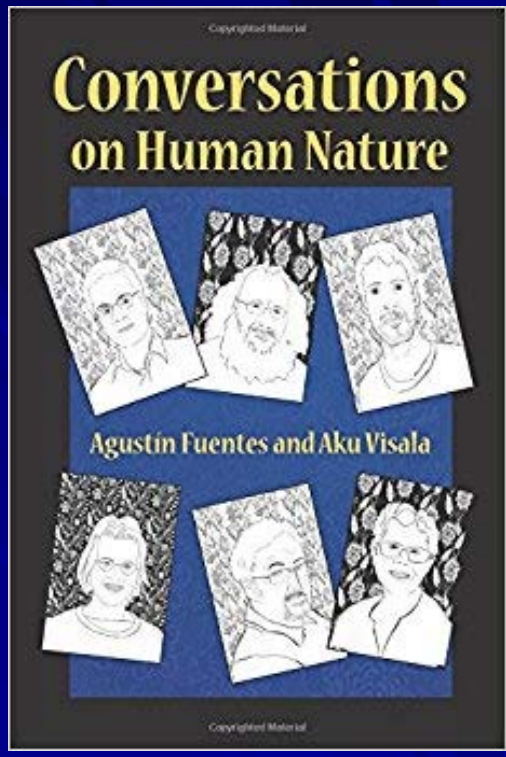
The Anthropology of War and Peace

Human Nature?

- **"So much depends on our conception of human nature:**
- **for individuals**
  - **the meaning and purpose of our lives,**
  - **what we ought to do or strive for,**
  - **what we hope to achieve or to become;**
- **for human societies,**
  - **what vision of human community we may hope to work toward and**
  - **what sort of social changes we should make.**

- Our answers to all these huge questions depend on whether we think there is some “true” or “innate” nature of human beings.
- If so, what is it? Is it different for men and women? Or is there no such “essential” human nature, only a capacity to be molded by the social environment – by economic, political, and cultural forces?”
- *Ten Theories of Human Nature*, L. Stevenson and D. L. Haberman, p. 3

- Is human nature
  - violent and warlike,
  - nonviolent and peaceful, or
  - either depending on situation?



- What is your view of human nature?

- Here – one anthropologist's view of human nature, and American society's view

Three ethnographic cases*

1. Yanomami (Chagnon, Ferguson, Sponsel) = K & NK

2. Semai (Dentan, Robarchek) = NK

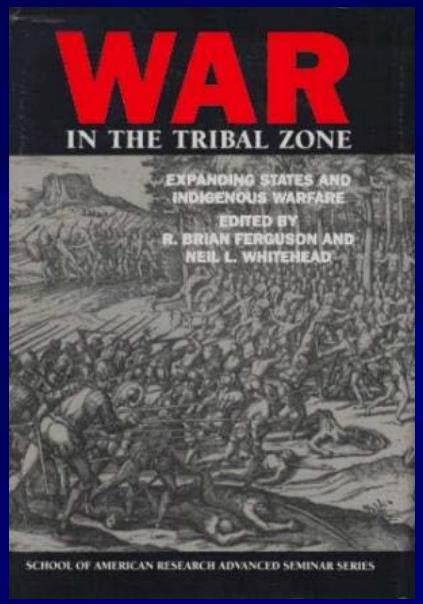
3. Waorani (Robarchek) = K -> NK

*Glenn Paige's logic of analysis

Case 1: Yanomami

- **Ph.D. Columbia University**
- **The world's foremost specialist on the anthropology of war**
  https://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/sites/fasn/files/Ten%20Points%20on%20War%20%282008%29.pdf

War in the Tribal Zone, 1992



- Ethnohistorical and other lines of evidence demonstrate that much of what had been considered to be endemic "primitive" or tribal warfare was actually generated by the external forces of colonialism

- This undermines much of
  (1) the anthropology of war and
  (2) the idea that human nature is inevitably warlike

Raymond C. Kelly

- ***Warless Societies and the Origin of War*, 2000**

- **Aims for general model of evolution of war**
- **Grounded in cross-cultural comparison tested against archaeological record**

- **Builds on Fabbro 1978**

Simple Hunter-Gatherers

Types of hunter-gatherers:

- **Simple - war absent to rare [unsegmented]**
- **Complex – war**
- **Equestrian – war**

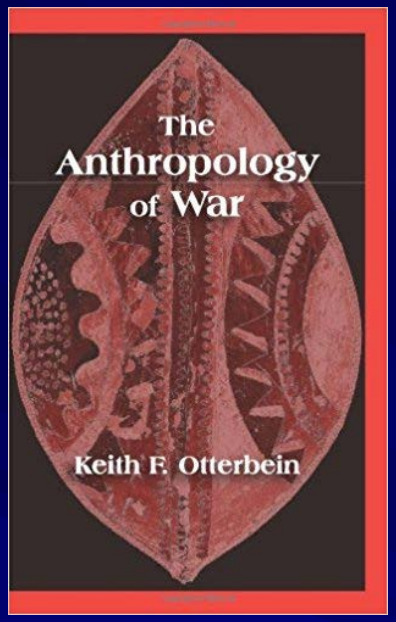
Generalizations

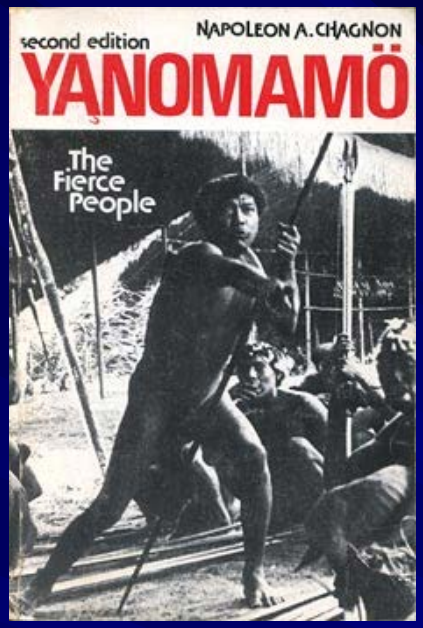
- "…nearly all early Upper Paleolithic societies were warless" (p.147).
- Earliest conclusive evidence of war is from Nubians around 12,000-14,000 B.C. (p. 148).
- **Warfare was rare to absent until very late in human prehistory, around 7,500-7,000 B.C**
- Related to development of farming and sedentary villages
- Later to competition over trade routes
- Then centralized and hierarchical political organizations (states)

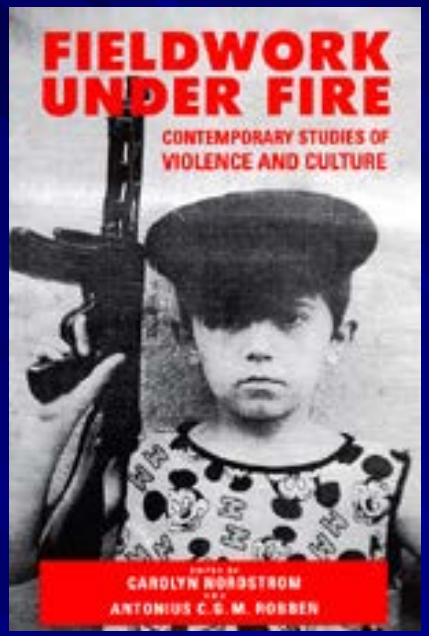
Kelly's Conclusions

- "Warfare is not an endemic condition of human existence but an episodic feature of human history (and prehistory) observed at certain times and places and not others" (p. 75).

- "The origin of war is a question of enduring interest because the conclusions reached are of central relevance to our conceptions of human nature, and such conceptions inform the political philosophies that shape and legitimize our social institutions" (p. 121-122, 124, 160) [emphasis added].


The Anthropology of War
Keith F. Otterbein


second edition
NAPOLEON A. CHAGNON
YANOMAMÖ
The Fierce People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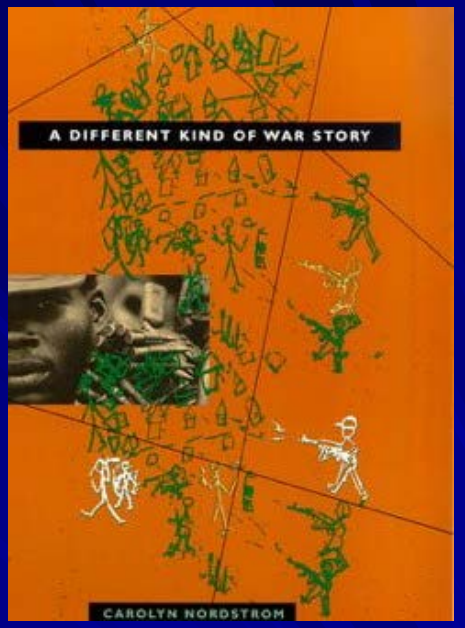
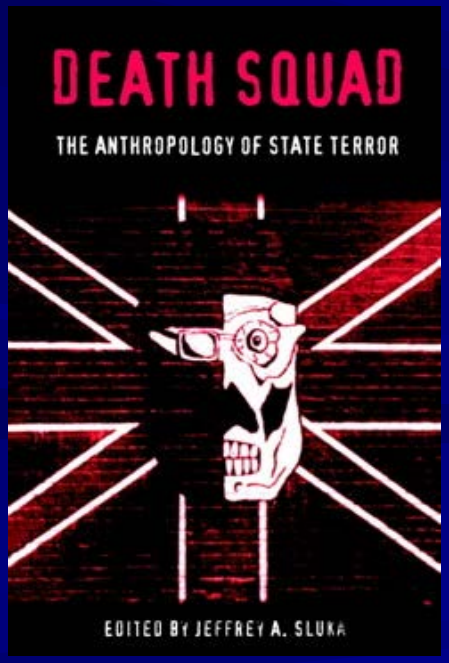
CONTEMPORARY STUDIES OF VIOLENCE AND CULTURE
CAROLYN NORDSTROM
ANTONIUS C.G.M. ROBBEN


A DIFFERENT KIND OF WAR STORY
CAROLYN NORDSTROM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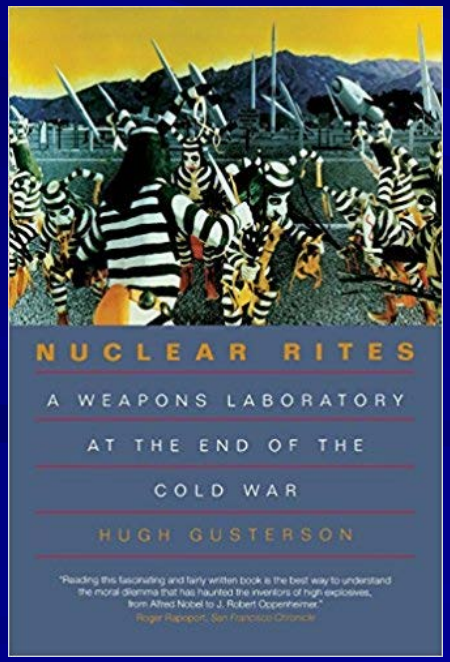
THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF STATE TERROR
EDITED BY JEFFREY A. SLUKA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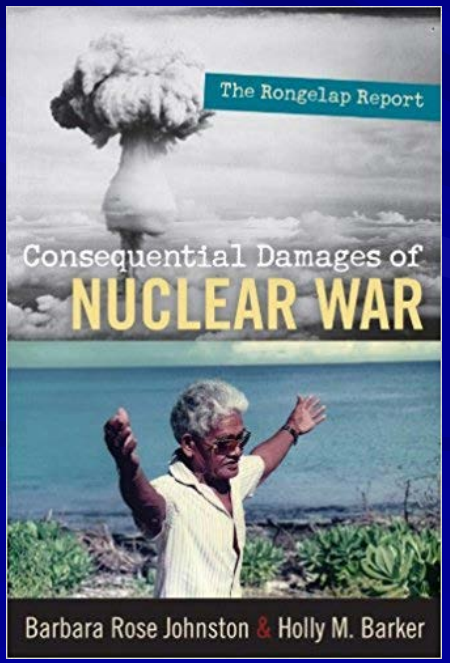
A WEAPONS LABORATORY AT THE END OF THE COLD WAR
HUGH GUSTERSON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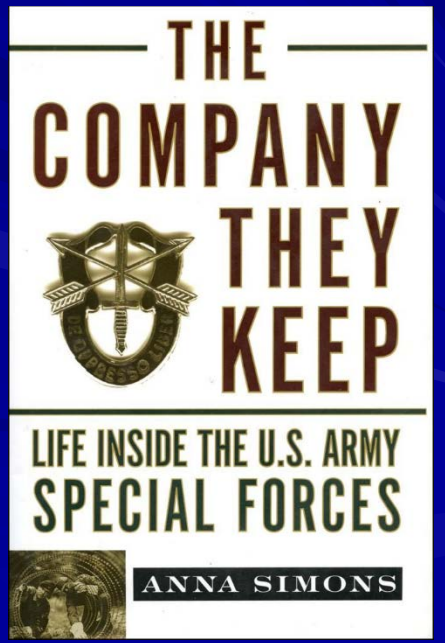
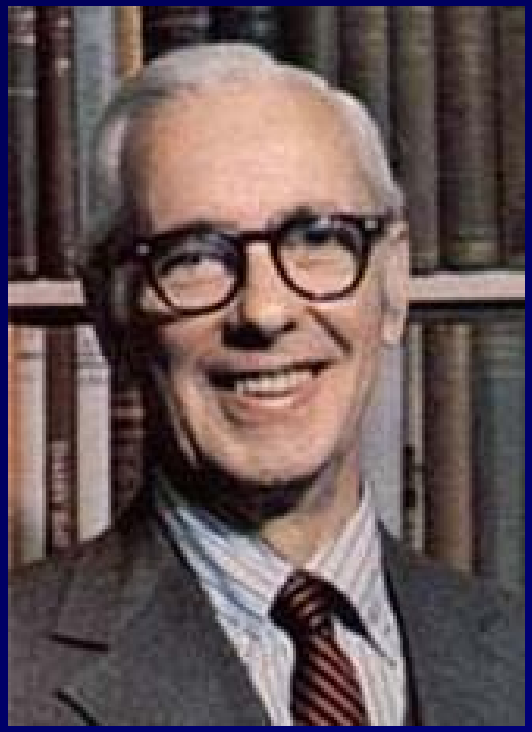
Consequential Damages of
NUCLEAR WAR
Barbara Rose Johnston & Holly M. Barker


THE COMPANY THEY KEEP
LIFE INSIDE THE U.S. ARMY SPECIAL FORCES
ANNA SIMONS

Anthropology of Peace

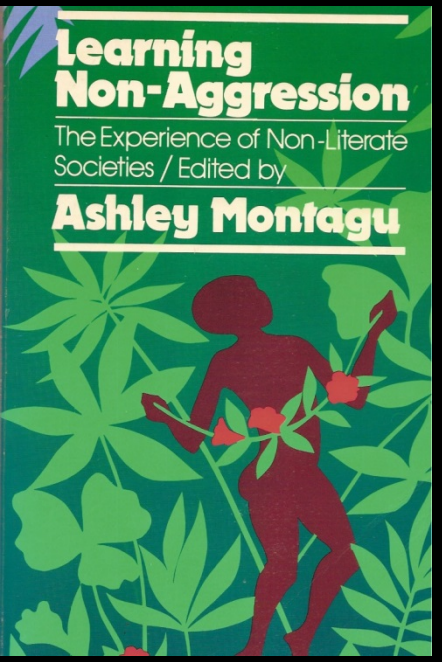


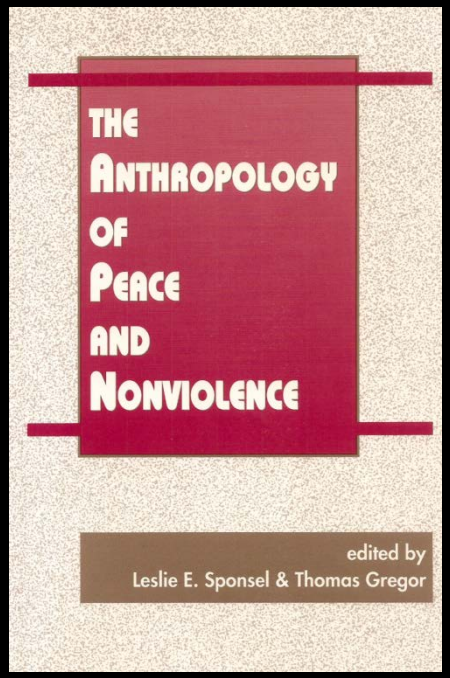
Ashley Montagu

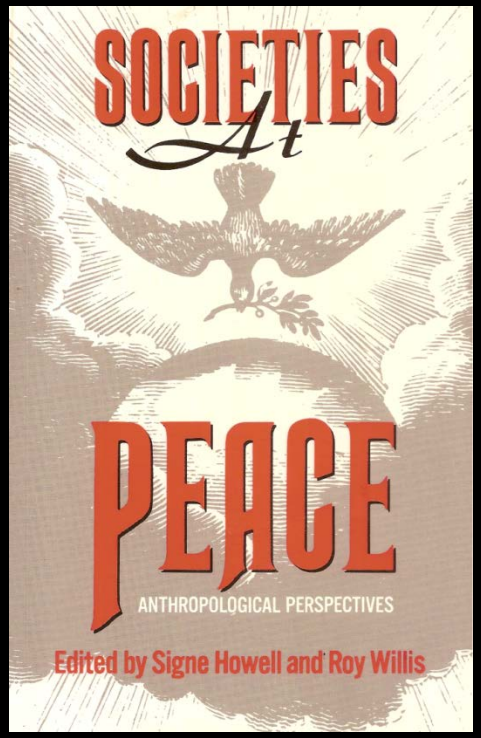
- 1905-1999
- Humanist and scientist
- Biocultural anthropologist
- Public intellectual
- Prolific author

Founder of the anthropology of peace

- 1952 *Darwin, Competition, and Cooperation*
- 1976 *The Nature of Human Aggression*
- 1978 *Learning Non-Aggression*
- 1988 *The Peace of the World*


Learning
Non-Aggression
The Experience of Non-Literate Societies / Edited by
Ashley Montagu


THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE
edited by
Leslie E. Sponsel & Thomas Gregor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ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES
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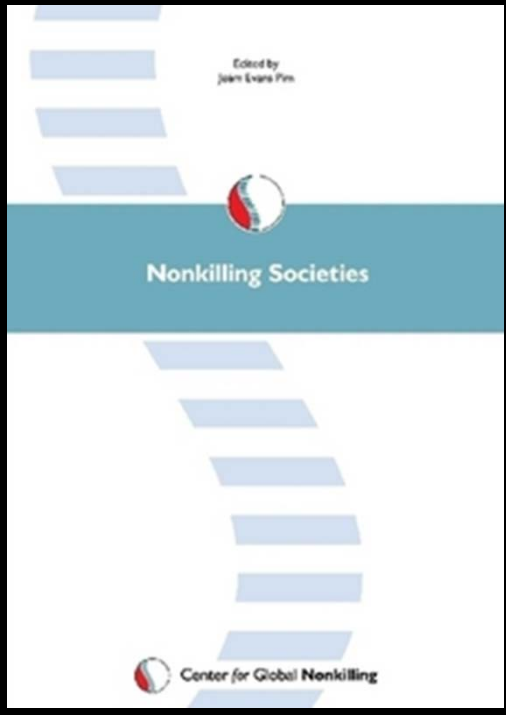

Nonkilling Societies
Center for Global Nonkilling

David Fabbro

- Absence of
  - Violence and war
  - External threat
  - Social stratification
    Regular political leader
  - Police and military
- Presence of
  - Small intimate community
  - Egalitarian social structure
  - Generalized reciprocity
  - Group consensus
  - Nonviolent values and conditioning

1978

"Peaceful Societies"

Journal of Peace Research XV(1): 67 - 83.

Sponsel

1996,
"The Natural History of Peace:
A Positive View of Human Nature,"

The Natural History of Peace,
Thomas A. Gregor, ed.,
pp. 95-125.

https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2015/11/Sponsel96.pdf

http://www.peacefulsocieties.org/Archintr/spo96int.html

Some Generalizations

- Nonviolence and peace are not rare, just **rarely studied**
  - explicitly, directly, systematically, deeply.

- Studying only violence and war can lead to a distorted view of human nature, cultural evolution, culture, society, history, and reality.

Main conclusions

1. Although conflict is inevitable and ubiquitous, violence is not.
2. Human nature has the psychobiological potential to be either nonviolent/peaceful or violent/warlike.
3. Nonviolence and peace appear to have prevailed in many prehistoric, pre-state, and non-state societies.
4. War is not a cultural universal.
5. The potential for the development of a more nonviolent and peaceful world is latent in human nature.

Bruce Bonta

- http://www.peacefulsocieties.org

- ***Peaceful Peoples: An Annotated Bibliography*, 1993**

- **B.D. Bonta, 1996, "Conflict Resolution Among Peaceful Societies: The Culture of Peacefulness," *Journal of Peace Research* 33(4):403-420.**

Basic argument

- Amish
- Hutterites
- Mennonites
- Quakers

- Peaceful societies exist.
- They are fundamentally different from others in their
  - Worldview
  - Ethos (focus)
  - Value system
  - Attitudes
  - Practices
  - Institutions
  - Customs
- This includes their perceptions of
  - Human nature
  - Conflicts
  - Dispute resolution
- Tolerance for violence (p. 404)

Peacefulness is a condition of human society characterized by

- Relatively high degree of interpersonal harmony
- Little if any physical violence
- **Workable strategies for resolving conflicts and averting violence**
- Commitment to avoiding violence with other societies
- Strategies for socialization of children to adopt and continue nonviolent ways (p. 405).

Conclusions

- "The basic reason for peacefulness in these societies is that people are **strongly opposed** to actual physical violence and firmly in favor of nonviolence….
- Violence is <u>never acceptable</u>….
- Peacefulness is an absolute commitment for them" (p. 414).

- **Peaceful societies provide**
  - **nonviolent precedents**
  - **heuristic models for developing peacefulness**
  - **inspiration about peace being a realized possibility in some societies, not simply an ideal, romantic, or utopian dream.**

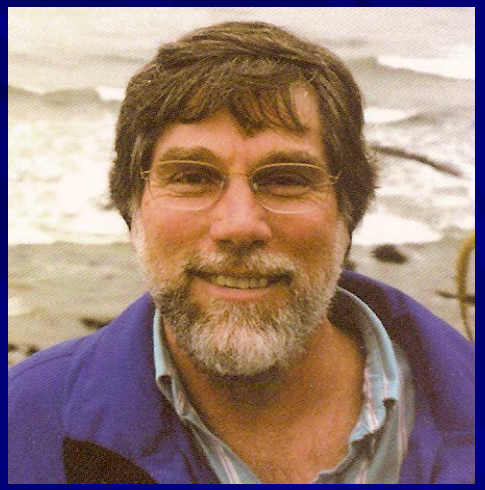
- **Armed conflicts are not essential for keeping the peace (p. 416).**

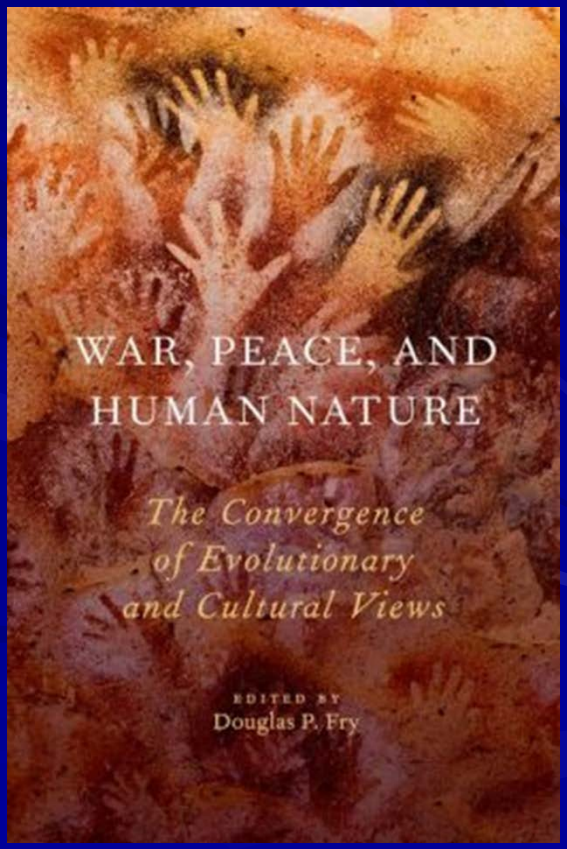
BEYOND WAR

THE HUMAN POTENTIAL FOR PEACE

DOUGLAS P. FRY

FOREWORD BY ROBERT SAPOLSKY





Douglas P. Fry

1997 *Cultural Variation in Conflict Resolution: Alternatives to Violence*

2004 *Keeping the Peace: Conflict Resolution and Peaceful Societies Around the World*

2006 *The Human Potential for Peace: An Anthropological Challenge to Assumptions about War and Violence*

2007 *Beyond War: The Human Potential for Peace*

Antithetical Models of Human Nature

Man the Warrior

[realism]

- Male competition for reproductive fitness generates belligerent militarism [females?]

Simple HG Pacifist

[liberalism]

- Natural selection for nonviolent conflict management generates peace [evolutionist]

- Human adaptive plasticity and international governance can generate future peace

Antithetical Models of Human Nature

Man the Warrior

- Cultural bias, selective use of evidence, and muddled thinking
- [apologists for war]

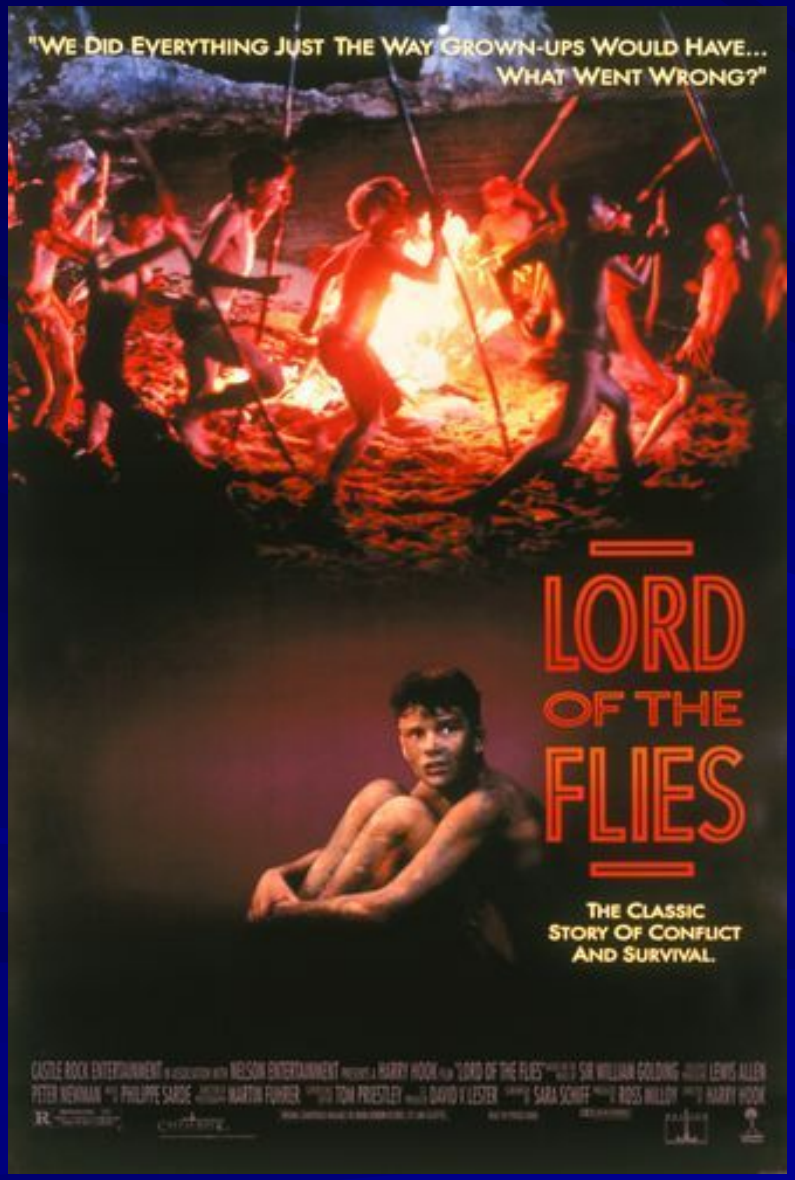
Simple HG Pacifist

- Objective, systematic, holistic, comparative, and critical analysis

Fry demonstrates that:

- **Past scholarship has been biased by an assumption of a `beast within.'**
- **Humans are not innately warlike.**
- **Humans are fully capable of living in peace.**

Cultural Bias



- Western assumptions about **human nature**
- Unconscious and unexamined
- Results in selectivity and advocacy
- Exaggeration of aggression

Man the Warrior Myth

Apocalypto

War is

- Ancient
- Universal
- Natural
- Normal
- Inevitable

Careless Thinking

- Define war too broadly and loosely
- group it with
  - Feuding
  - Interpersonal violence

Case 2: Semai

Robert Knox Dentan

- SUNY – Buffalo
- *Semai: A Nonviolent People* of Malaysia 1968
- Articles in anthologies on peaceful societies and Bonta's website

Semai

- Population 40,000 in 2003
- Peninsular Malaysia, Southeast Asia
- Mountainous tropical rain forest
- Foragers and swidden horticulturalists
- Society egalitarian including gender
- Nonviolent and sharing worldview, values, attitudes, customs, behavior
- Nonviolent conflict resolution
- Homicide rare
- Fear hostile surroundings, mistrust strangers, flee confrontations

Case 3 - Waorani

Carole and Clayton Robarchek

- Semai, Malaysia (restudy)
  - 1969-80
- Waorani, Ecuador
  - 1987, 1992-1993

- Wichita State University, Kansas

Waorani:

***The Contexts of Violence and War*, 1998**

Waorani (Huaorani, Auca)

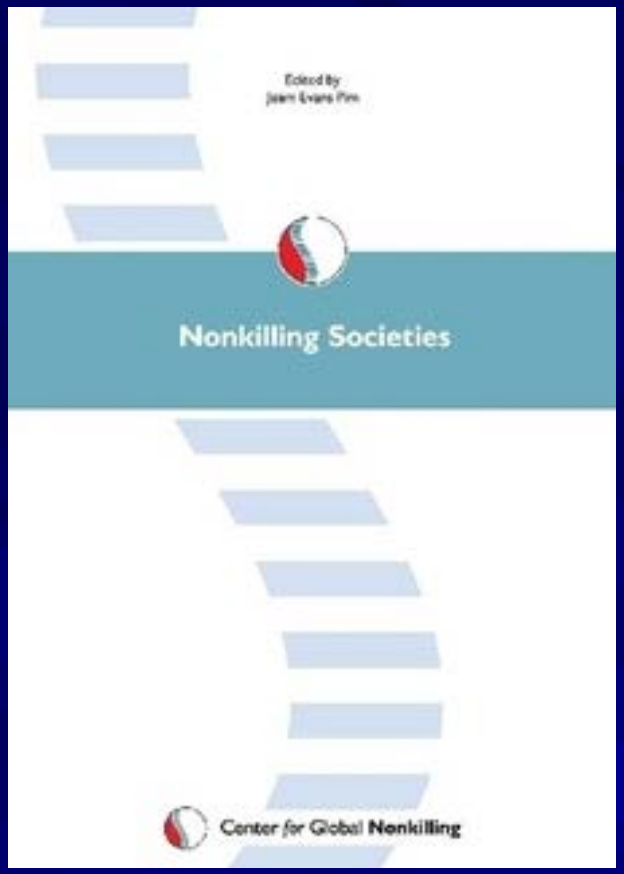
- Ecuador, Amazon
- 1,650 population

- Similar to Yanomami in some ways (mountainous tropical forest, subsistence economy, etc.)

- Also long considered “fierce savages”

Compared Semai and Waorani

- Very similar in most respects, but opposites in violence
- Most important difference is worldview
  - How they culturally construct reality and meaning
- http://www.peacefulsocieties.org



http://www.nonkilling.org

Nelson Mandela
Long Walk to Freedom

"I never lost hope that this great transformation would occur…. I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite…. Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished."