

Peace in our time?

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The Daily Mail:

Hear the good news! ‘We are living in the most peaceable era of our species’ existence!’ Well, you could have fooled me. Who says so? And why? The herald of reassurance is professor Steven Pinker, the Harvard psychologist with impressive books to his credit on how our minds work.

He draws his conclusion – that human violence has declined amazingly, is still declining and may be on the way out – from a 700-page survey of the subject, packed with statistics, table after table and graph after graph.

The professor writes as though he knows that I am not going to believe him. He is trying to bust a long-held myth – that human nature is deep-down irredeemably, irreformably violent, that we (or most of us) are savages underneath. When circumstances allow, we prove it. He argues that this has to be a myth because the statistics on declining violence of all kinds agree so impressively that they cannot be doing so by coincidence.

Take the 20th century – usually assumed to have been the most violent on record. Consider the death toll of World War II (55 million) and World War I (15 million); the deaths inflicted on their own citizens by Mao (40 million), Stalin (20 million), and Hitler (21 million), and the toll of the Russian and Chinese revolutions and civil wars (12 million). What can equal that?

Read the whole story: [*The Daily Mail*](#)

