LSE IDEAS public lecture

Each Age Gets the Bloodshed it Needs: 20,000 years of violence

Professor Ian Morris
Philippe Roman Chair in History and International Affairs at LSE IDEAS for 2015-16

Professor Danny Quah
Chair, LSE

LSE events

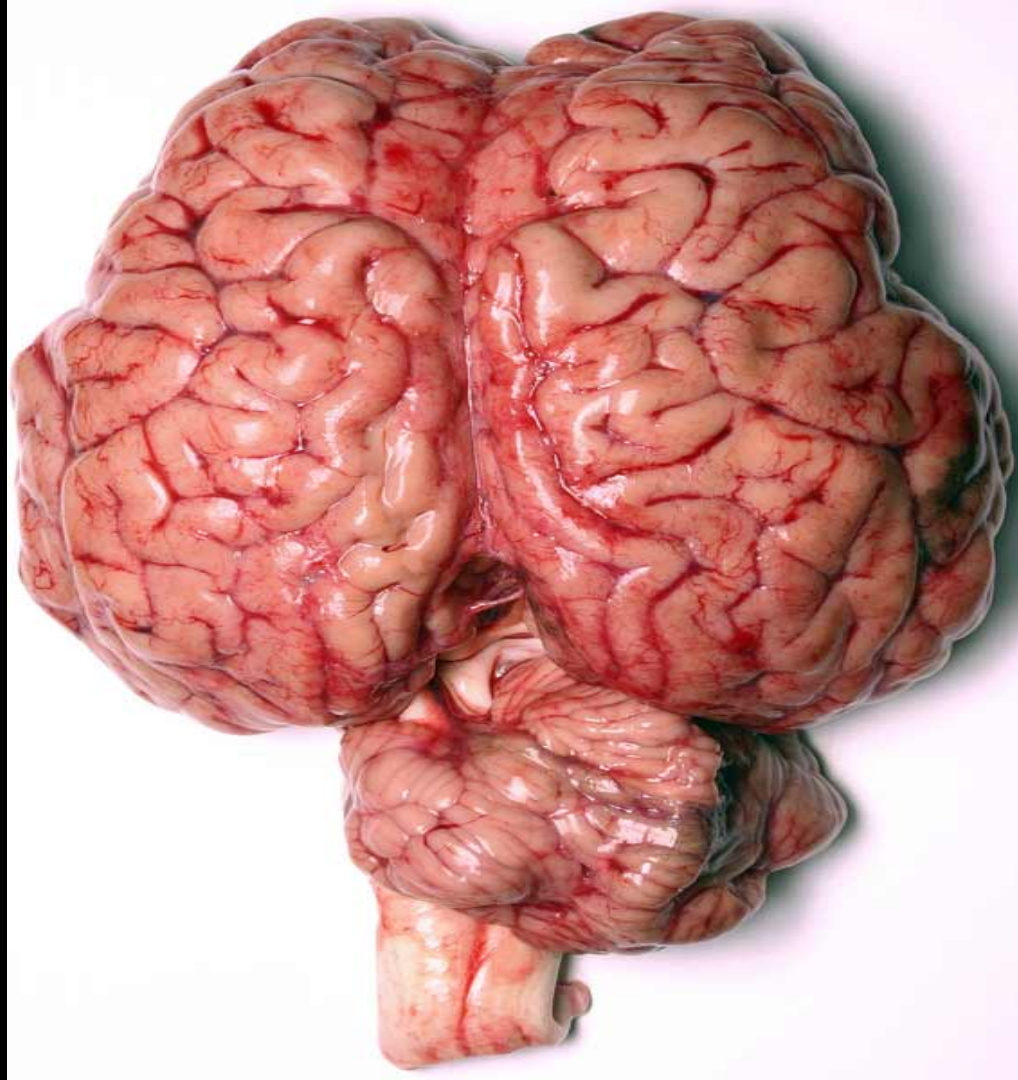
Hashtag for Twitter users: **#LSEMorris**

Each Age Gets the Bloodshed it Needs:

20,000 Years of Violence

Ian Morris
LSE
February 9, 2016

2.7 pounds of magic: the modern human brain



1. Bad news: violence is an evolutionary adaptation

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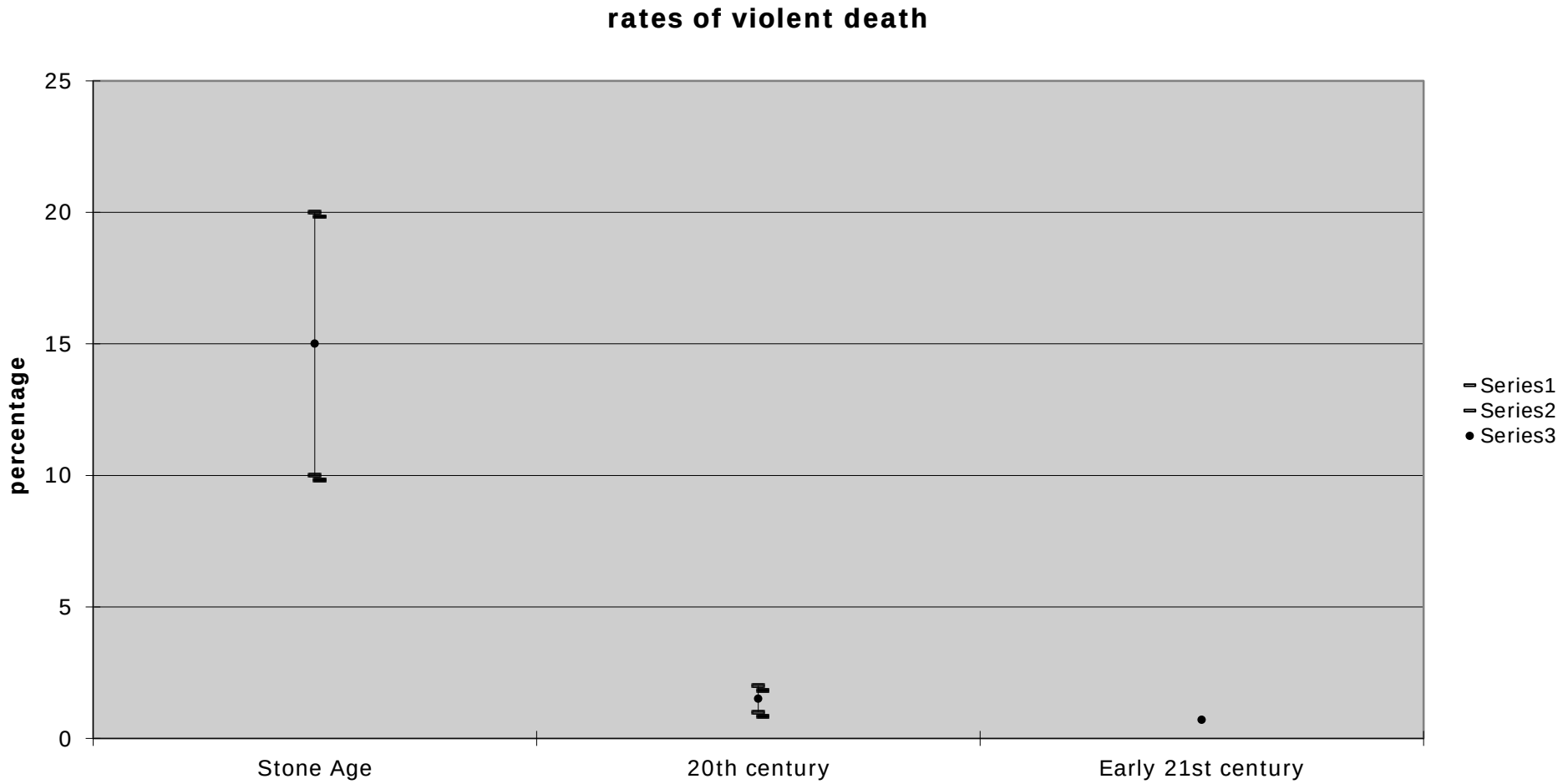
2. Good news: rates of violent death have declined by 90 percent across the last 20,000 years

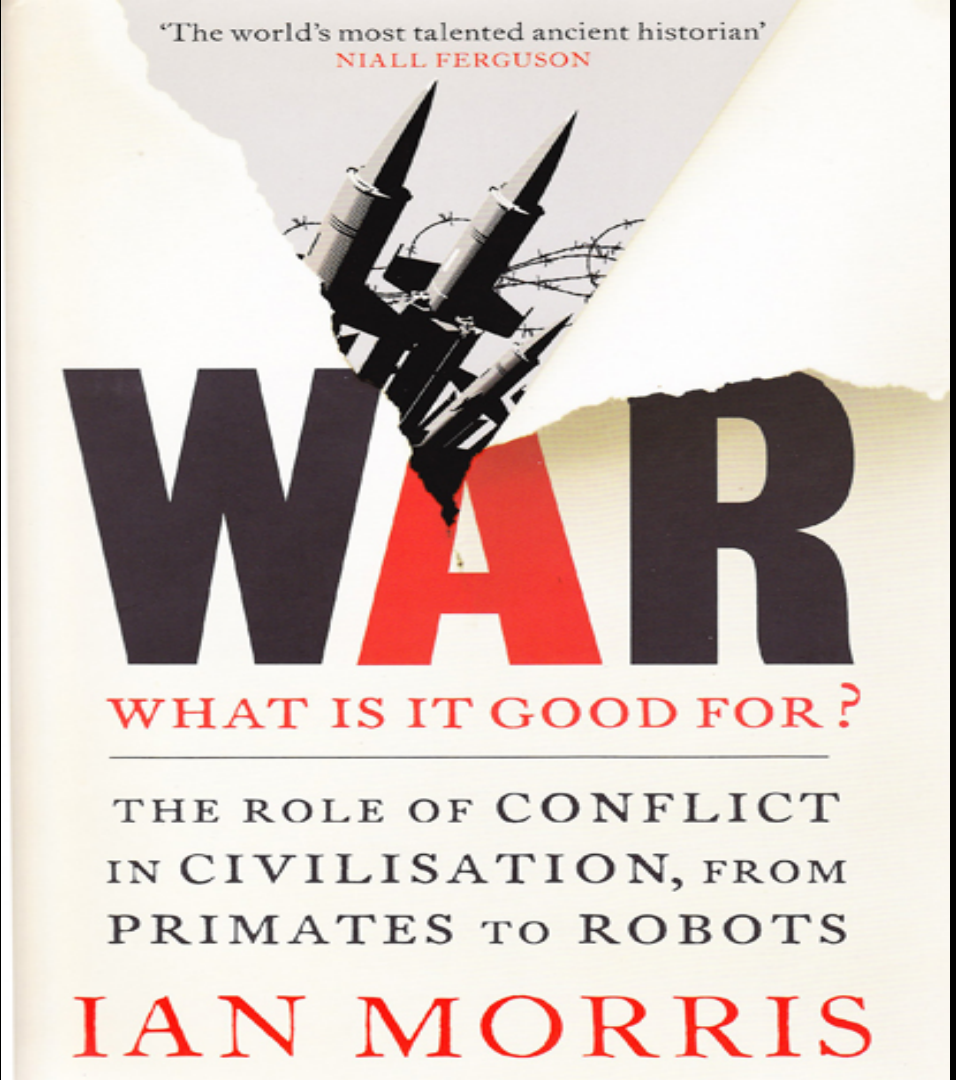
Aboriginal Australian group (late nineteenth century)

Yanomami club fight, Venezuela (1960s)

A massacre in the Soviet Union, 1942


rates of violent death
25
20
15
10
5
0
percentage
Stone Age
20th century
Early 21st century
Series1
Series2
Series3

1. Bad news: violence is an evolutionary adaptation
2. Good news: rates of violent death have declined by 90 percent across the last 20,000 years
3. Great news: we know why this has happened and how to make the trend continue



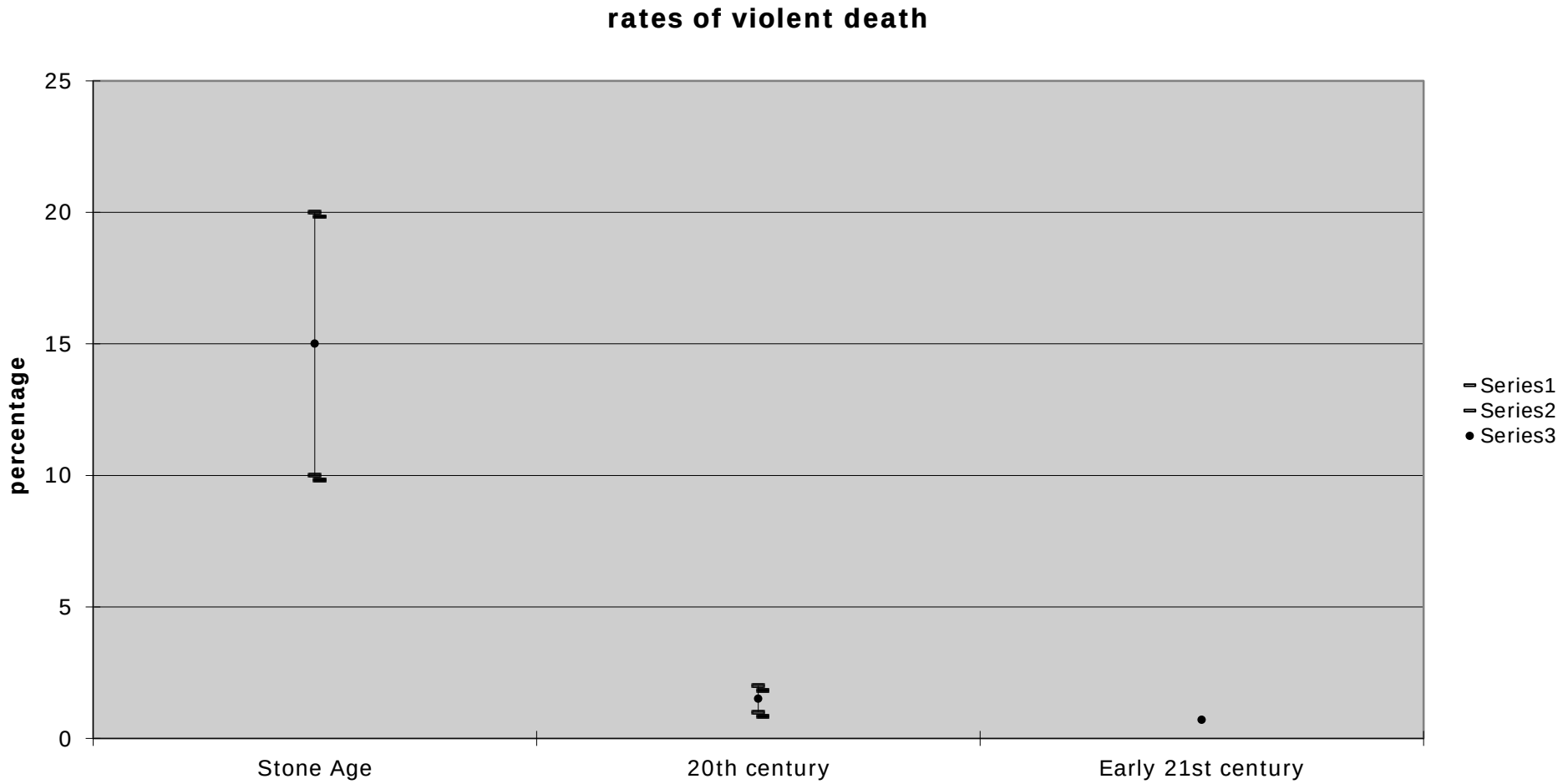
War! What is it Good For?

Profile Books, 2014

1. By fighting wars, people have created larger, more organized, internally pacified societies that have reduced the risks that their members will die violently

Not saints: Assyrian king and his generals, 7th century BC

CHTUNG!
verlassen jetzt
EST-BERLIN
Lord Patel ©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1. By fighting wars, people have created larger, more organized, internally pacified societies that have reduced the risks that their members will die violently
2. War is the worst way to create larger, safer societies, but is pretty much the only way humans have found

COMMITTED TO
IMPROVING THE STATE
OF THE WORLD
WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM
WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM
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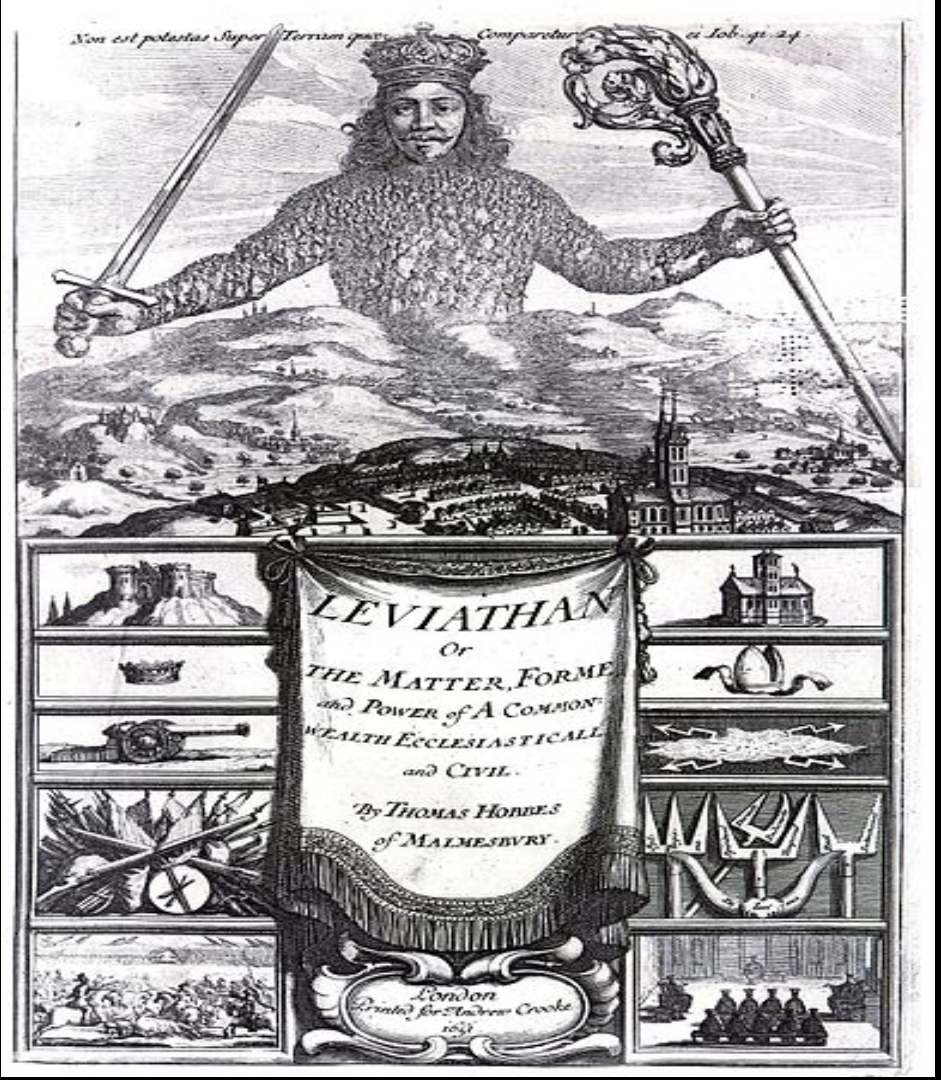
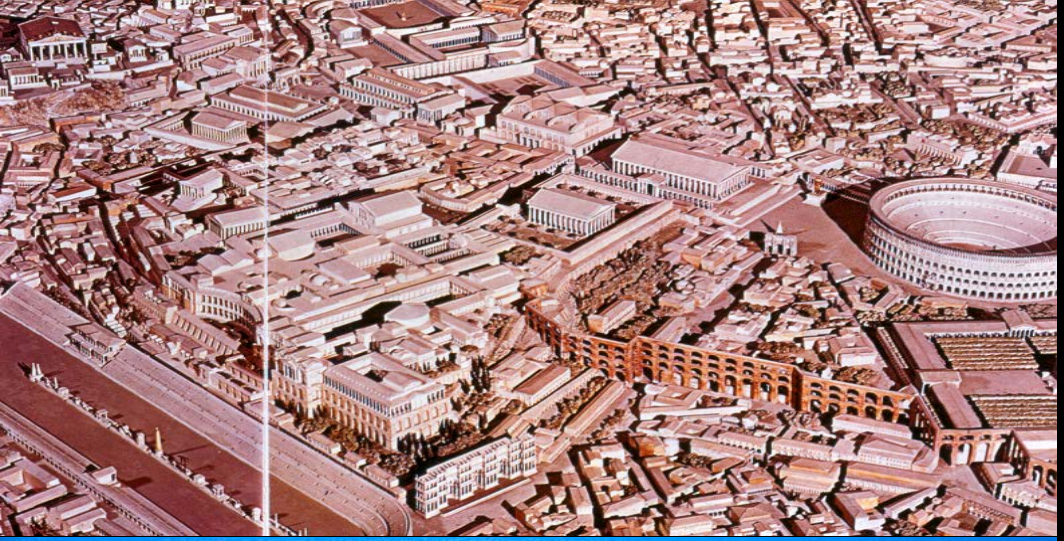


Leviathan:
Thomas Hobbes, 1651

1. By fighting wars, people have created larger, more organized, internally pacified societies that have reduced the risks that their members will die violently
2. War is the worst way to create larger, safer societies, but is pretty much the only way humans have found
3. Over the long run, the larger, safer societies created by war have made humanity richer

The waste land: Romans burning a Dacian village, c. AD 160



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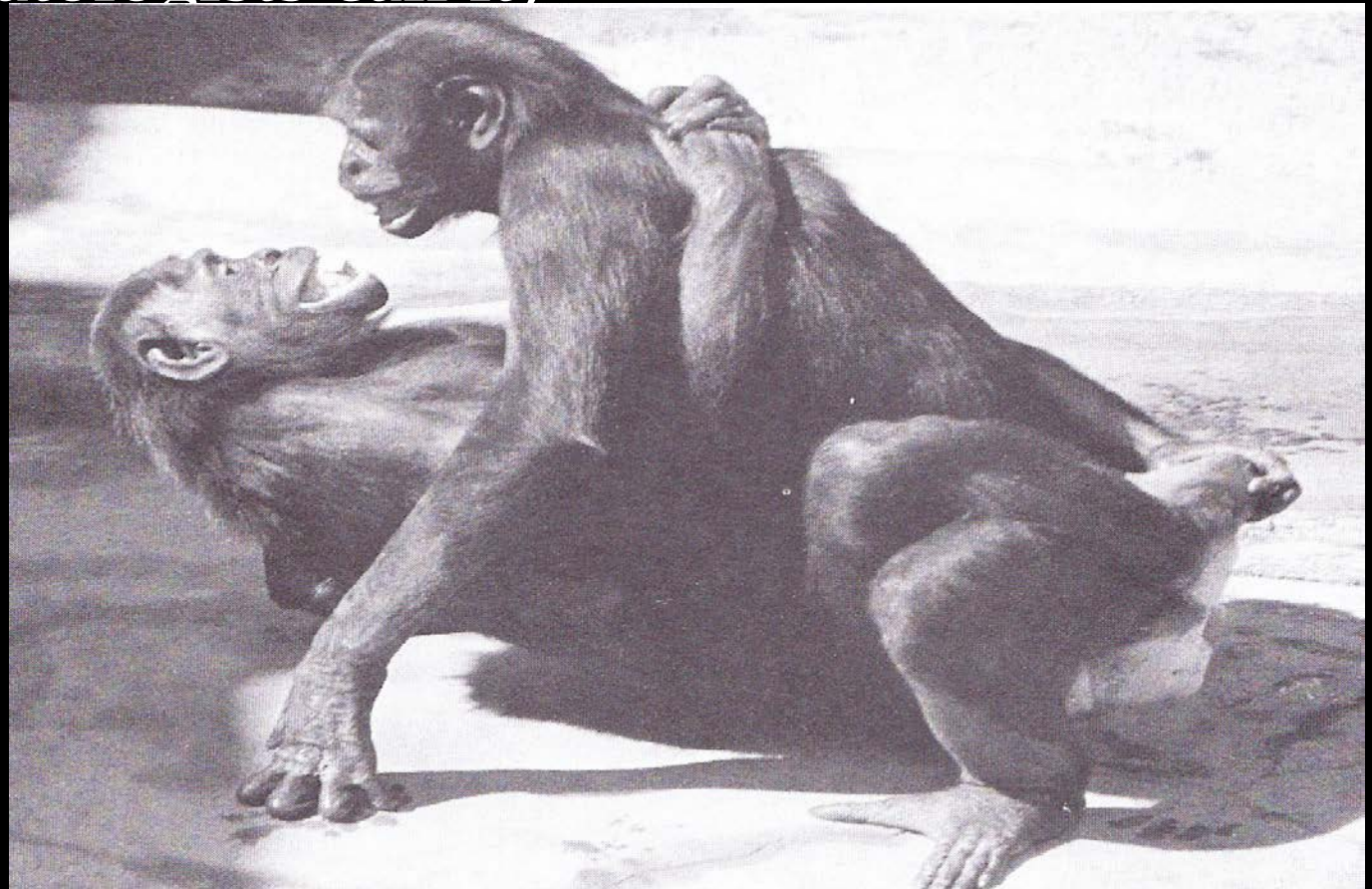
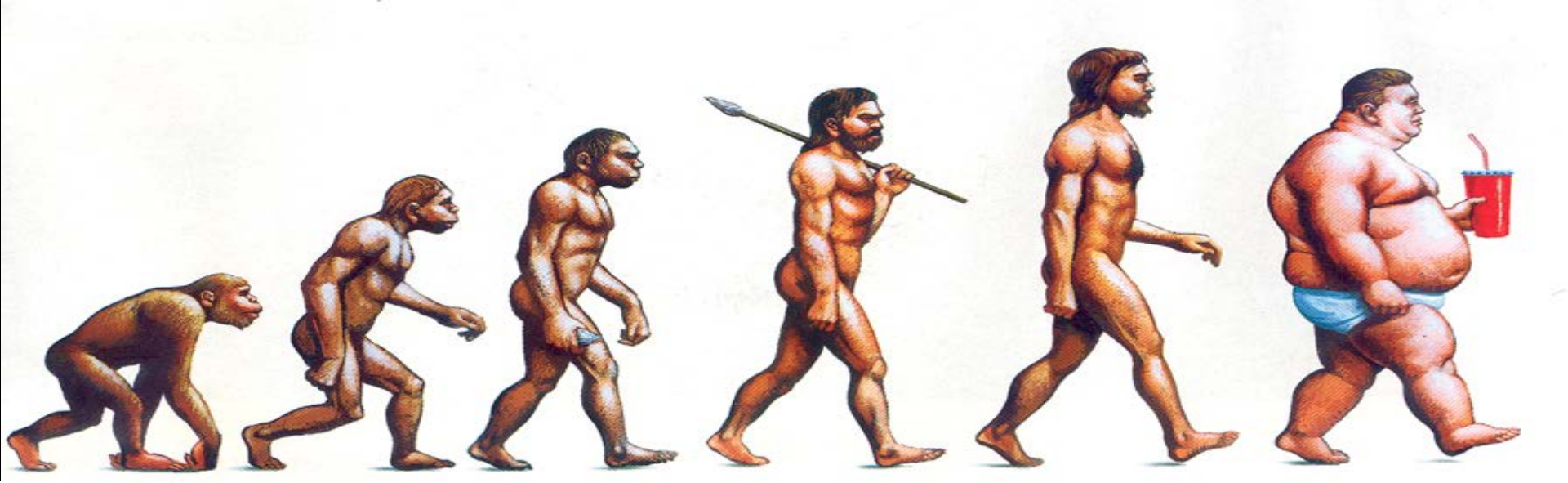
4. War has been good for something—so good, in fact, that it is now putting itself out of business

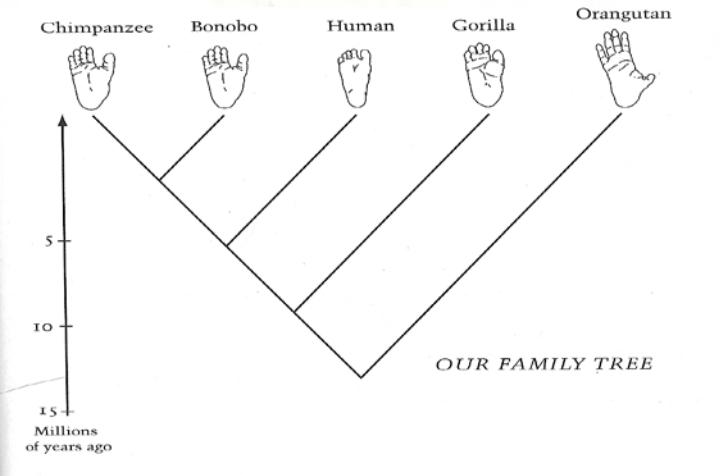
Happy families: Jane Goodall and the Kasekela chimpanzees, Gombe Park (Tanzania), 1965

Red in tooth and claw: chimpanzees at war

Hoka-hoka: bonobo genito-genital manipulation (as primatologists call it)

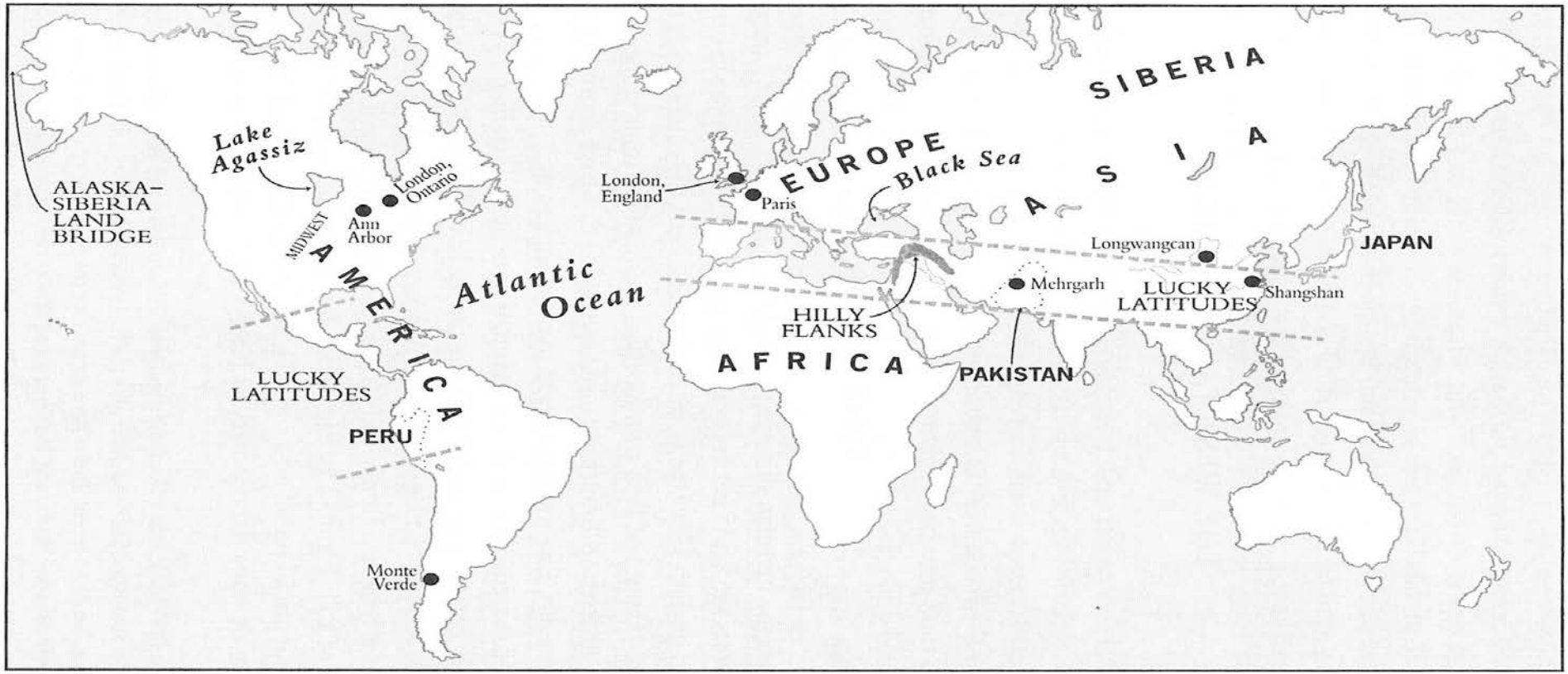




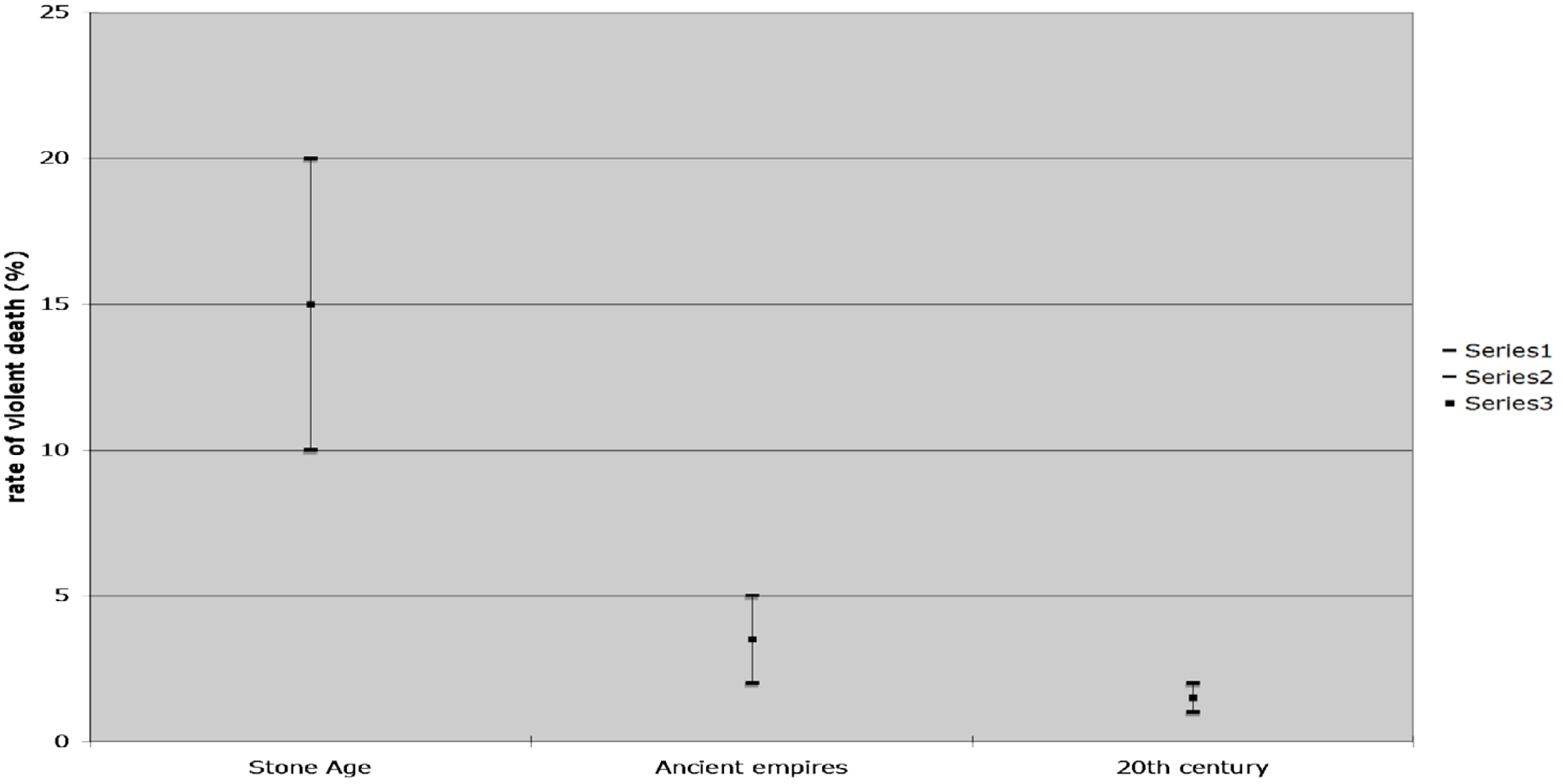


The descent of man

The “lucky latitudes”: where the densest concentrations of domesticable plants and animals evolved at the end of the Ice Age



Incorporation: the oldest known example, on the Narmer Palette
(Egypt, c. 3100 BC)


25
20
15
10
5
0
rate of violent death (%)
Stone Age
Ancient empires
20th century
Series1
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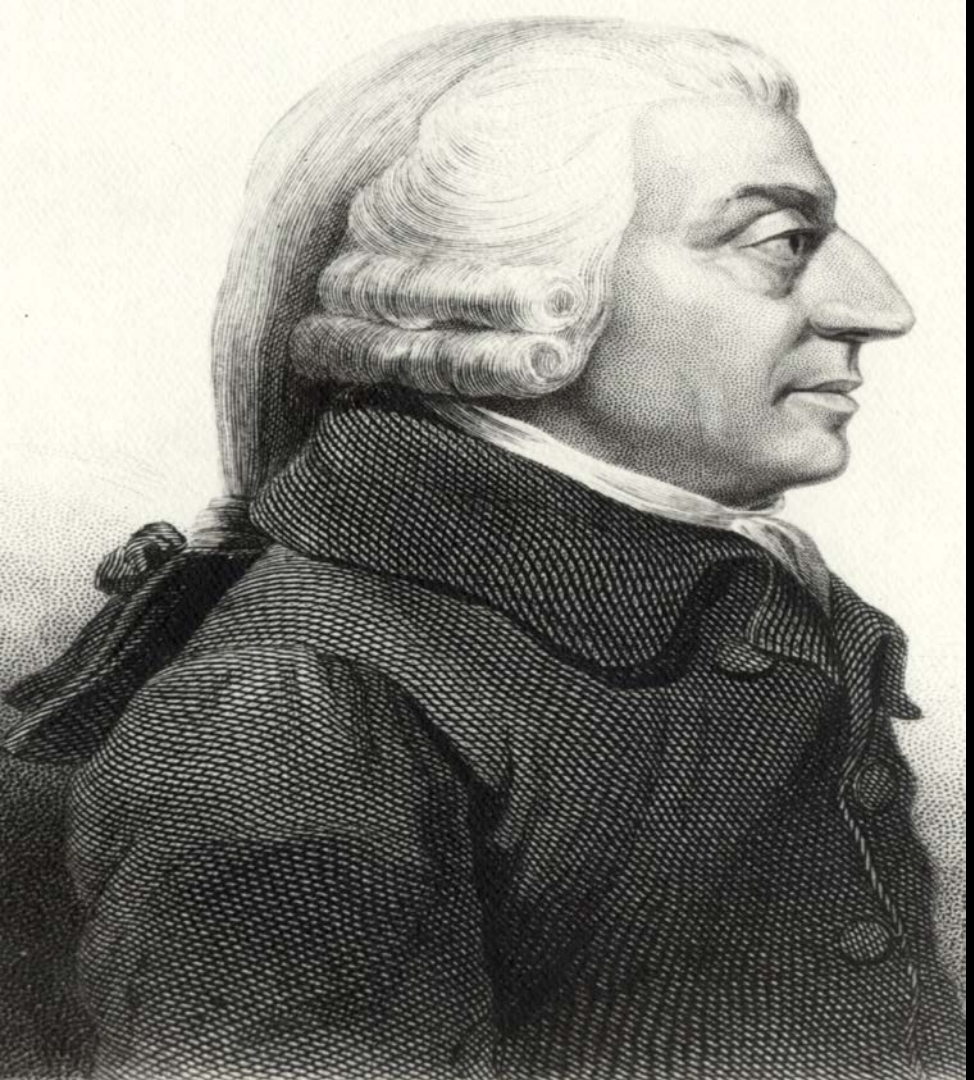
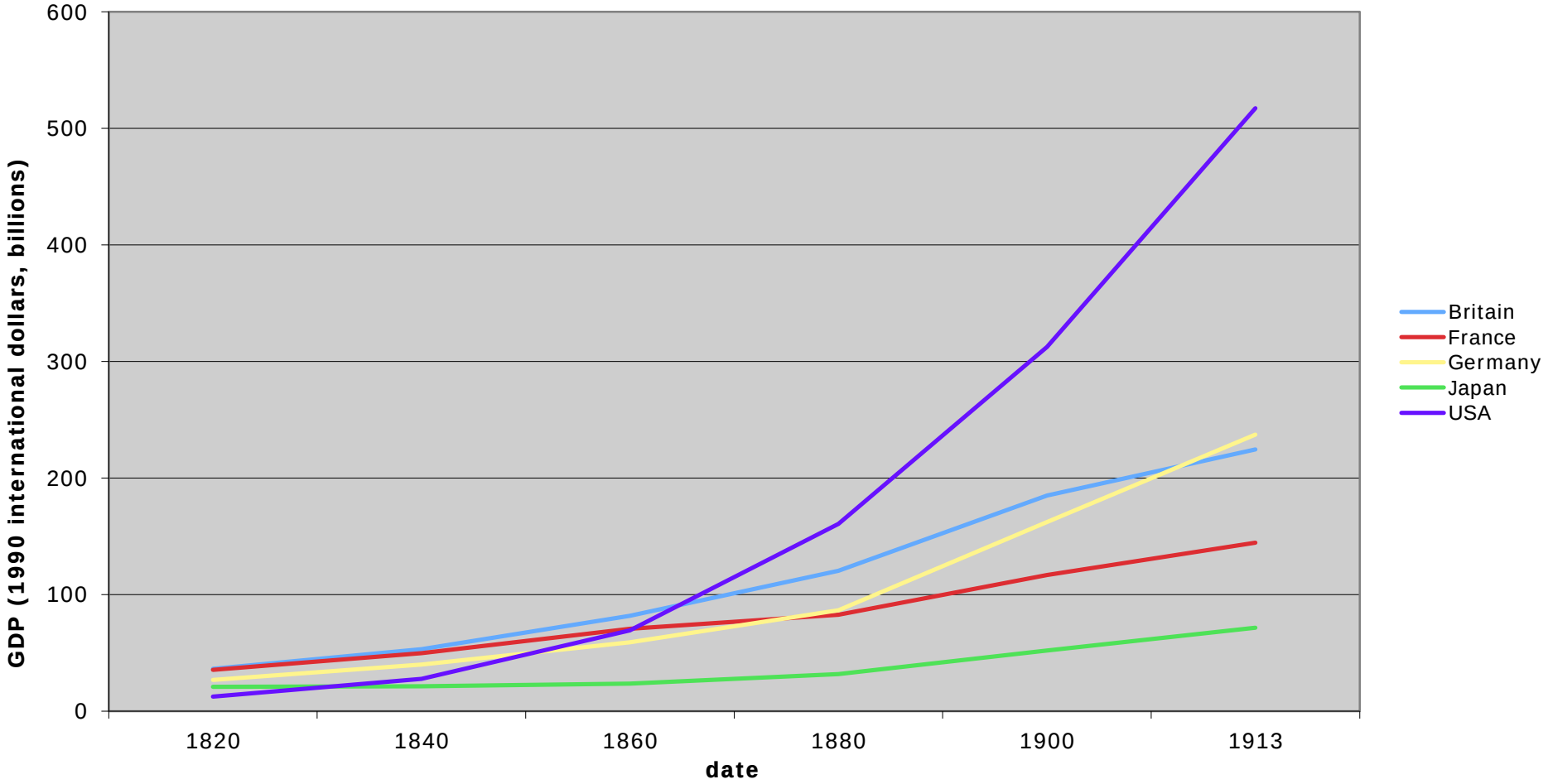
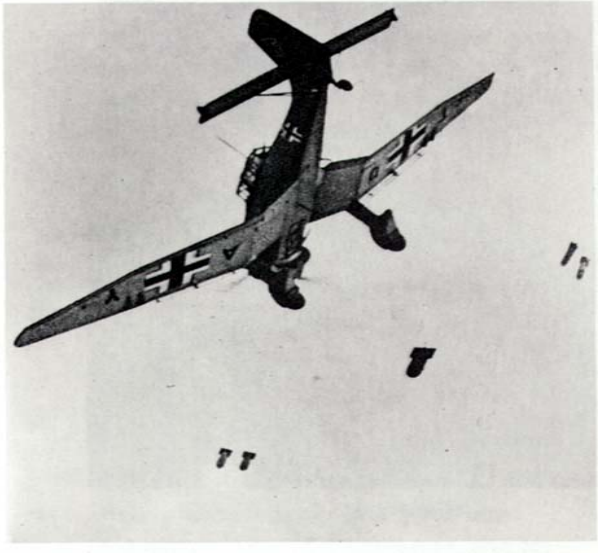
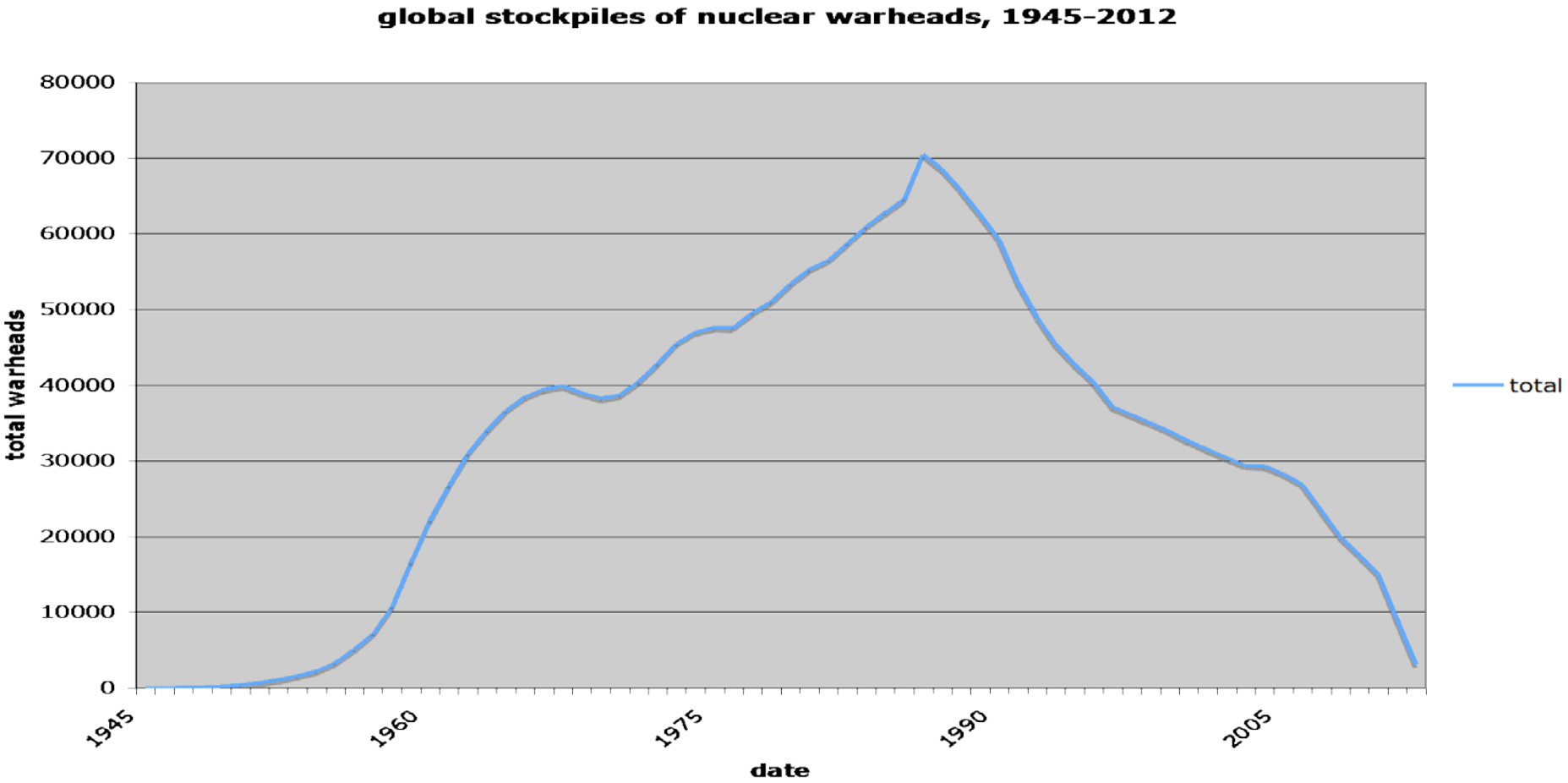


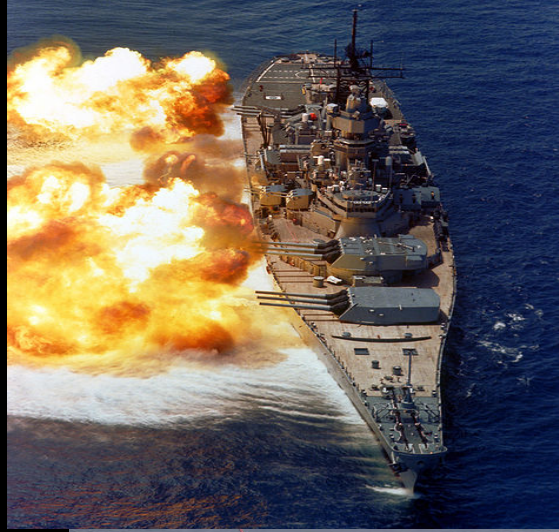
The Glasgow School of Economics:
Adam Smith, 1723-90

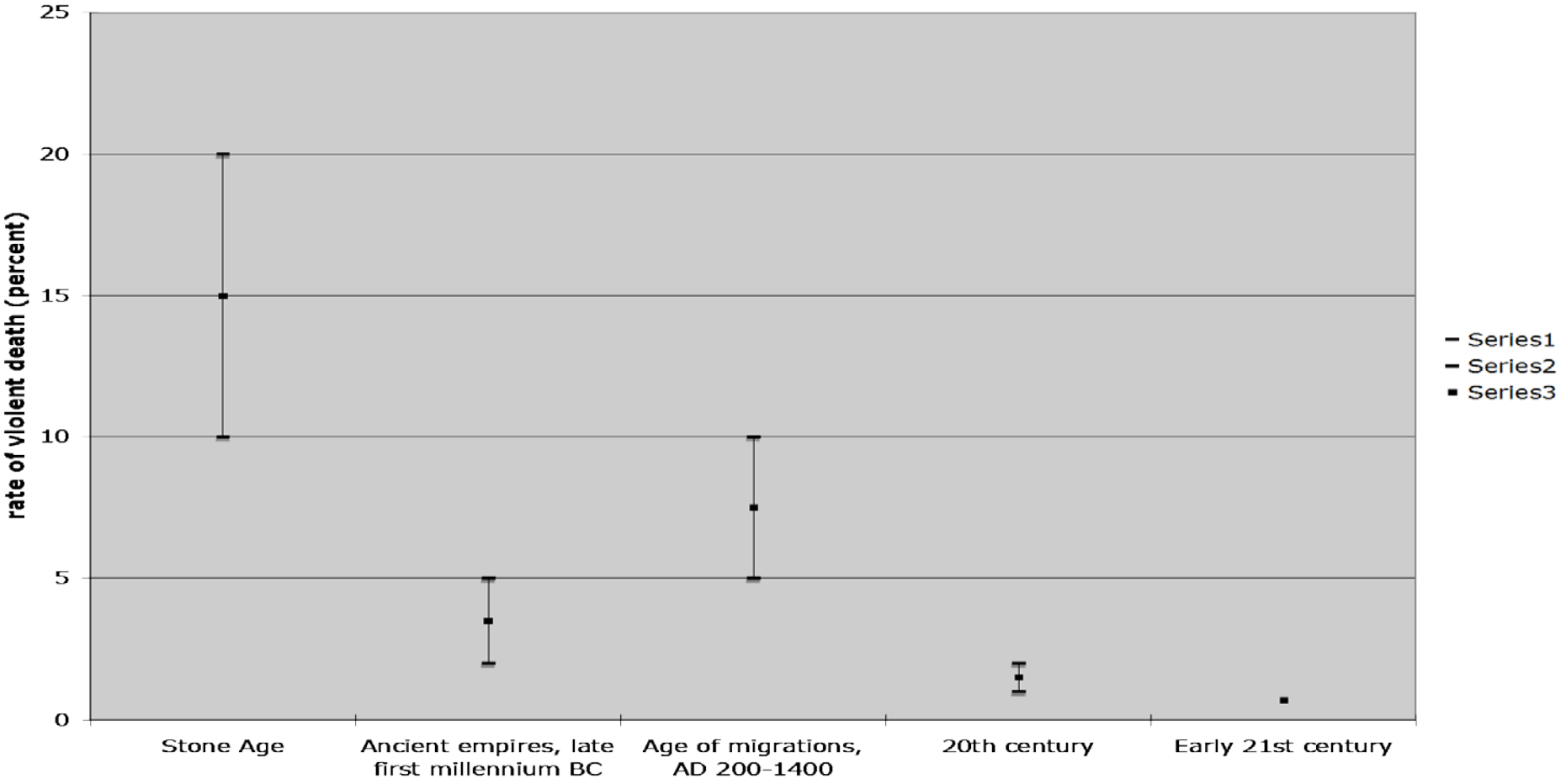

600
500
400
300
200
100
0
GDP (1990 international dollars, billions)
1820
1840
1860
1880
1900
1913
date
Britain
France
Germany
Japan
USA



Fifty years ago—three years after the Berlin Wall was built, two years after the Cuban Missile Crisis


global stockpiles of nuclear warheads, 1945–2012
total warheads
80000
70000
60000
50000
40000
30000
20000
10000
0
1945
1960
1975
1990
2005
date
total




25
20
15
10
5
0
rate of violent death (percent)
Stone Age
Ancient empires, late first millennium BC
Age of migrations, AD 200-1400
20th century
Early 21st century
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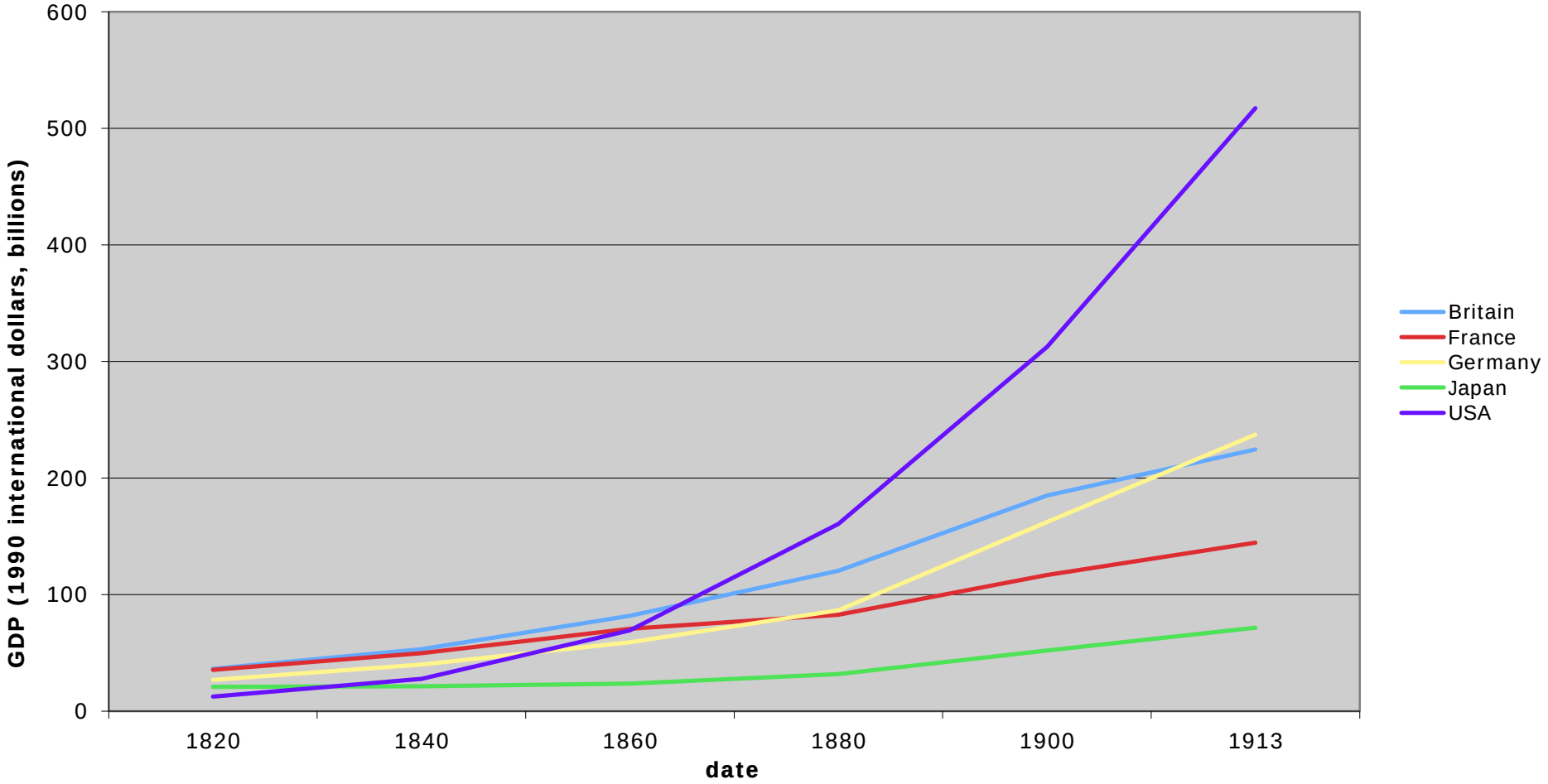
Look, no hands! For the first time ever, a robot (X-47B) fighter plane lands itself on and takes off again from the USS *George H. W. Bush* (May 13, 2013)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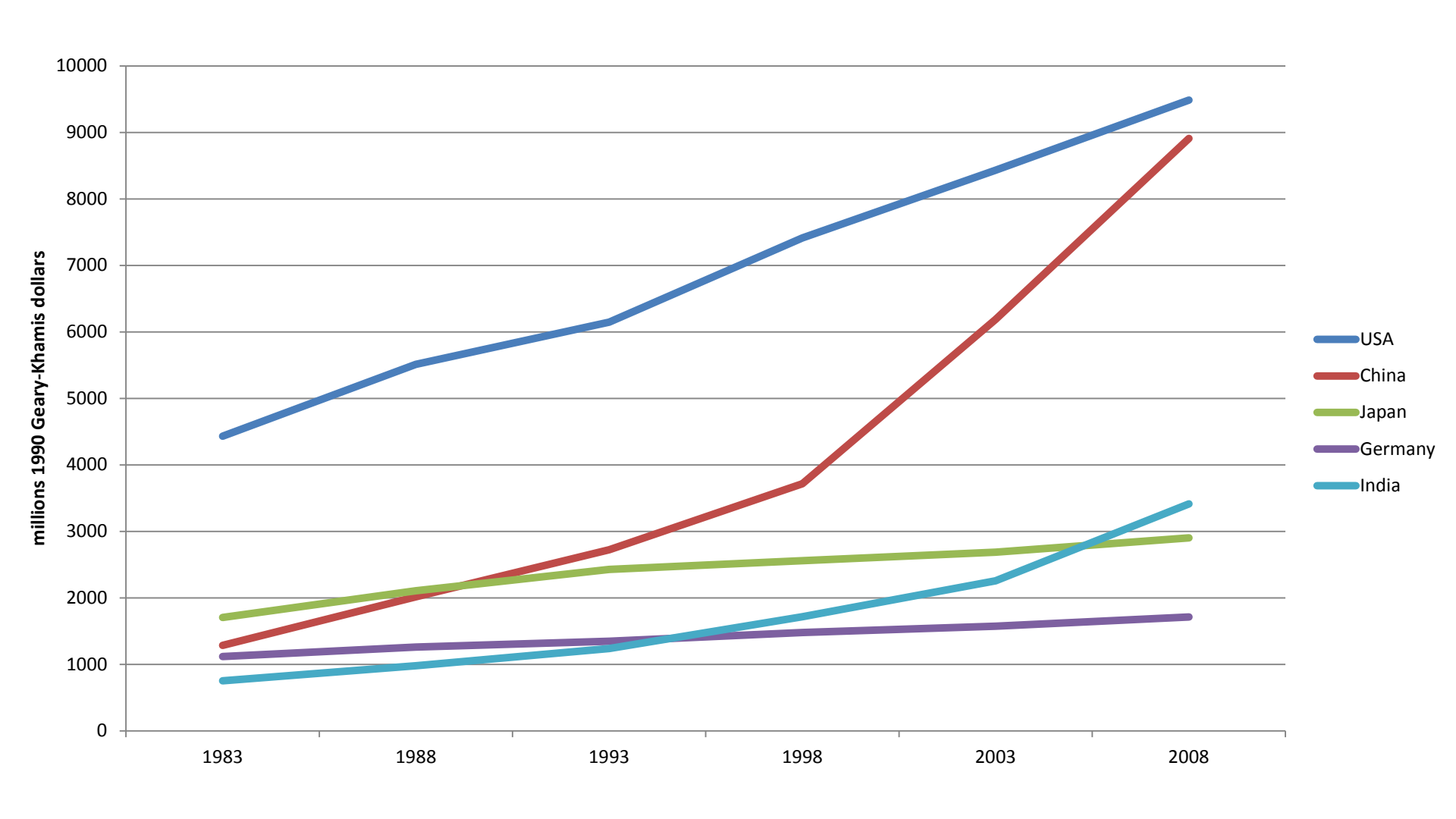
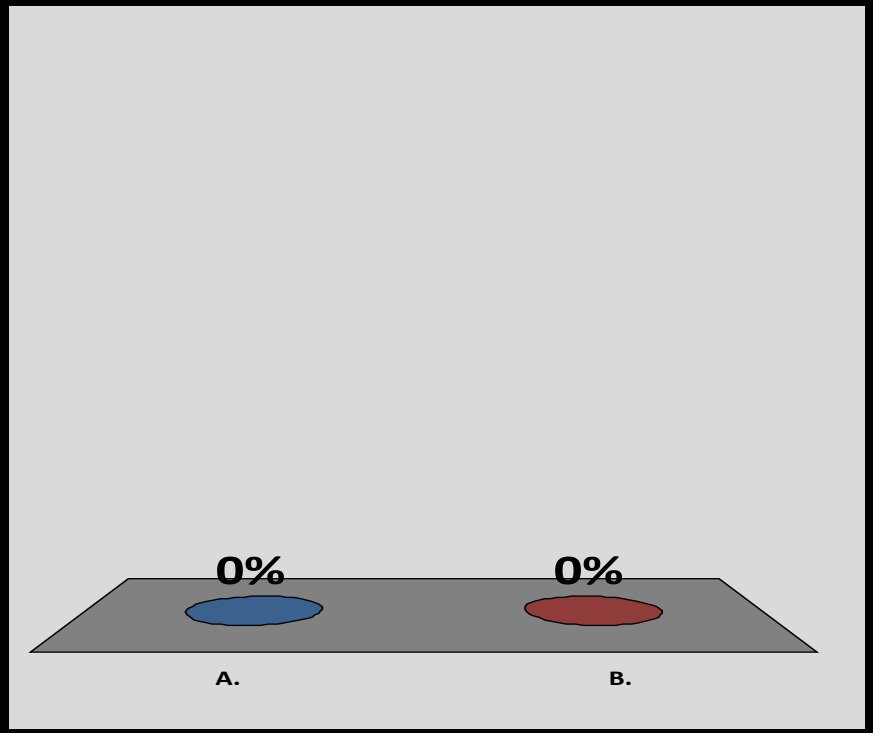

millions 1990 Geary-Khamis dollars
10000
9000
8000
7000
6000
5000
4000
3000
2000
1000
0
1983
1988
1993
1998
2003
2008
USA
China
Japan
Germany
India

Will rates of violent death continue to decline across the next 100 years?

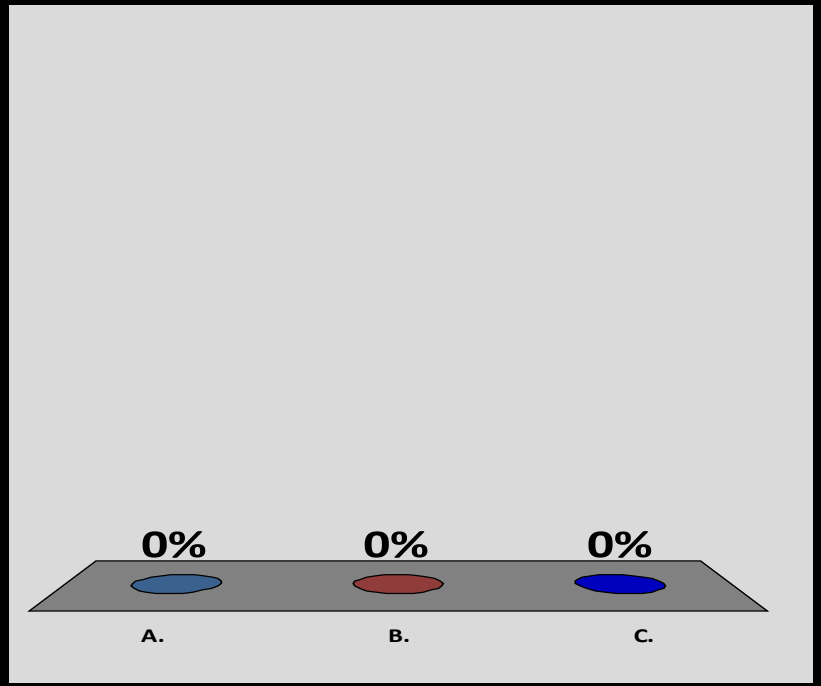
A. Yes

B. No



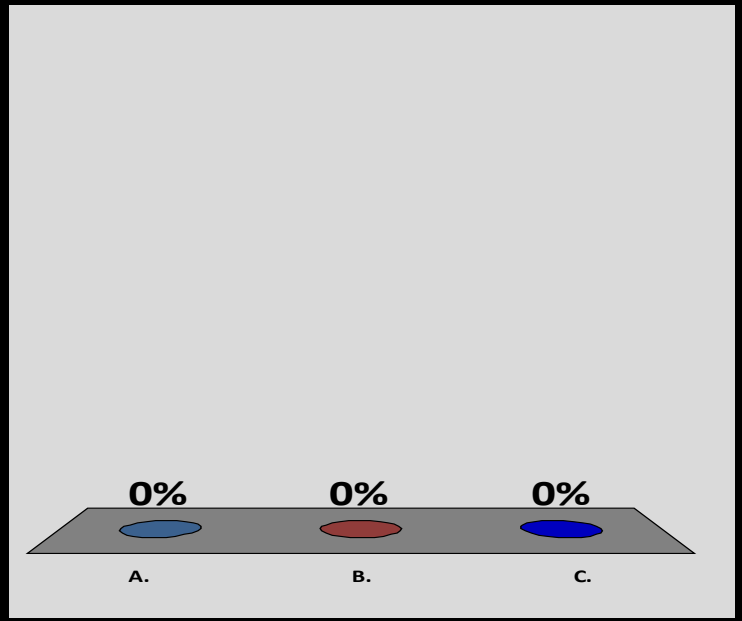
Is the European Union really an example of a bigger, safer, more prosperous society that has formed without war or the threat of war?

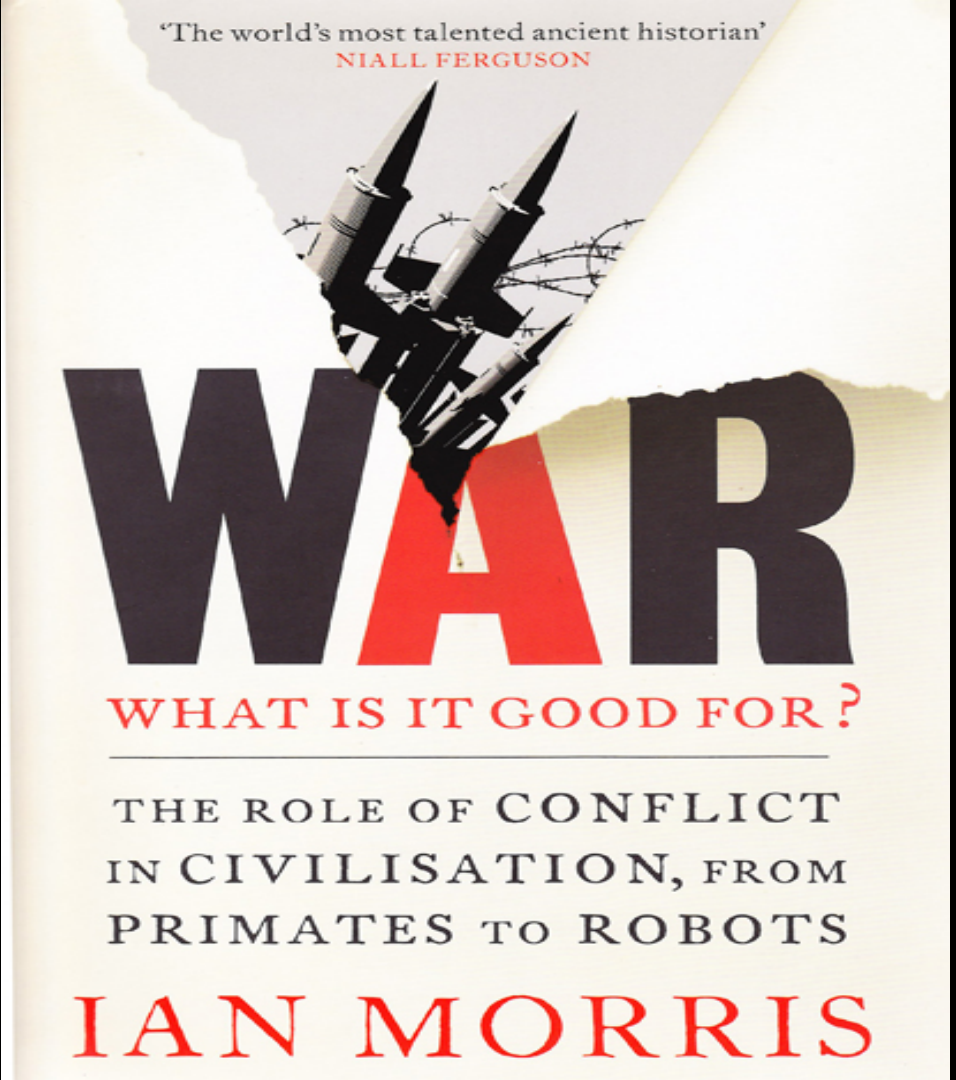
A. Yes
B. Maybe
C. No



Will the breakdown of the British globocop between the 1870s and 1910s prove to be a good analogy for the breakdown of the American globocop between the 2000s and 2040s?

A. Yes
B. In some ways
C. No





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