

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

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The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined.

Pinker, Steven (Author)

Oct 2011. 780 p. Viking, hardcover, \$40.00. (9780670022953). 303.609.

Readers will understandably question psychology professor Pinker's basic premises that violence has declined significantly and that we are living in the most peaceable era of human existence. But he makes the case with data and trend lines indicating that despite the horrors of our modern age—terrorism, genocide, everyday mayhem—we are actually killing and maiming less frequently than in earlier history. Pinker takes a very long view, drawing on history and psychology to examine a very hopeful trend. He begins by looking at six historical trends that have led to advancements from hunting to agriculture to commerce and governance, resulting in greater prosperity and ease. In the arena of psychology, he explores five inner demons and how they have been fueled and calmed by historical factors. Finally, he examines four “better angels”—forces, including empathy, self-control, morality, and reason, that have historically kept us from eliminating our species. This long, well-researched, comprehensive tour-de-force provides a helpful look at the human condition.

— *Vanessa Bush*