.)

[114] See, e.g., Manuel Eisner, “[Long-Term Historical Trend in Violent Crime](#),” *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 30 (University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 83-142.—In Eisner’s estimate, there was a “Europe-wide massive drop—roughly by a factor of 10:1 to 50:1 over the period from the fifteenth to the twentieth century—in lethal interpersonal violence....By around 1950, most European countries experienced their lowest historically known levels of homicide rates. Since then, an increasing trend has prevailed.” (p. 88) But, as Eisner concludes: “Thus far, attempts at explanation were primarily post hoc interpretations in the light of cultural, social, and political covariates of the secular trend in homicide rates.” (p. 133)

[115] Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 34, p. 395, p. 62.

[116] In an open letter criticizing E.O. Wilson’s 1975 book *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, a group of colleagues and friends that included Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin wrote: “We are not denying that there are genetic components to human behavior. But we suspect that human biological universals are to be discovered more in the generalities of eating, excreting and sleeping than in such specific and highly variable habits as warfare, sexual exploitation of women and the use of money as a medium of exchange. What Wilson’s book illustrates to us is the enormous difficulty in separating out not only the effects of environment (e.g., cultural transmission) but also the personal and social class prejudice of the researcher. Wilson joins the long parade of biological determinists whose work has served to buttress the institutions of their society by exonerating them from responsibility for social problems. From what we have seen of the social and political impact of such theories in the past, we feel strongly that we should speak out against them. We must take ‘Sociobiology’ seriously, then, not because we feel that it provides a scientific basis for its discussion of human behavior, but because it appears to signal a new wave of biological determinist theories.” (“[Against ‘Sociobiology’](#),” *New York Review of Books*, November 13, 1975.)

[117] Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (Penguin Books, 2002). See esp. chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, and 17, pp. 103-173, and pp. 281-336.

[118] *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

[119] *Ibid.*, p. 145, pp. 134-135. Pinker was attacking Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1981); and R.C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, and Leon Kamin, *Not In Our Genes: Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature* (Pantheon Books, 1985).

[120] See, e.g., Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby, Eds., *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1992). Also see John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, “[Conceptual Foundations of Evolutionary Psychology](#),” in David M. Buss, Ed., *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology* (John Wiley & Sons, 2005), pp. 5-67.

[121] Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, pp. 106-107.—In their book, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (The Free Press, 1994), Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray summarized Herrnstein’s earlier argument for a “future in which socioeconomic status would increasingly be [genetically] inherited.” This “syllogism” ran as follows: “If differences in mental abilities are inherited, and...If success requires those abilities, and...If earnings and prestige depend on success,...Then social standing (which reflects earnings and prestige) will be based to some

extent on inherited differences among people.” (See “Genetic Partitioning,” pp. 105-113; here p. 105.)

[122] See Michel J. Crozier *et al.*, [*The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*](#) (New York University Press, 1975). As Noam Chomsky described the elitist perspective of this work: “The crisis of democracy to which they refer arises from the fact that during the 1960s, segments of the normally quiescent masses of the population became politically mobilized and began to press their demands, thus creating a crisis, since naturally these demands cannot be met, at least without significant redistribution of wealth and power, which is not to be contemplated. The trilateral scholars, quite consistently, therefore urge more ‘moderation in democracy’.” (Noam Chomsky, *Towards A New Cold War: Essays on the Current Crisis and How We Got There* (Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 68.)

[123] See Charles Murray, “[Prole Models](#),” *Wall Street Journal*, February 6, 2001; Murray writes that he took the phrase “proletarianization” from Arnold Toynbee. Also see Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “[Defining Deviancy Down: How we’ve become accustomed to alarming levels of crime and destructive behavior](#),” *The American Scholar*, Winter, 1993.

[124] Daniel Patrick Moynihan, [*The Negro Family: The Case For National Action*](#), United States Department of Labor, March, 1965, Ch. IV, “[The Tangle of Pathology](#).” “The fundamental problem,” Moynihan wrote, “is family structure....[T]he Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling.”

[125] Let us quote Pinker’s exact words here: The criminal justice system learned to better “[exploit] two features of our psychology. One is that people—especially the people who are likely to get in trouble with the law—steeply discount the future, and respond to more certain and immediate punishments than to hypothetical and delayed ones. The other is that people conceive of their relationships with other people and institutions in moral terms, categorizing them either as contests of raw dominance or as contracts governed by reciprocity and fairness.” (*Better Angels*, p. 126) At n. 176 and n. 177 (p. 703), Pinker’s multiple sources for these claims are academics that include the psychologists Martin Daley and his late wife Margo Wilson, the criminologists Travis Hirschi and Michael R. Gottfredson, the late criminologist James Q. Wilson and the late psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein, and the anthropologist Alan Fiske.

[126] See Lauren E. Glaze, “[Correctional Population in the United States, 2010](#),” *Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin*, U.S. Department of Justice, December 2011.

[127] See [Dorsey v. United States](#) (11-5683) and [Hill v. United States](#) (11-5721), Supreme Court of the United States, June 21, 2012. In delivering the Majority Opinion of the Court by a narrow 5-to-4 margin, Justice Stephen Breyer noted that “Until 2010, the relevant statute imposed upon an offender who dealt in powder cocaine the same sentence it imposed upon an offender who dealt in one one-hundredth that amount of crack cocaine.” (p. 1.)

[128] See [Trends in U.S. Corrections](#), The Sentencing Project, Washington, D.C., May, 2012. Also see Jerome G. Miller, *Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[129] See Roy Walmsley, [World Prison Population List](#) (Eighth Edition), International Centre for Prison Studies, King’s College London, January, 2009.

[130] Hannah Holleman *et al.*, “[The Penal State in an Age of Crisis](#),” *Monthly Review*, Vol. 61, No. 2, June, 2009.

[131] Randall G. Shelden, *Controlling the Dangerous Classes: A History of Criminal Justice in America* (Allyn & Bacon, 1st. Ed., 2001), p. 269. Also see Shelden, *Our Punitive Society: Race, Class, Gender and Punishment in America* (Waveland Press, Inc., 2010).

[132] Jerome G. Miller, "[American Gulag](#)," *Yes Magazine*, Fall, 2000. Also see Steven R. Donziger, Ed., *The Real War on Crime: The Report of the National Criminal Justice Commission* (HarperPerennial, 1996).

[133] See Pinker's "seven links...between reasoning ability and peaceable values" (*Better Angels*, pp. 661-667). Pinker believes that "intelligence causes, rather than correlates with, classical liberal attitudes" (*Ibid.*, p 663), and in the third of his "seven links," which he calls "Intelligence and Liberalism," he writes not only that "smarter people are more liberal," but emphasizes that that "intelligence leads to classical rather than left-libertarianism." He continues: "[S]ince intelligence is correlated with social class, any correlation with liberalism, if not statistically controlled, could simply reflect the political prejudices of the upper middle class. But the key qualification is that the escalator of reason predicts only that intelligence should be correlated with classical liberalism, which values the autonomy and well-being of individuals over the constraints of tribe, authority, and tradition. Intelligence is expected to correlate with classical liberalism because classical liberalism is itself a consequence of the interchangeability of perspectives that is inherent to reason itself. Intelligence need not correlate with other ideologies that get lumped into contemporary left-of-center political coalitions, such as populism, socialism, political correctness, identify politics, and the Green movement. Indeed, classical liberalism is sometimes congenial to the libertarian and anti-political-correctness factions in today's right-of-center coalitions....[I]ntelligence tracks classical liberalism more closely than left-liberalism." (*Ibid.*, pp. 662-663). We believe these are extravagant claims, with Pinker's own deep ideological commitments hidden behind the mask of "evolutionary psychology."

[134] In summarizing work on the human sense of right and wrong by figures such as the University of Chicago psychologist Richard Shweder, the University of Virginia psychologist Jonathan Haidt, and especially that of the UCLA anthropologist Alan Fiske, Pinker makes the claim that "One can line up [Fiske's relational] models...along a scale that more or less reflects their order or emergence in evolution, child development, and history: Communal Sharing > Authority Ranking > Equality Matching > Market Pricing." (See Pinker, "Morality and Taboo," *Ibid*, pp. 622-642, esp. p. 624-629; here p. 628.) Here again, we believe these claims about a neatly defined taxonomy of human relations, with the most advanced being one called "Market Pricing," are extravagant, and that Pinker's own as well as his sources' deep ideological commitments are hiding behind the mask of "evolutionary psychology."

[135] Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, pp. 155-158; and n. 34, p. 448.

[136] See R. J. Rummel, *Death By Government* (Transaction Publishers, 1994), p. 2.

[137] See Chomsky and Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*.

[138] *Voice From Northeastern Brazil to III Conference of Bishops*, International Movement of Catholic Intellectuals and Professionals, Mexico, November, 1977. This document continued: "In order to impose the model of development which gives privilege to small minorities, it was necessary to create or maintain a repressive State which in turn provokes a situation of civil war. The very theoreticians of the system insist on the necessary link between development and security; they recognize that the development they wish to impose on the country can only provoke indignation among the people....If there were any type of freedom left, the cries of protest would be

so great that the only solution has been to impose absolute silence.” (In *Ibid.*, p. 54.)

[139] See, e.g., Israel Shahak, [*Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years*](#) (Pluto Press, 1994; AAARGH Internet Edition, 2005), esp. Ch. 2, “Prejudice and Prevarication,” pp. 16-29.

[140] See *Ibid.*, esp. “The Ideology of ‘Redeemed’ Land” and “Israeli Expansionism,” pp. 9-13.

[141] Quoted favorably by Pinker himself in *The Blank Slate*, p. 291.

[142] See, e.g., Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies* (South End Press, 1989), pp. 45-47. As Chomsky wrote: “One notable doctrine of Soviet propaganda is that the elimination by Lenin and Trotsky of any vestige of control over production by producers and of popular involvement in determining social policy constitutes a triumph of socialism. The purpose of this exercise in Newspeak is to exploit the moral appeal of the ideals that were being successfully demolished; Western propaganda leaped to the same opportunity, identifying the dismantling of socialist forms as the establishment of socialism, so as to undermine left-libertarian ideals by associating them with the practices of the grim Red bureaucracy. To this day, both systems of propaganda adopt the terminology, for their different purposes. When both major world systems of propaganda are in accord, it is usually difficult for the individual to escape their tentacles. The blow to freedom and democracy throughout the world has been immense.” (p. 45)

[143] See Robert A. Brady, *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism* (Howard Fertig, Inc., 1969 (originally 1937)); also see Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944* (Ivan R. Dee, 2009 (originally 1944)).

[144] See, e.g., David Felix, “On Financial Blowups and Authoritarian Regimes in Latin America,” in Jonathan Hartlyn and Samuel A. Morley, Eds., *Latin American Political Economy: Financial Crisis and Political Change* (Westview Press, 1986), pp. 85-125. Referring to the impact of the Chicago Boys on Pinochet’s Chile from 1973 through the onset of the Latin American debt crisis in the early 1980s, Felix noted that “virtually the entire banking system has been taken over by the government and is now operated by government-appointed managers. A wisecrack...is that the transition from Allende to Pinochet has been a transition from utopian to scientific socialism, since the means of production are ending up in the hands of the state” (n. 14, p. 120). He adds that this has “led some observers to dub [the Chicago Boys] ‘Marxists of the right’” (n. 7, p. 119). Also see Greg Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, The United States, and The Rise of the New Imperialism* (Metropolitan Books, 2006), Ch. 5, “The Third Conquest of Latin America: The Economics of the New Imperialism,” pp. 159-194.

[145] Here Pinker reprises an argument that he offered nine years earlier in *The Blank Slate*, on the “ideological connection between Marxist socialism and National Socialism,” with “Hitler [having] read Marx carefully while living in Munich in 1913...” (p. 157).

[146] In his catalog of Hitler’s “private library,” the historian Timothy Ryback wrote that though “Ernst Hanfstaengl ascribed to the idled Nazi leader a more ambitious intellectual fare that allegedly included the philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche,...[though] none of these individuals are represented among the surviving books from Hitler’s prison years.” (See Timothy W. Ryback, *Hitler’s Private Library: The Books That Shaped His Life* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), pp. 67-68.) Of course Hitler did not miss the fact that many of the most accomplished socialist and communist intellectuals were Jewish.

[147] To quote Hitler's own words, referring to his years in Vienna, prior to World War I: "It was during this period that my eyes were opened to two perils, the names of which I scarcely knew hitherto and had no notion whatsoever of their terrible significance for the existence of the German people. These two perils were Marxism and Judaism." (*Mein Kampf (My Struggle)*, Trans. James Murphy and Abbots Langley (Fredonia Classics, 2003), p. 21.)

[148] Pinker lists both the "Mideast Slave Trade" and the "Atlantic Slave Trade" in the figure that appears in *Better Angels*, p. 195.

[149] See Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (Verso, 2002).

[150] In *Better Angels*, Pinker separately attributes a higher death-toll of 40 million to Mao, but this higher number includes the famine-related deaths as well as deaths in the armed conflict that led to the communists' takeover of China in 1948 and deaths during the "Cultural Revolution" period of the 1960s. See "(Possibly) The Twenty (or so) Worst Things People Have Done To Each Other," *Better Angels*, p. 195. For Pinker's source in this case, see Matthew White, *The Great Big Book of Horrible Things* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), pp. 429-438.

[151] Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Clarendon Press, 1989), Ch. 11, "China and India," pp. 204-225; esp. pp. 210-215.

[152] *Ibid.*, p. 210.

[153] *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215. Drèze and Sen have written elsewhere that the "success of the Chinese economic and social policies have depended on the concerns and commitments of the leadership. Because of its radical commitments to the elimination of poverty and to improving living conditions—a commitment in which Maoist as well as Marxist ideas and ideals played an important part—China did achieve many things that the Indian leadership failed to press for and pursue with any vigour. The elimination of widespread hunger, illiteracy, and ill health falls solidly in this category. When state action operates in the right direction, the results can be quite remarkable, as is illustrated by the social achievements of the pre-reform period." (Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 77.) In contrast to the kind of interest that Pinker takes in the alleged "Mao masterminded...famine" of the Great Leap Forward period, surely there must have been some alternative plan at work there to have benefitted China's general population so dramatically. (Also see Amartya Sen, "[Indian Development: Lessons and Non-Lessons](#)," *Daedalus*, Vol. 118, No. 4, Fall, 1989, pp. 369-392.)

[154] In Mehul Srivastava and Adi Narayan, "[Early Death Assured in India Where 900M Don't Eat Enough](#)," Bloomberg, June 13, 2012.

[155] As Drèze and Sen added: "The 'support-led security' on the basis of which China had achieved so much prior to the reforms has been weakened rather than strengthened in some important ways by the reforms affecting the economy and the society....There is a clear weakening of commitment to public support measures, which may be partly ideological, related to the recent passion for economic liberalism...." (*Hunger and Public Action*, p. 219.)

[156] See Xihze Peng, "[China's Demographic History and Future Challenges](#)," *Science*, Vol. 333, No. 6042, July 29, 2011, pp. 581-587. Table 1, "Major demographic indicators for mainland China" (p. 581), recounts China's death-rate per 1,000 people according to its last six National Population Censuses. These death-rates were: 1953 (14.0); 1964 (11.5); 1982 (6.6); 1990 (6.7); 2000 (6.5);

and 2010 (7.1).

[157] See Stephen F. Cohen, *Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).

[158] In Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* (Metropolitan Books, 2003), p. 147.

[159] *Ibid.*, p. 147

[160] See David M. Kotz and Fred Weir, *Russia's Path from Gorbachev to Putin: The demise of the Soviet system and the new Russia* (Routledge, Rev. Ed., 2007), especially pp. 151-258. As these authors wrote: "A strong case can be made that Russia's public health crisis and its demographic decline are a result of the neoliberal transition strategy and the economic and social effects it has produced, such as the impoverishment of a large part of the population, rising unemployment, sharply reduced access to health care, a collapse of the public health system, and a breakdown in public order....There is no place for most of Russia's population in this new economic system." (p. 257)

[161] See, e.g., Stephan Sievert, Sergey Zakharov and Reiner Klingholz, [*The Waning World Power: The demographic future of Russia and the other Soviet successor states*](#), The Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy, Berlin, 2011. These authors estimate that, "had it not been for immigration, population losses [in Russia] would have reached 11.5 million" by 2011 (p. 1).

[162] On the impact of the Iraqi sanctions regime, see von Sponeck, *A Different Kind of War*.

[163] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), "Islamic Tolerance," pp. 238-240.

[164] R.J. Rummel, "[Was the Democratic Peace Killed? Part IV, Death by Obama](#)," *A Freedomist View*, September 15, 2009.

[165] R.J. Rummel, "[Tyranny Closing In—The Stealth Coup](#)," *A Freedomist View*, August 8, 2009; and R.J. Rummel, "[Tyranny In View—The Not So Stealth Obama Coup](#)," *A Freedomist View*, October 6, 2009.

[166] R.J. Rummel, *Death By Government*, pp. 276-277. Also see Table 11.1, "Vietnamese War Dead and Democide, 1945-87," p. 243, where Rummel attributes 6,000 Vietnamese deaths to U.S. "democide."

[167] For Rummel's definition of "democide," see *Ibid.*, Ch. 2, "The New Concept of Democide," pp. 31-43, esp. p. 42.

[168] See the series by Nick Turse, Deborah Nelson, and Janet Lundblad, "[Vietnam—The War Crimes Files](#)," *Los Angeles Times*, August 6 and August 20, 2006.

[169] Rummel, *Death By Government*, p. 273.

[170] See n. 40, above.

[171] Rummel, *Death By Government*, p. 272 and p. 274. For more of Rummel's elaborate rationalizations for his egregiously low estimate of the U.S. "democide" in Vietnam, see pp. 271-277,

a passage that is remarkable for its author's complete rejection of his own definition of the term "democide" wherever U.S. violence in Vietnam (South or North) is the issue.

[172] *Ibid.*, p. 91; pp. 97-98.

[173] In Andrew Mack *et al.*, [Human Security Report 2009/2010](#), the HSRP acknowledged the "generous support" that it received from the British, Canadian, Norwegian, Swedish, and Swiss governments. The HSRP also thanked its "collaborators" at the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Sweden) and the International Peace Research Institute Oslo (Norway). (p. iv.)

[174] According to the HSRP, this new "[global security architecture] comprises a loose but ever-expanding network of international organizations, donor and other governments, inter-agency committees, informal clusters of like-minded states..., think-tanks, and large numbers of national and international NGOs," all "grounded in a growing normative consensus that the international community has a responsibility to prevent war, to help stop wars that cannot be prevented, and to try and prevent those that have stopped from starting again." (*Ibid.*, p. 79.) If over the past two decades this "normative consensus" has been applied to U.S.-led violence with as much force as it has to the targets under attack by U.S. violence, we'd like to see the HSRP's evidence for it. Of course there is none.

[175] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[176] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[177] See [International Security Assistance Force \(ISAF\): Key Facts and Figures](#), NATO, January 9, 2012.

[178] In Pinker's usage, the politicization of "democracy" versus "nondemocracy" is even more evident. "Not only do democracies avoid disputes with each other, but there is a suggestion that they tend to stay out of disputes across the board," he writes. "The Democratic Peace held not only over the entire 115 years spanned by the dataset [i.e., the Correlates of War Project's Militarized Interstate Disputes 2.1 Dataset] but also in the subspans from 1900 to 1939 and from 1989 to 2001. That shows that the Democratic Peace is not a by-product of the Pax Americana during the Cold War. In fact, there were never any signs of a Pax Americana or a Pax Britannica: the years when one of these countries was the world's dominant military power were no more peaceful than the years in which it was just one power among many....[Bruce] Russett and [John] Oneal [in *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*] found only one restriction on the Democratic Peace: it kicked in only around 1900, as one might have expected from the plethora of 19th century counterexamples." (*Better Angels*, p. 283-284.)

[179] Mack *et al.*, [Human Security Report 2009/2010](#), p. 10.

[180] Gerdis Wischnath and Nils Petter Gleditsch, "[Battle deaths—comparing the UCDP and PRIO data](#)," Peace Research Institute of Oslo, March 10, 2011, p. 13.

[181] In the Wischnath-Gleditsch paper, both the UCDP and PRIO definitions of "battle deaths" are given. To simplify, "battle-related deaths" for the UCDP "refer to those deaths caused by the warring parties that can be directly related to combat over the contested incompatibility" (e.g., a territory or a government), and include both "traditional battlefield fighting" as well as what "does not resemble what happens on a battlefield." For PRIO, the category includes "all people, soldiers and civilians, killed in combat," but no one killed in "one-sided violence"—in massacres, for example. (*Ibid.*, n. 7, p. 8.)

[182] Also see Steven Pinker, *The Stuff of Thought* (Viking, 2007), pp. 65-73; and pp. 208-225.

[183] See "[Main Conflict Table](#)," *Armed Conflicts Version 4-2009*. This version of the UCDP-PRIO armed conflicts dataset lists 260 armed conflicts for the years 1946-2008, and consists of 1957 rows (from Row 2 through Row 1958) and 26 columns, in which the system of classifying armed conflicts is broken down.

[184] *Ibid.*, "North Korea/South Korea," Rows 490-493.

[185] *Ibid.*, "South Vietnam," Rows 554-563, and "North Vietnam/South Vietnam," Rows 1004-1014.—It is important to add that the UCDP-PRIO dataset makes no mention of any U.S. role in Vietnam for the years 1955-1961.

[186] *Ibid.*, "Guatemala," Row 400.

[187] *Ibid.*, "Guatemala," Rows 401-431.

[188] *Ibid.*, "El Salvador," Rows 1225-1237.

[189] *Ibid.*, "Nicaragua," Rows 1456-1466.

[190] *Ibid.*, "Hungary," Row 564.

[191] *Ibid.*, "Afghanistan," Row 1953.

[192] In the same section of the book, Pinker provides two other bar diagrams that convey information of similar import: Figure 2-3, "Rate of death in warfare in nonstate and state societies" (p. 53), and Figure 2-4, "Homicide rates in the least violent nonstate societies compared to state societies" (p. 55). The line of criticism that we develop here applies to these figures as well.

[193] Steven Pinker, "[A History of Violence](#)," *New Republic*, March 19, 2007.

[194] The seven writers whom Pinker cites as purveyors of "grim diagnoses of modernity" are Sigmund Freud, Michel Foucault, Zygmunt Bauman, Edmund Husserl, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Jean-François Lyotard. (See *Better Angels*, n. 6, p. 707.)

[195] The exact passage in Rousseau reads: "The example of savages, which people have almost all found alike on this point, confirms that the human race was made to rest in this state forever, that it is the true youth of the world, and that all later progress has apparently been so many steps towards the perfection of the individual but has, in fact, been towards the decrepitude of the species." (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, [Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men](#), 1754, Trans. Ian Johnston (eBooks@Adelaide, The University of Adelaide Library, 2009), Second Part.

[196] In Pinker's game-theory-laden way of expressing himself, he writes: "Any organism that has evolved to be violent is a member of a species whose other members, on average, have evolved to be just as violent....When a tendency towards violence evolves, it is always strategic. Organisms are selected to deploy violence only in circumstances where the expected benefits outweigh the expected costs. That discernment is especially true of intelligent species, whose large brains make them sensitive to the expected benefits and costs in a particular situation, rather than just to the odds averaged over evolutionary time.... If you have reason to suspect that your neighbor is inclined to eliminate you, then you will be inclined to protect yourself by eliminating him first in a preemptive strike....The tragedy is that your competitor has every reason to crank through the same calculation,

even if he is the kind of person who wouldn't hurt of fly. In fact, even if he knew that you started out with no aggressive designs on him, he might legitimately worry that you are tempted to neutralize him out of fear that he will neutralize you first, which gives you an incentive to neutralize him before that, ad infinitum." (*Better Angels*, p. 32-34)

[197] Thomas Hobbes, [*De Cive: Philosophicall Rudiments Concerning Government and Sociiety*](#) (1651), Ch. I, "Of the state of men without Civill Society," para. XII. As Hobbes reiterated this point some years later in his *Leviathan*: "Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man. For war consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of time is to be considered in the nature of war, as it is in the nature of weather. For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or two of rain, but in an inclination thereto of many days together: so the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is peace. Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man, the same consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." (Thomas Hobbes, [*Leviathan, or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil*](#) (1660), Ch. XIII, "On the Natural Condition of Mankind As Concerning Their Felicity and Misery.")

[198] For a discussion of the symbolic uses of the names "Rousseau" and "Hobbes," see Andrew Lawler, "[The Battle Over Violence](#)," *Science*, Vol. 336, May 18, 2012.

[199] See, e.g., the early criticism of Pinker by Christopher Ryan, "[Steven Pinker's Stinker on the Origins of War](#)," *Psychology Today*, March 29, 2011, which was based on [Pinker's 2007 TED lecture](#) on the same topic; Neil L. Whitehead, "[How Reason Has Trumped Violence](#)," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, October 14, 2011; Brendan Moody, "[A Long History of Something or Other \(Part I\): Anecdotes and Anthropology](#)," *Notes from a Crackpot*, October 21, 2011; and Christopher Ryan, "[Pinker's Dirty War on Prehistoric Peace](#)," *Huffington Post*, January 9, 2012.

[200] R. Brian Ferguson, "Pinker's List: Exaggerating Prehistoric War Mortality," which is scheduled to appear in a collection edited by Douglas P. Fry, [*War, Peace, and Human Nature: The Convergence of Evolutionary and Cultural Views*](#) (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Also see Ferguson, "The Prehistory of War and Peace in Europe and the Near East," which will appear in the same Fry-edited collection.

[201] Douglas P. Fry, "[Peace in Our Time](#)," *Book Forum*, December/January, 2012.

[202] Among the most important sources for Pinker's claims in this section are the economist Samuel Bowles, the sociobiologist Johan M. G. van der Dennen, the political scientist Azar Gat, the anthropologist Lawrence Keeley, the anthropologists Grant McCall and Nancy Shields, the economists Richard Steckel and John Wallis, the archaeologist I.J.N. Thorpe, and the anthropologist Phillip L. Walker.

[203] Here quoting two articles by R. Brian Ferguson: "[The Birth of War](#)," *Natural History*,

July/August, 2003; and "[On Evolved Motivations for War](#)," *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 73, No. 3, July, 2000, which was Ferguson's review of a book by one of Pinker's sources on the alleged violence and warfare among hunter-gatherer humans, Azer Gat. Also see R. Brian Ferguson, "[Born To Live: Challenging Killer Myths](#)," in Robert W. Sussman and C. Robert Cloninger, Eds., *Origins of Altruism and Cooperation* (Springer, 2011), pp. 249-270.

[204] See, e.g., John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, "[Groups in Mind: The Coalitional Roots of War and Morality](#)," in Henrik Høgh-Olesen, Ed., *Human Morality & Sociality: Evolutionary & Comparative Perspectives* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pp. 191-234; here pp. 191-192.

[205] See Babatunde Osotimehin et al., [State of the World Population 2011: People and possibilities in a world of 7 billion](#) (United Nations Population Fund, 2011), pp. 1-7.

[206] White, *The Great Big Book of Horrible Things*, pp. 400-421; p. 560.

[207] In an endnote, Pinker admits that with respect to the An Lushan Revolt, Matthew White "notes that the [death toll] is controversial." (Pinker, *Better Angels*, n.13, "An Lushan Revolt," p. 707.) But what White actually writes is that of the five sources whom he uses to produce his estimate of the An Lushan Revolt, two express "major doubt" about the accuracy of the death tolls, one "slight doubt," one "apparent acceptance," and one "acceptance." (White, *The Great Big Book of Horrible Things*, n. 17, pp. 575-576.) This means is that the evidence for the death toll related to the An Lushan Revolt is largely junk—and so on for the other major "hemoclysms" that Pinker promotes in order to show show that World War II was not the bloodiest event in human history.

[208] As Johan Galtung has written: "We shall refer to the type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence as personal or direct, and to violence where there is no such actor as structural or indirect. In both cases individuals may be killed or mutilated, hit or hurt in both senses of these words, and manipulated by means of stick or carrot strategies. But whereas in the first case these consequences can be traced back to concrete persons as actors, in the second case this is no longer meaningful. There may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances.... The important point here is that if people are starving when this is objectively avoidable, then violence is committed,...as in the way world economic relations are organized today." (Johan Galtung, "[Violence, Peace, and Peace Research](#)," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1969, pp. 170-171.)

[209] Pinker adopts a philosophical guise, and asks whether he should use actual (absolute) or adjusted (relativized) numbers. His response is that the "choice confronts us with the moral imponderable of whether it is worse for 50 percent of a population of one hundred to be killed or 1 percent of a population of one billion." But he is satisfied with the conclusion that "in comparing the harmfulness of violence across societies, we should focus on the rate, rather than the number, of violent acts." (*Better Angels*, p. 47) We call this Pinker's *expanding-denominator deceit*.

[210] Timothy Snyder, "[War No More: Why the World Has Become More Peaceful](#)," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 1, January/February, 2012. Further illuminating Pinker's expanding-denominator deceit, Snyder asks: "Is it preferable for ten people in a group of 1,000 to die violent deaths or for ten million in a group of one billion? For Pinker, the two scenarios are exactly the same, since in both, an individual person has a 99 percent chance of dying peacefully."

[211] White, *The Great Big Book of Horrible Things*, p. xiv.

[212] See “Ranking: The One Hundred Deadliest Multicides,” *Ibid.*, pp. 529-531.

[213] See James L. Payne, *A History of Force: Exploring the Worldwide Movement Against Habits of Coercion, Bloodshed, and Mayhem* (Lytton Publishing Company, 2003).

[214] Lewis F. Richardson, *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels*, Quincy Wright and C.C. Lineau, Eds. (The Boxwood Press, 1960).

[215] Pinker takes Figure 5-6 from Brian Hayes, “[Computing Science: Statistics of Deadly Quarrels](#),” *American Scientist*, Vol. 90, No. 1, January/February, 2002.

[216] About “Poisson processes,” Pinker explains: “In a Poisson process, events occur continuously, randomly, and independently of one another. Every instant the lord of the sky, Jupiter, rolls the dice, and if they land snake eyes he hurls a thunderbolt. The next instant he rolls them again, with no memory of what happened the moment before....[T]he intervals between events are distributed exponentially: there are lots of short intervals and fewer and fewer of them as they get longer and longer. That implies that events that occur at random will seem to come in clusters, because it would take a *nonrandom* process to space them out.” (*Better Angels*, p. 203.)

[217] About “power-law distributions,” Pinker explains: “Piles of data in which the log of the frequency of a certain kind of entity is proportional to the log of the size of that entity, so that a plot on log-log paper looks like a straight line, are called power-law distributions. The name comes from the fact that when you put away the logarithms and go back to the original numbers, the probability of an entity showing up in the data is proportional to the size of that entity raised to some power (which translates visually to the slope of the line in the log-log plot), plus a constant.” (*Ibid.*, p. 211.)

[218] Pinker’s major source at this point is John Maynard Smith, *Evolution and the Theory of Games* (Cambridge University Press, 1982). Calling Smith the “biologist who first applied game theory to evolution,” Pinker explains: “A game of attrition is mathematically equivalent to an auction in which the highest bidder wins the prize and both sides have to pay the loser’s low bid. And of course it can be analogized to a war in which the expenditure is reckoned in the lives of soldiers. The War of Attrition is one of those paradoxical scenarios in game theory (like the Prisoner’s Dilemma, the Tragedy of the Commons, and the Dollar Auction) in which a set of rational actors pursuing their interests end up worse off than if they had put their heads together and come to a collective and binding agreement....Thanks to the perverse logic of the attrition game, in which the loser pays too, the bidders may keep bidding after the point at which the expenditure exceeds the value of the prize. They can no longer win, but each side hopes not to lose as much. The technical term for this outcome in game theory is ‘a ruinous situation’. It is also called a ‘Pyrrhic victory’; the military analogy is profound.” (*Better Angels*, pp. 217-218.)

[219] See Lewis F. Richardson, *Arms and Insecurity: A Mathematical Study of the Causes and Origins of War*, Nicolas Rashevsky and Ernesto Trucco, Eds. (The Boxwood Press, 1960). Note that Richardson completed this study in 1940.

[220] Johnson, *Nemesis*, p. 9.

[221] Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War on International Terrorism* (Henry Holt & Co., 1981).

[222] For critiques of Claire Sterling’s work, see, e.g., Herman, *The Real Terror Network*, pp. 49-65; Edward S. Herman and Frank Brodhead, *The Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection* (Sheridan Square Publications, 1986), pp. 123-146; and Edward S. Herman and Gerry O’Sullivan, *The*

"Terrorism" Industry: *The Experts and Institutions That Shape Our View of Terror* (Pantheon Books, 1989), p. 63; pp. 170-173. As Herman and O'Sullivan wrote: "[T]he core evidence in Sterling's work rested on CIA disinformation 'blown back' to the U.S. public, and to [William] Casey and [Alexander] Haig, via Sterling. Bob Woodward reports that a senior review panel, appointed by Casey to assess CIA estimates of Soviet involvement in terrorism, discovered that Sterling had relayed a story that 'was part of an old, small-scale CIA covert propagandea operation....[Lincoln Gordon, chairman of the review panel] found the sequence particularly telling: from CIA propagandea to Sterling's book galley, to Haig's reading of the galley, to Haig's press conference, then Haig's comments picked up in the *New York Times* article by Sterling, then finally in Sterling's book'. Intelligence analyst Gregory Treverton contends that the CIA analysts assigned the task of checking out Sterling's sources found that 'virtually all of them were CIA disinformation—articles planted by covert operators in various media'." (*The "Terrorism" Industry*, p. 63.)

[223] On the media's treatment of Sterling, see Herman and Brodhead, *The Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection*, pp. 181-202.

[224] See "'Islamic Violence'," above.

[225] Mack *et al.*, [Human Security Report 2009/2010](#), Part II, "The Shrinking Costs of War," pp. 102-152; and Part III, "Trends in Human Insecurity," pp. 156-187.

[226] White, *The Great Big Book of Horrible Things*, pp. 337-338.

[227] See "Sources and Methods," above.

[228] Rummel, *Death by Government*, pp. 277-278; and Table 11.1, "Vietnamese War Dead and Democide, 1945-87," p. 243.

[229] Pinker, *Better Angels*, n. 184, p. 711.

[230] For a list of some of the positive media fare that has greeted Pinker's book, Pinker maintains several webpages devoted to *Better Angels*. See <<http://stevenpinker.com/>>.

[231] Peter Singer, "[Is Violence History?](#)" *New York Times*, October 9, 2011.

[232] We ran Nexis database searches of the *New York Times* for the twelve-month period from May 1, 2011 through April 30, 2012. The search parameters were 'Pinker' and 'Better Angels'. Between Patricia Cohen, "[Genetic Basis for Crime: A New Look](#)," June 20, 2011, which quoted Pinker at length and mentioned his forthcoming book, and Stanley Fish, "[Citing Chapter and Verse: Which Scripture Is the Right One?](#)" (online exclusive), March 26, 2012, at least 23 different non-trivial items (i.e., exclusive of "Best Seller" mentions and letters to the editor) were published in the *Times's* print and online editions that dealt positively with Pinker's book .

[233] Simon Blackburn, "[The Better Angels of Our Nature](#)," *New Statesman*, October 24, 2011.

[234] David Runciman, "[The Better Angels of Our Nature by Steven Pinker](#)," *The Guardian*, September 24, 2011.

[235] [The Colbert Report](#), Comedy Central, October 18, 2011.

[236] David Sirota, [Interview with Steven Pinker](#), Colorado Progressive Talk Radio, KKZN-AM760, October 19, 2011.

[237] [Up w/Chris Hayes](#), MSNBC, March 25, 2012.

[238] See our section on “Class, Race, and the ‘Science of Self-Control’.” The four scientists Pinker has in mind here are Stephen Jay Gould, Richard Lewontin, Leon Kamin, and Steven Rose.

[239] Fry, “[Peace in Our Time](#).”

[240] Although they were writing nine years before the publication of *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, and sharing their reflections on the life and work of the late Stephen Jay Gould, who died in 2002, what Richard C. Lewontin and Richard Levins wrote back then about Gould’s dislike of “Panglossian adaptationism” in the study of evolution (or what Gould himself once called the “blinkered view that evolutionary explanations must identify adaptation produced by natural selection”) applies quite aptly to Steven Pinker’s book: “Another aspect of Gould’s radicalism in science was in the form of his general approach to evolutionary explanation. Most biologists concerned with the history of life and its present geographical and ecological distribution assume that natural selection is the cause of all features of living and extinct organisms and that the task of the biologist, insofar as it is to provide explanations, is to come up with a reasonable story of why any particular feature of a species was favored by natural selection. If, when the human species lost most of its body hair in evolving from its ape-like ancestor, it still held on to eyebrows, then eyebrows must be good things. A great emphasis of Steve’s scientific writing was to reject this simplistic Panglossian adaptationism, and to go back to the variety of fundamental biological processes in the search for the causes of evolutionary change.” (“[Stephen Jay Gould: What Does it Mean to Be a Radical?](#)” *Monthly Review*, Vol. 54, No. 6, November, 2002.)

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