

Is Violence History?

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The New York Times:

It is unusual for the subtitle of a book to undersell it, but Steven Pinker's "Better Angels of Our Nature" tells us much more than why violence has declined. Pinker, a professor of psychology at Harvard who first became widely known as the author of "The Language Instinct" addresses some of the biggest questions we can ask: Are human beings essentially good or bad? Has the past century witnessed moral progress or a moral collapse? Do we have grounds for being optimistic about the future?

If that sounds like a book you would want to read, wait, there's more. In 800 information-packed pages, Pinker also discusses a host of more specific issues. Here is a sample: What do we owe to the Enlightenment? Is there a link between the human rights movement and the campaign for animal rights? Why are homicide rates higher in the southerly states of this country than in northern ones? Are aggressive tendencies heritable? Could declines in violence in particular societies be attributed to genetic change among its members? How does a president's I.Q. correlate with the number of battle deaths in wars in which the United States is involved? Are we getting smarter? Is a smarter world a better world?

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