**Progress**

**When the U.S., invaded Afghanistan in 2001, fewer than 1 million Afghan children were enrolled in elementary schools, and just 5,000 of them were girls. Today, more than 8 million Afghan kids go to an elementary school, including more than 3 million girls. *(CommentaryMagazine.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, August 1, 2014)***

**It’s a common perception that our species is today “more brutal and more blood-thirsty than at any other point in history,” said Leon Neyfakh in The Boston Globe. But what if the opposite were true? In his superbly argued new book, Harvard psychology professor Steven Pinker lays out the counterintuitive claim that we humans are actually less likely to kill one another than we’ve ever been. Combing through 5,000 years of evidence, from archaeologists’ studies of ancient grave sites to contemporary law-enforcement statistics, Pinker charts a slow but sure decline in violence going back to Neolithic times. In the early stages of the 21st century, he concludes, our “better angels” are actually besting our inner demons. Pinker’s theory seems to hit a snag when his chronology reaches the 20th century, said James Q. Wilson in The Wall Street Journal. After all, the two world wars and other mass killings took 130 million lives. But to Pinker, what matters is the number killed relative to the era’s total population. The Mongol conquests of the 1300s killed some 40 million – a number that is equivalent to 278 million today. As for why we might have become less violence-prone, Pinker cites a long “civilizing process” dating from when people began living in large groups. As communities grew, people came to accept codes governing everything from table manners to moral conduct, then sanctioned states to enforce the most significant rules. As these systems became more refined, so did we. Central to our kinder, gentler natures is our capacity to reason, said Peter Singer in The New York Times. Pinker strongly credits the Enlightenment with shaping the principles that have brought us to our long peace. “Reason does, Pinker holds, point to a particular kind of morality,” one rooted in the understanding that “we live in a world in which others can make a difference to whether we live well or die miserably”: We want others to treat us well, and we agree that in exchange we will not treat them badly. Though an optimist, Pinker isn’t so naïve as to declare our capacity for cruelty defeated. Still, this is a “supremely important book,” one that at its best can help shape policy, or at the very least, may help us appreciate that we’re perhaps not as bad as we think we are. *(The Week magazine, October 21, 2011)***

**The U.S. budget deficit shrank to its lowest level since 2007 in the past fiscal year, as falling unemployment and faster economic growth boosted revenue. The U.S. Treasury posted a shortfall of $483 billion in the year ending Sept. 30, compared with a deficit of $680 billion a year earlier. *(Bloomberg.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, January 23, 2015)***

**For the first time in five years, the U.S. annual budget deficit was below $1 trillion in 2013, coming in at $680 billion. The deficit dropped 37 percent from the previous year – the fastest rate of decline since the end of World War II. *(Associated Press, as it appeared in The Week magazine, November 15, 2013)***

**When Pablo Casals reached 95, a young reporter threw him a question: “Mr. Casals, you are 95 and the greatest cellist that ever lived. Why do you still practice six hours a day?” And Mr. Casals answered, “Because I think I’m making progress.” Your goal is to make progress every day of your life. *(Dr.Maxwell Maltz)***

**I wish parents would understand that if their child drops eight fly balls one day, then only drops six the next, that’s a reason to go to Dairy Queen. The principal thing is competing against yourself. It’s about self-improvement, about being better than you were the day before. *(Steve Young)***

**The number of children aged 5 to 17 who were engaged in child labor globally fell by nearly 78 million – to 168 million – between 2000 and 2012, according to a study by the International Labor Organization. The number of those doing hazardous work, including tasks involving toxic substances or dangerous machinery, fell by about half over the same period. The trend reflects improving living standards in most developing countries. *(Slate.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, October 4, 2013)***

**The annual federal deficit has fallen faster in the past three years than during any comparable period since the 1960s. From fiscal 2009 to fiscal 2012, the budget deficit decreased from 10.1 percent of GDP to 7 percent. *(Investor’s Business Daily, as it appeared in The Week magazine, November 30, 2012)***

**World food prices fell in January for the first time in three months, thanks largely to lower prices for grains, sugar and meat. But dairy products are getting more expensive; the United Nations registered a 1.3 percent increase in dairy prices, due to large demand in China, North Africa, the Middle East, and the Russian Federation. *(WSJ.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, February 21, 2014)***

**The number of far-right "hate" groups -- including neo-Nazi groups, racist skinheads, and chapters of the Ku Klux Klan -- declined slightly last year, from an all-time high of 1,007 in 2012 to 939 in 2013, according to a study by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Some white supremacists "were demoralized by President Obama's re-election, the study said. *(CNN.com. as it appeared in The Week magazine, March 14, 2014)***

**Hispanics have a higher high school dropout rate than any other demographic in the country, but the numbers are falling fast. The share of Hispanics without a high school diploma nearly halved from 2000 to 2012, from 32 percent to just 14 percent. The dropout rate for all races fell from 12 percent to 7 percent over the same period. *(FiveThirtyEight.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, October 31, 2014)***

**Homelessness has fallen 4 percent nationwide over the past year, but it has risen by 13 percent in New York City. New York and Los Angeles alone account for one fifth of homelessness in the U.S. *(TheAtlantic.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, December 27, 2013)***

**Another banner month for job creation: America's jobs streak continues, said Ben Casselman in FiveThirtyEight.com. The U.S. economy added 252,000 jobs last month, bringing 2014's grand total to nearly 3 million new jobs -- the best year for hiring since 1999. The unemployment rate fell to 5.6 percent, its lowest point since June 2008. But job growth still "isn't translating into wage gains for most workers." Average hourly pay actually fell in December. Wages increased only 1.7 percent over the past year, barely ahead of the 1.3 percent inflation rate. (The Week magazine, January 23, 2015)**

**Henry Kissinger once twitted Le Duc Tho, chief North Vietnamese negotiator at the peace negotiations in Paris: "I admire your ability to change impossible demands to merely intolerable demands and call it progress." (Hugh Sidey, in Life)**

**Only one American soldier was classified as missing in action during the 13-year Afghanistan War: Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, who was released by the Taliban last week. That compares with 73,547 U.S. troops who are still unaccounted for from World War II, 7,883 from the Korean War, and 1,642 from the Vietnam War. *(Time.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, June 13, 2014)***

**The U.S. may overtake Russia as the world’s largest producer of oil and gas this year. U.S.’s monthly production rate of the two fuels has soared to the equivalent of 22 million barrels a day, while Moscow’s is estimated to be 21.8 million barrels. *(The Wall Street Journal, as it appeared in The Week magazine, October 18, 2013)***

**After accounting for government aid such as food stamps, researchers from Columbia University have found that the share of poor people in the U.S. has dropped from 26 percent in 1967 to just 16 percent in 2012. *(NewYorker.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, December 20, 2013)***

**The U.S. reduced its crude oil imports last year by 10 percent, or a million barrels a day. *(Los Angeles Times, as it appeared in The Week magazine, March 23, 2012)***

**According to new data from Pew Research, the wage gap for American women under 32 has shrunk to 7 percent. But among all ages, women make 16 percent less than men, and Millennial-age women are just "as pessimistic as their mothers and grandmothers regarding gender equality." *(Associated Press, as it appeared in The Week magazine, December 20, 2013)***

**Eighty-two percent of U.S. employers say they expect to raise wages between zero and 3 percent over the next three years, according to a new poll by the National Association for Business Economics. Only 11 percent of bosses said they anticipated faster wage growth. Since 1986, average hourly wages have increased by just 1 percent overall. *(The Wall Street Journal, as it appeared in The Week magazine, May 2, 2014)***

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***