

# **Violence Over Time**

The dramatic decline of violence

**or**

How and why the past sucked

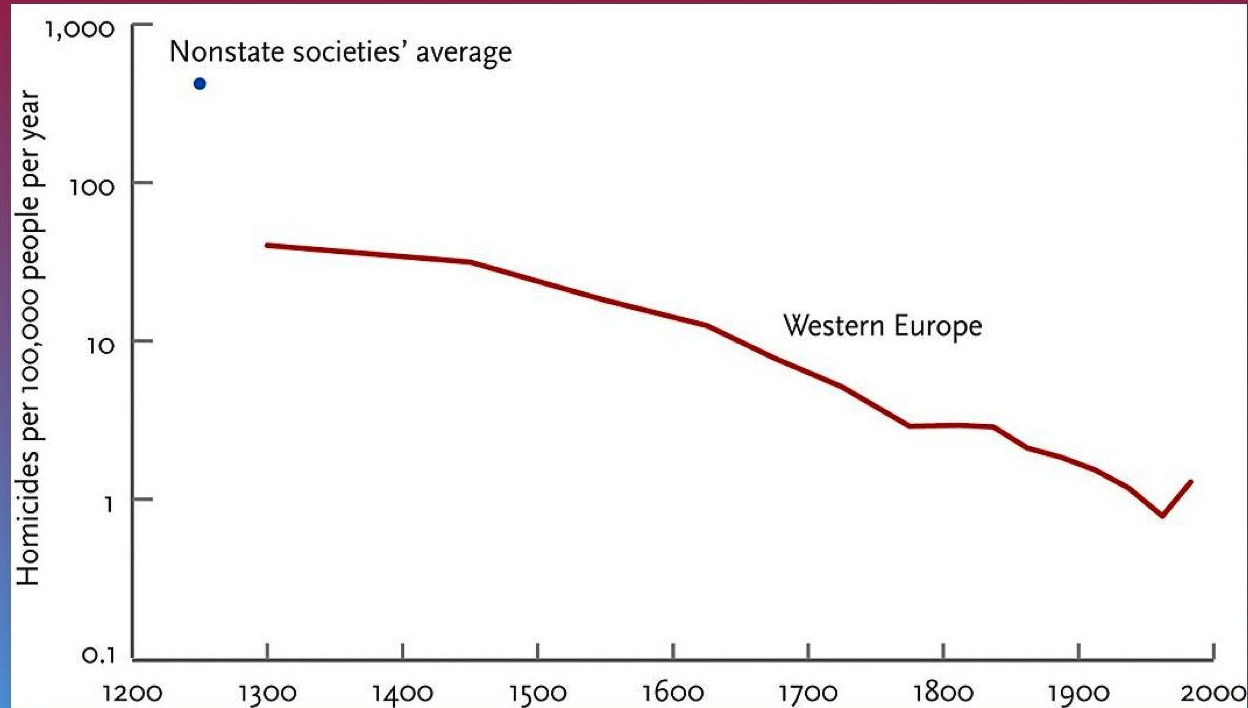
# Perceptions of violence

- Common beliefs about violence
  - Our ancestors lived hard but peaceful lives
    - Simpler times
  - Modern wars are very violent
  - Crime is on the rise
- These beliefs couldn't be further from reality
  - Can people be so wrong about something so important?

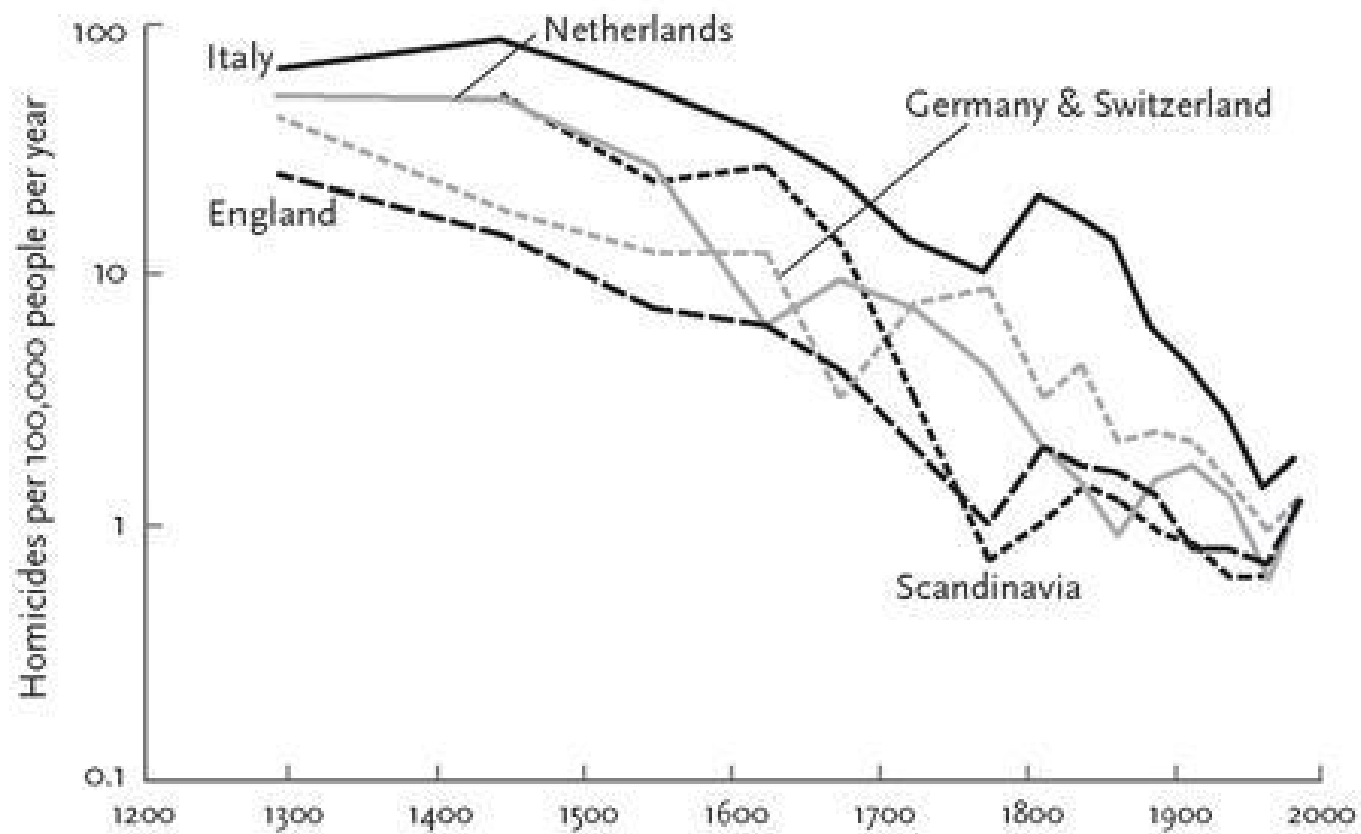
# Violence over time

- Our ancestors were much more violent than us
- We are living in the most peaceful period of humanities existence
- Violent crimes have VASTLY declined
- There are fewer wars and the wars that do occur kill fewer people per capita

# Homicide in Europe, 1300-2000

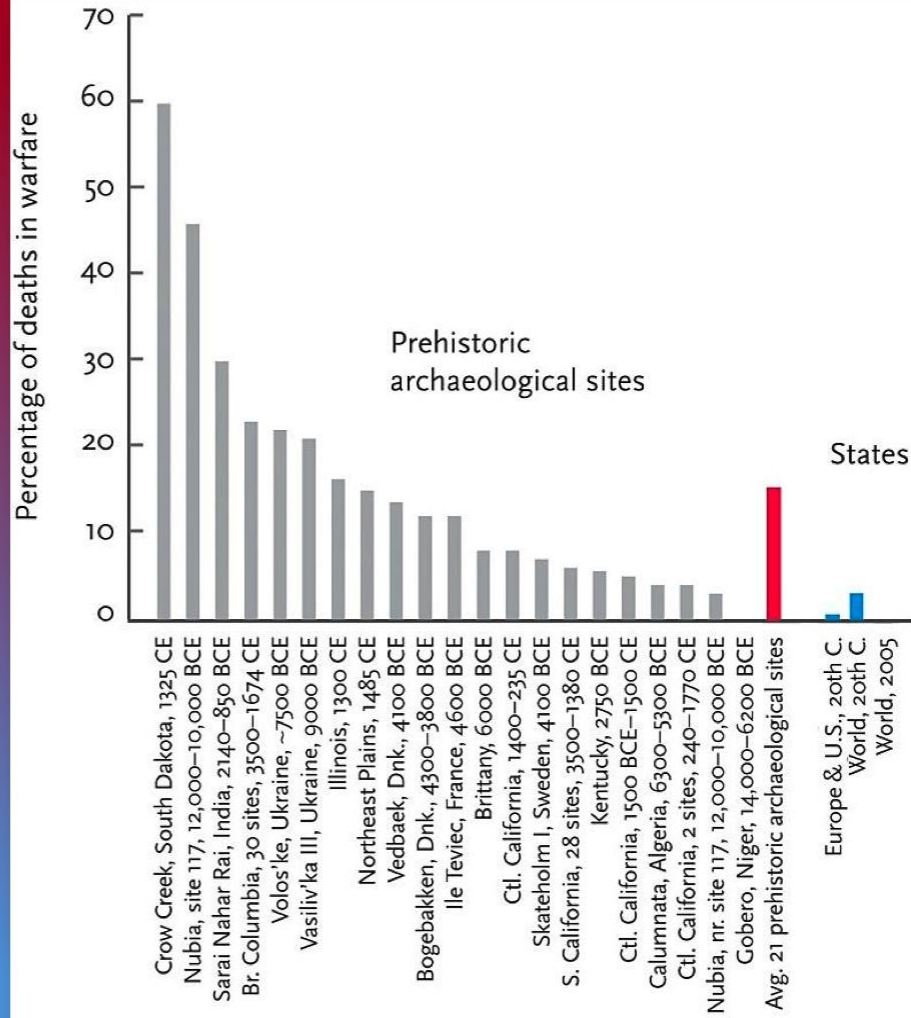


Source: Eisner, 2003



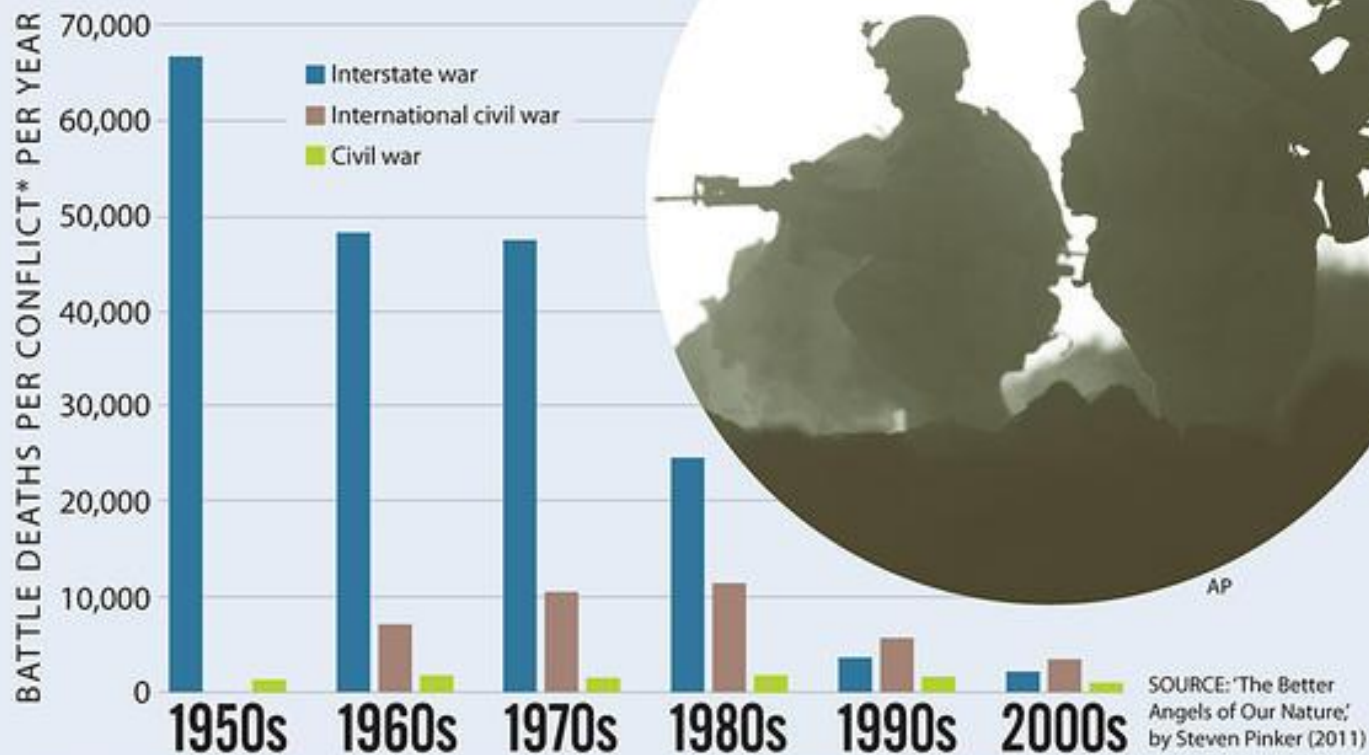
# Violent Deaths in Pre-historic Societies

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



# Deadliness of wars

We may be living in the most peaceful time in the history of mankind, argues scientist Steven Pinker, in part because the average war kills fewer people.



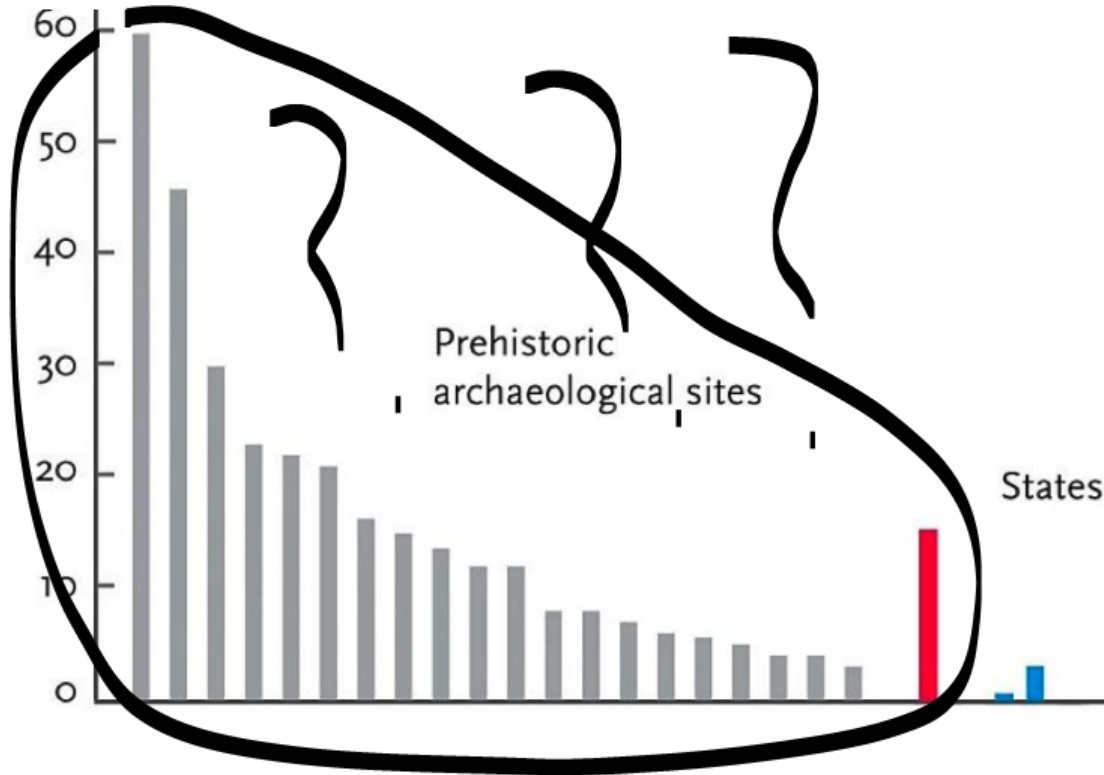
\*Deaths in 'state-based armed conflicts' that involve an army or militia on each side. (This does not include 'one-sided conflict,' or genocide.)





- Worldwide phenomenon
- Much of the data in the previous two graphs is drawn from western sources
  - Well recorded data
  - Almost all nations not as peaceful as europe seem to be on a trajectory towards peace

# Pre history... What gives man



# Violence in the state of nature

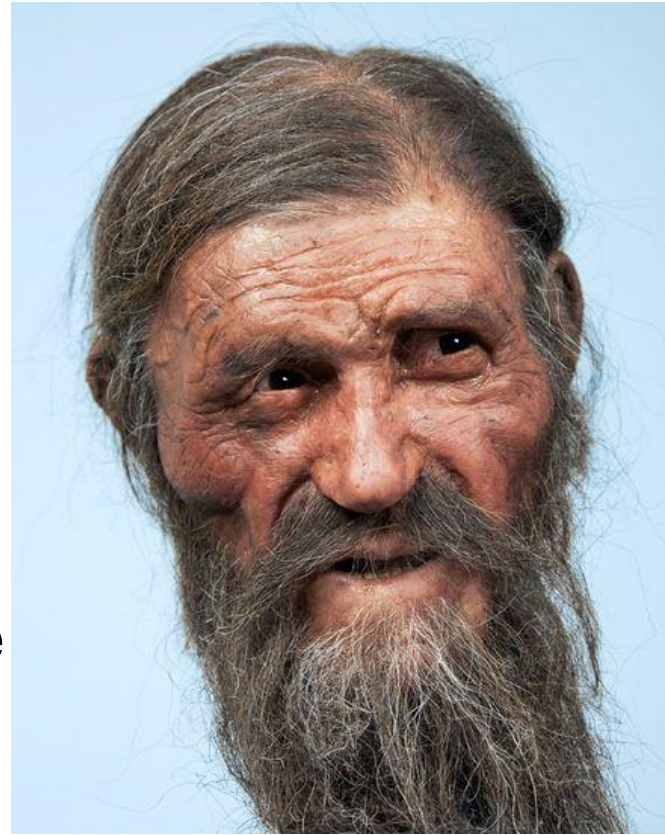
- Nonstate and pre civilization societies were very violent
  - Some societies you were far more likely to die at the hands of someone else than any other way
- Why?
  - Hobbesian state of all against all
    - Pre emptive strikes
    - Raiding
    - Feuding

# Archeological evidence

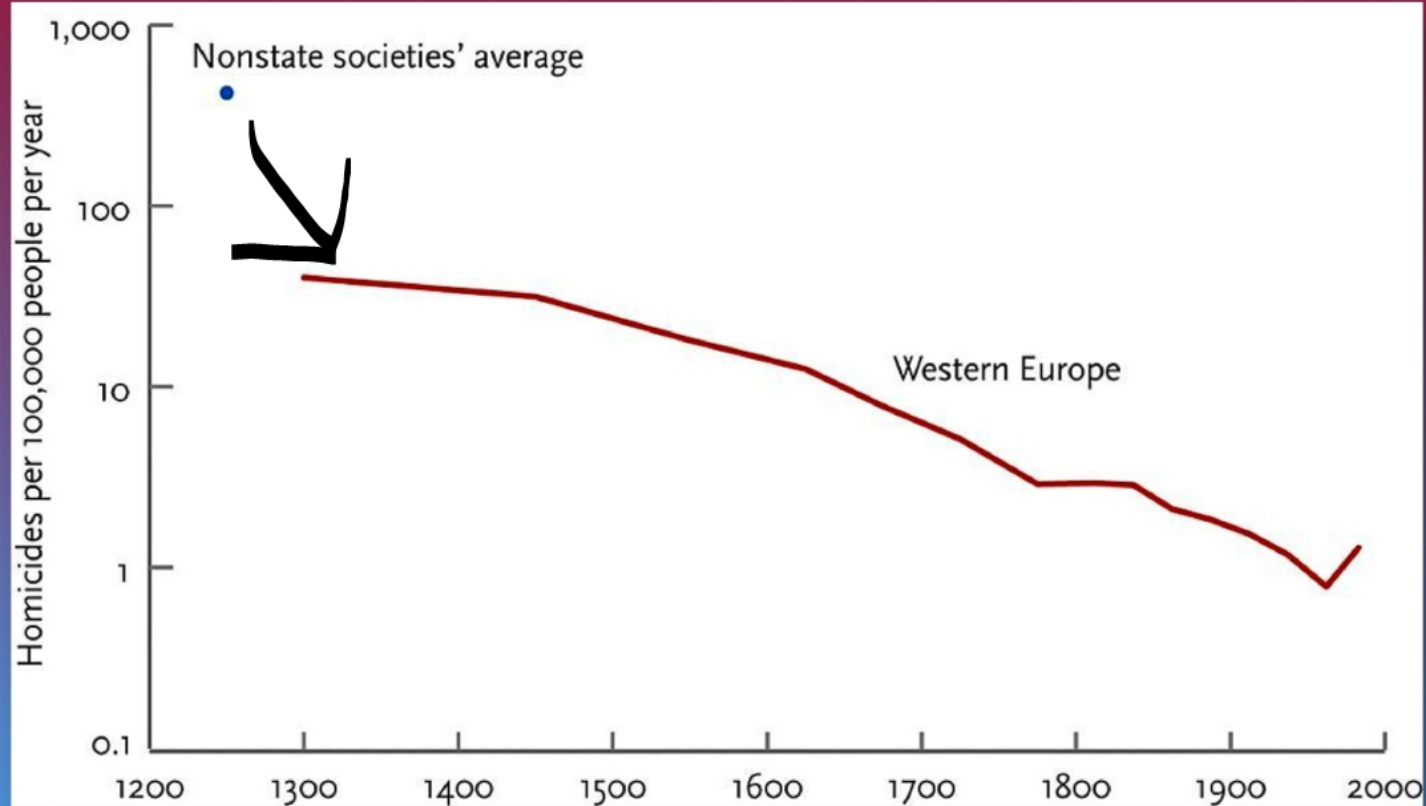
- How do we know this?
  - Finding bodies and burial sites
  - Many bodies were murdered
  - Lots of mass graves of large groups of people
  - Many people died with grievous fresh wounds
  - Peat bogs full of murdered people

# Case study

- Otzi the iceman
  - Body recovered in alps
  - Had been frozen for 5 thousand years
  - Like many ancient bodies found he was murdered
  - Four peoples DNA on him
  - Cuts, head bashed in



# Yay... Warlords?



# Start of civilization

- Existence of states dramatically decreases violence
- Allows for power structures that help everyone escape Hobbesian traps
  - Reduced chronic raiding and vendettas
  - Probably caused a 5 fold reduction in violence

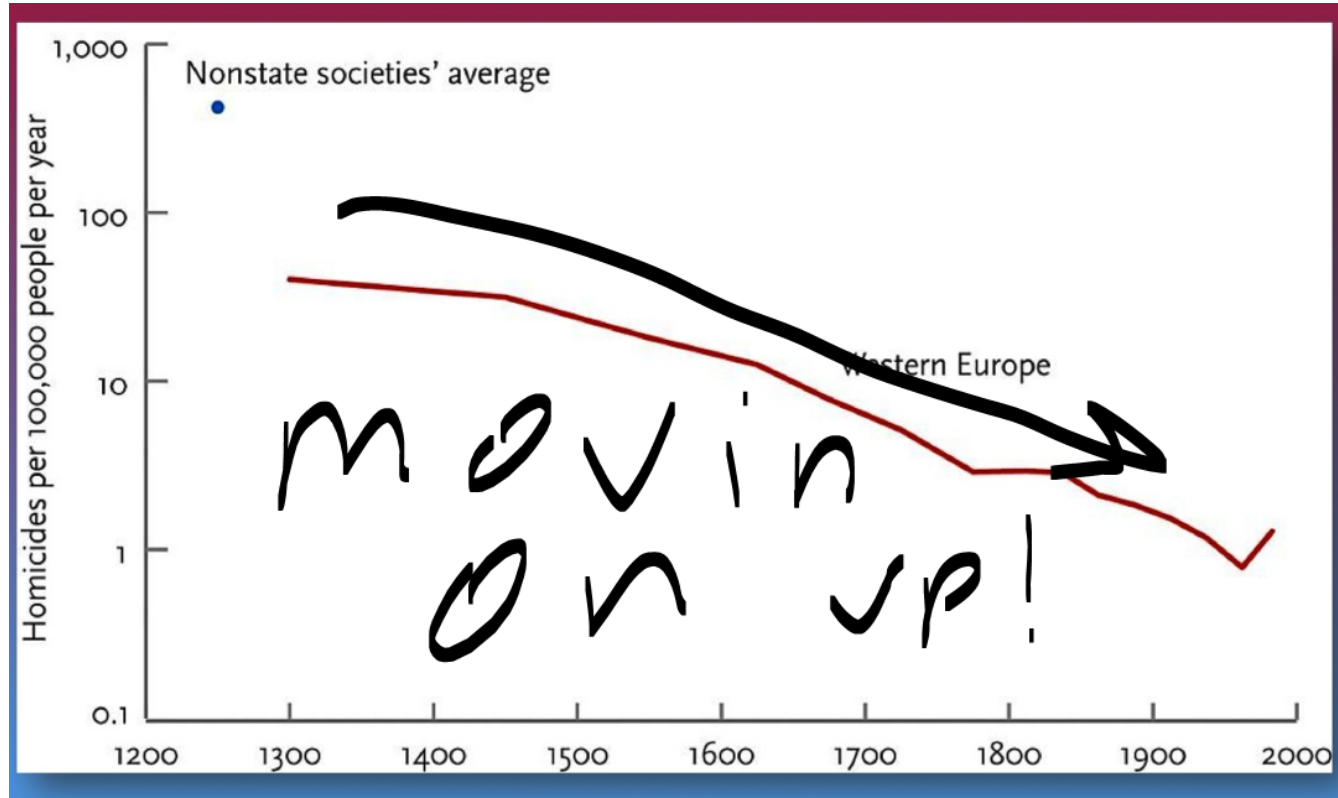
# Start of civilization

- These first governments were probably awful
  - Warlords and kings seizing power with their soldiers
- Monopoly on violence
- Start of laws
  - I should stop the surfs from killing each other
    - (I'm the only one who gets to do that!)





# Governments start to suck.... less



# Governments get better

- Much larger kingdoms and nations arising
- They also become less dependant on local rulers who swear loyalty to a king
  - More based on common law
  - Cuts out local warlords
    - europe 1500 ad had 5000 political units
      - Dukes, Lords, Barons
    - 1900ad had less than 30 political units

# Governments get better

- Little bits of improvement start off a virtuous cycle
  - Less violence makes it safer for trade
  - Increases revenue (for individuals and states)
  - More is spent on infrastructure and industry
- This incentivised central powers to restrict wanton nobels killing everyone even more

**Also the humanitarian revolution**

# The Enlightenment



The Age of Reason

# Humanitarian revolution

- Called the enlightenment in europe
  - Also happening in China
  - Continued increase in population
  - Trade increasing
  - Printing presses allowing spread of ideas
  - Larger cities and trade allow mixture of people and ideas
  - Economic revolution allows capital not land to give power

# Humanitarian revolution

- Expanding circle of empathy
  - Peter Singer
  - In our ancestors empathy reserved for family units
  - Cities allowed people to expand that (Maybe all people are like me)
  - Printing press probably REALLY helped this
  - “There but by fortune go I”
  - Abstract reasoning measurably improves with reading

# Humanitarian revolution

- These thoughts starts to influence government
  - Locke: People have inalienable rights
- Many violent crimes start to become illegal
  - Slavery
    - One of the most common labor institutions in the world to this point
  - Judicial torture
  - Cruelty to animals

# The long peace and the new peace

- After World War 2
  - Most large states stopped waging war
- After the cold war has ended
  - Number of wars drastically on decline
  - Genocides, a historically common event also on decline
  - Even terrorist attacks on the decline
    - Very surprising I know!



- Book is great
- Bill gates said:“It was one of the most important books I’ve ever read”

