



Radical Optimism

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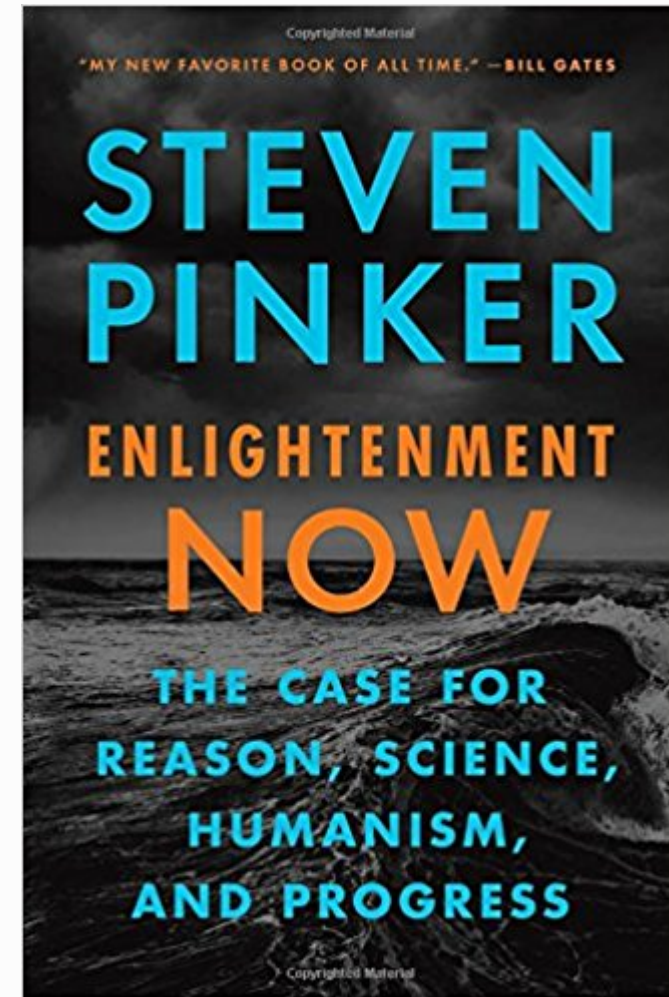
- Radical Optimism:
 - Life is basically good.
 - Most key metrics have been getting better for the last few hundred years (at least).
 - Most other problems are likely to be solved over time.
 - Things can go bad, but the burden of proof is on the pessimist.
- Website with all evidence: <https://radicaloptimism.org/>
- 2014 Presentation: <https://averageradical.github.io/radicaloptimism/#/>

What Radical Optimism Is Not

- A lot of things suck.
- Progress is bottlenecked on bad ideas.
- Institutions are hard to change due to inertia.
- Some things are unsolvable right now.
- Entropy/Heat Death of the Universe?

Optimism Has Gone Mainstream

- Steven Pinker from Harvard publishes Enlightenment Now in 2018
 - Bill Gates calls this his new favorite book of all time
- For a video presentation with graphs, search YouTube for “Pinker Enlightenment Cato Institute”
- Good book review and critique by Scott Aaronson:
<https://www.scottaaronson.com/blog/?p=3654>



Agenda

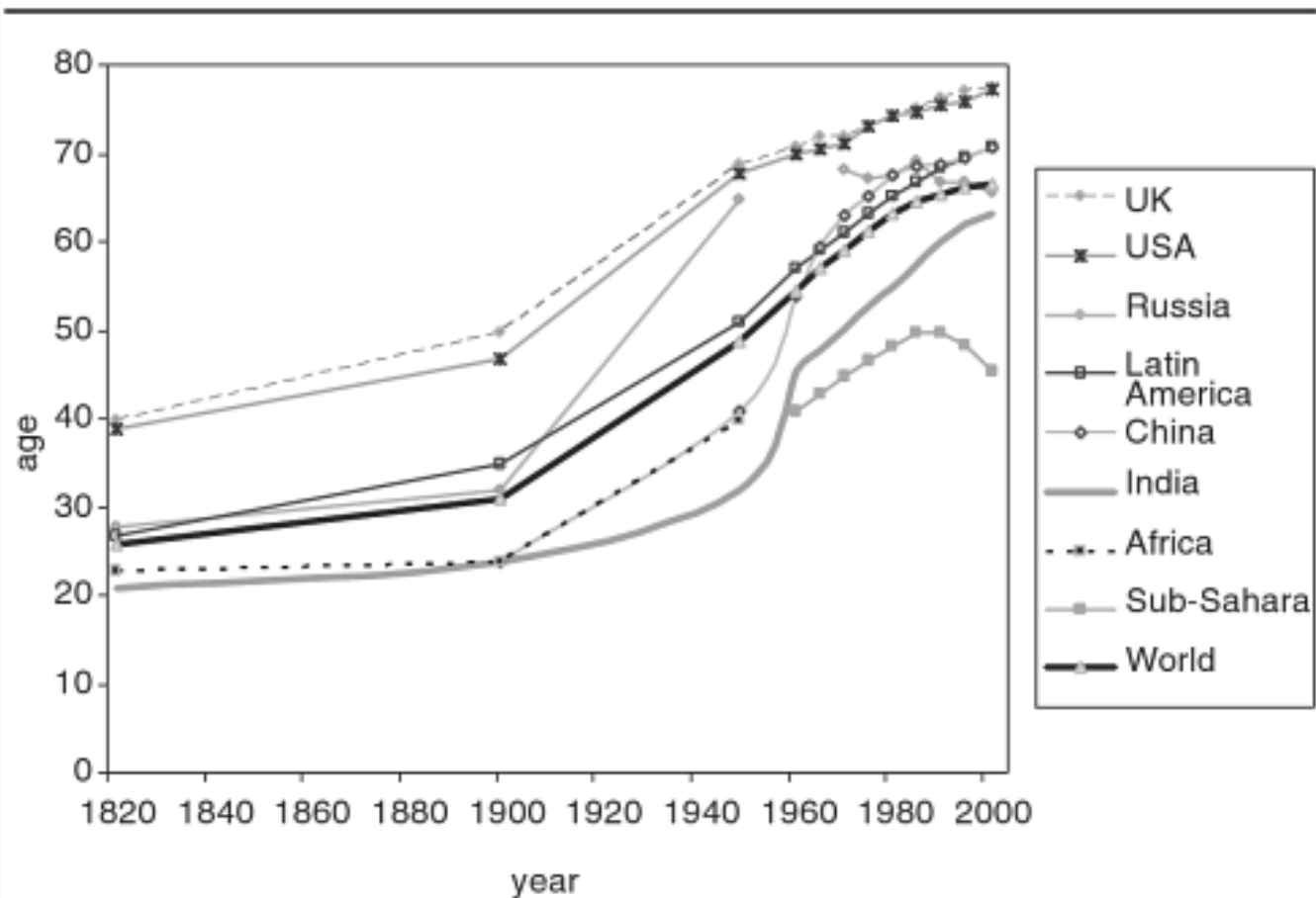
- Graphs of Key Positive Evidence
- Discuss Best Objections
- Practical Take-Aways



Three Key Graphs

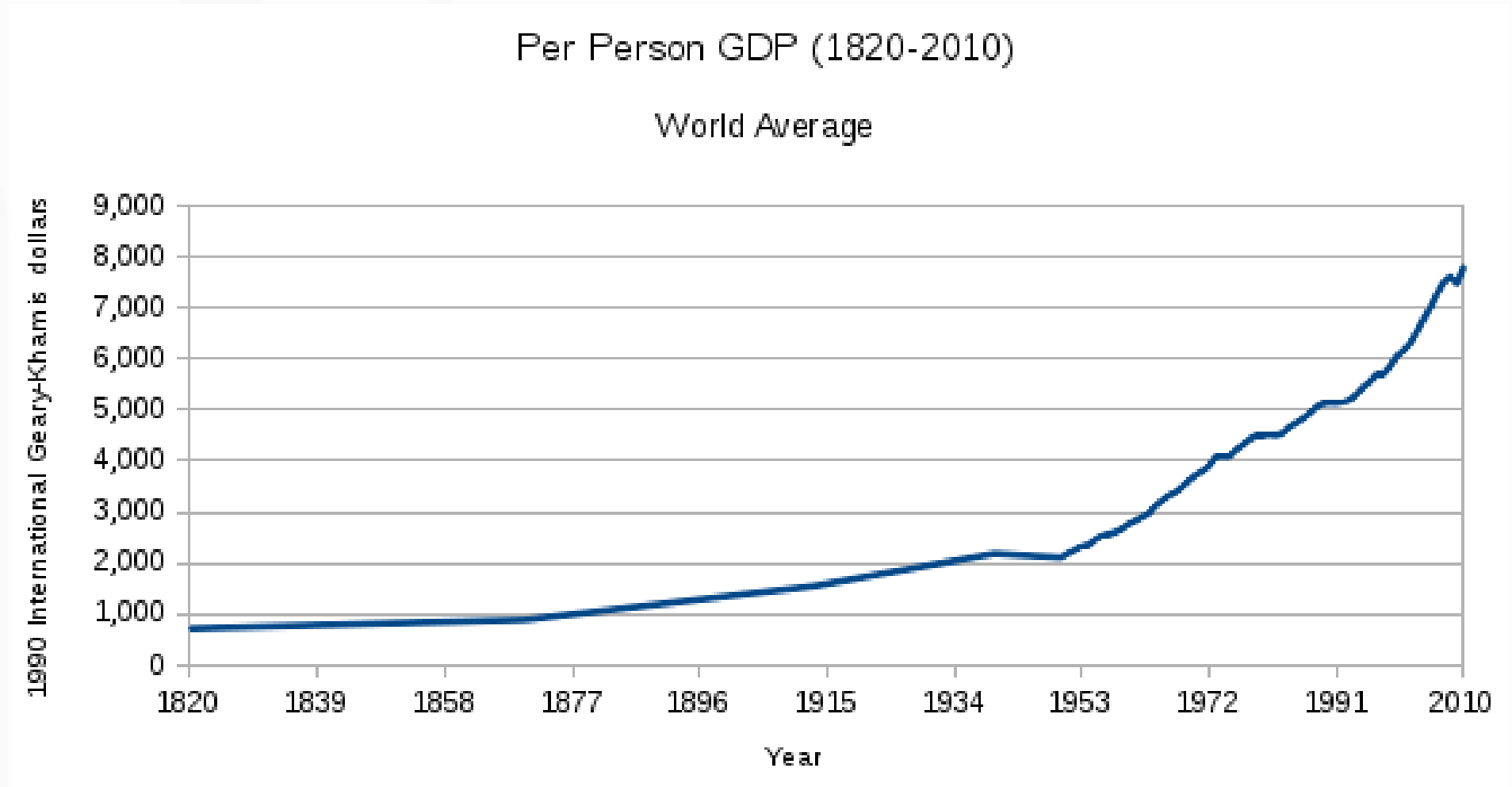
Global Life Expectancy

Figure 2.9
LIFE EXPECTANCY, 1820–2003



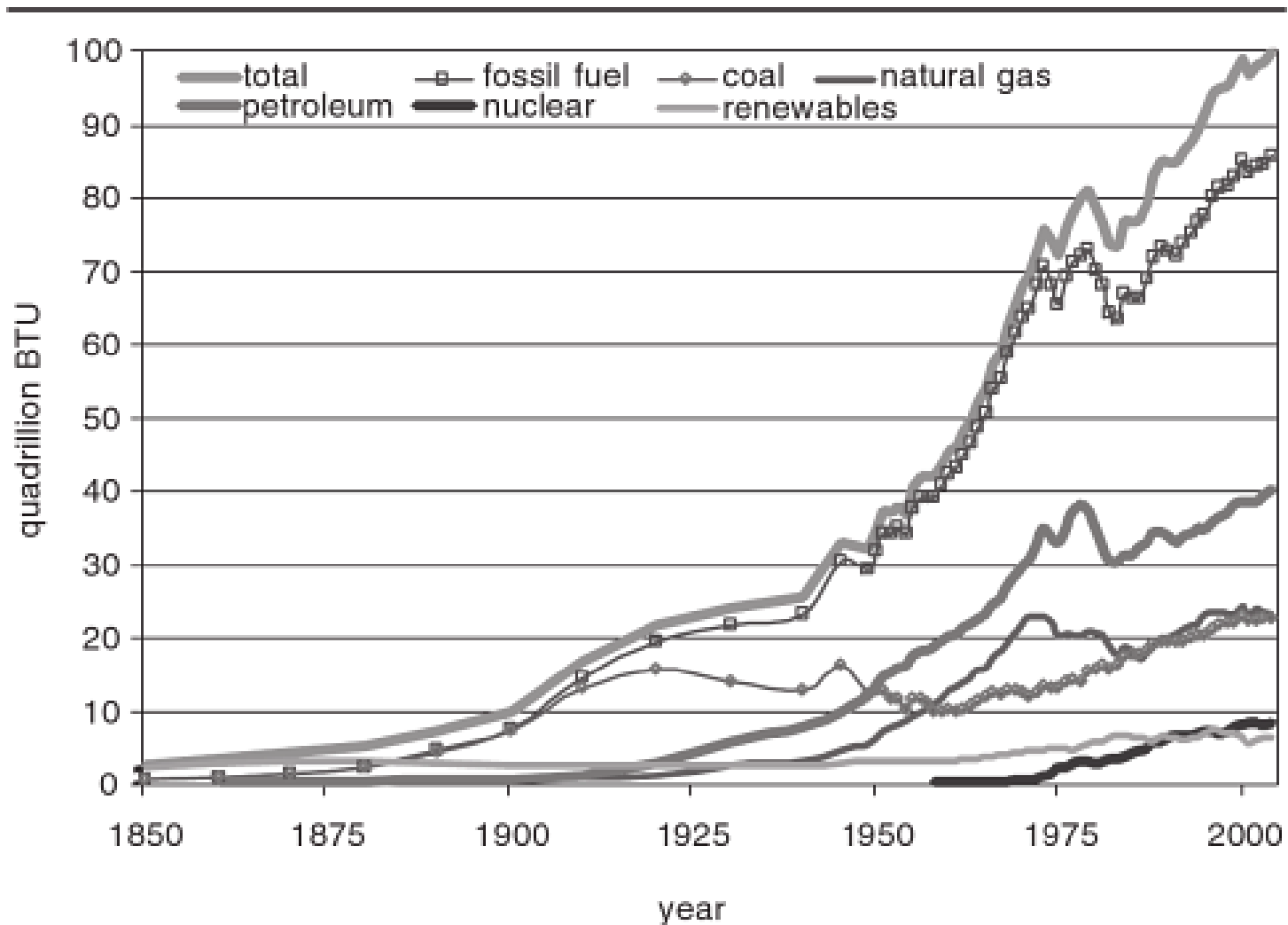
SOURCES: Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: A Millennium Perspective* (Paris: OECD, 2001); World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, <http://devdata.worldbank.org/dataonline> (accessed July 12, 2005).

Global Per-Person GDP



U.S. Energy Use

Figure 6.9
U.S. ENERGY USE, 1800–2004

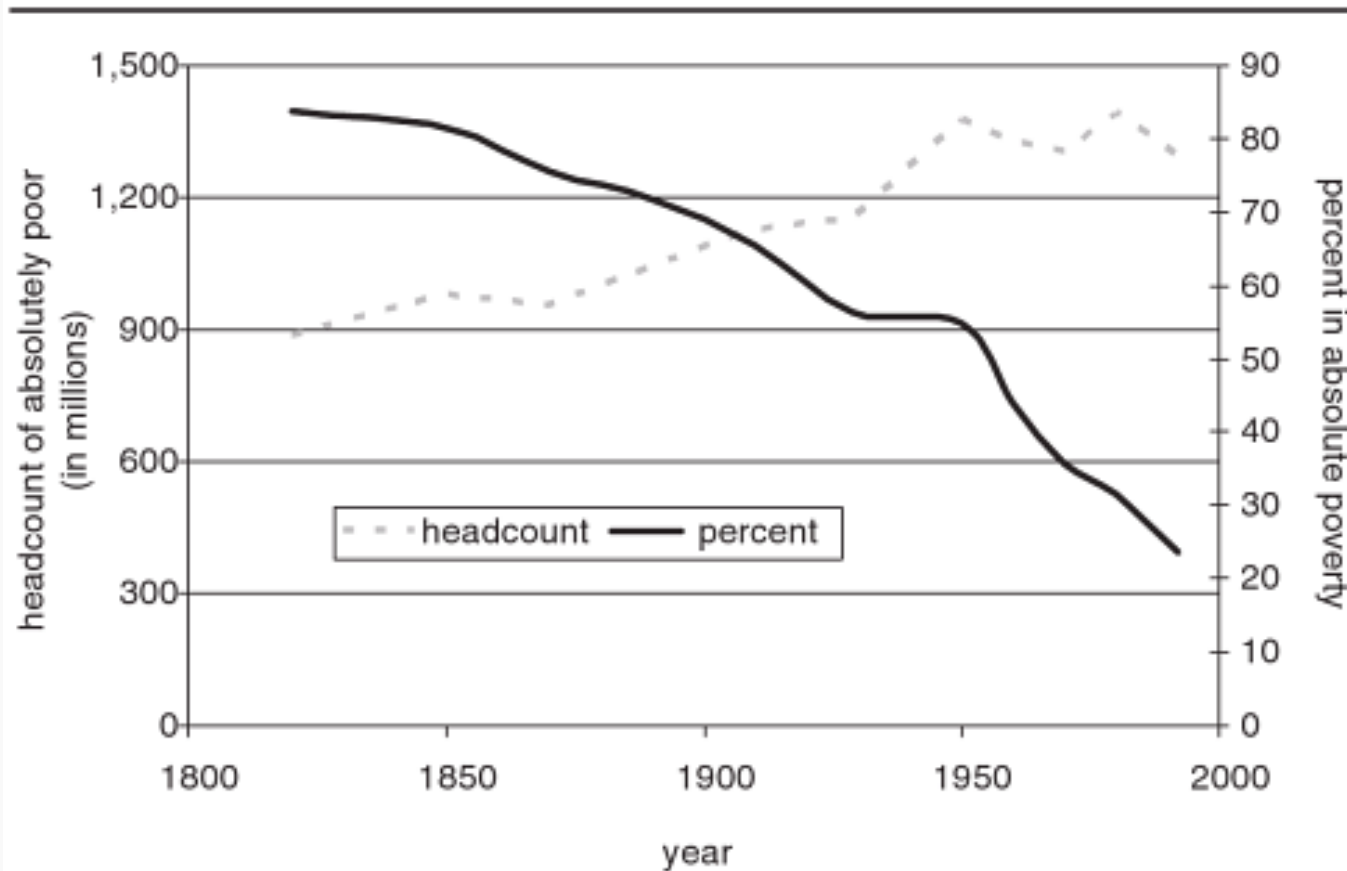




Other Good News

Global Poverty

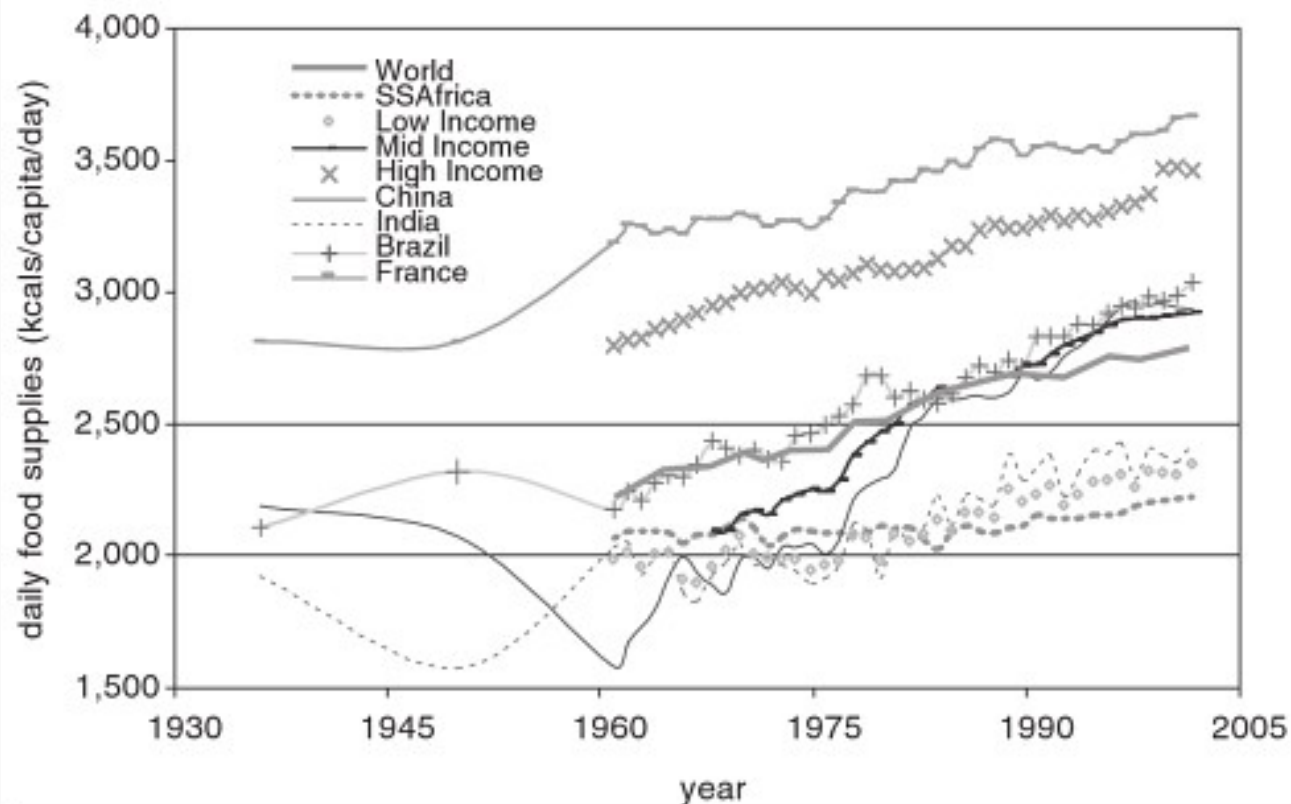
Figure 3.1
GLOBAL POVERTY, 1820–1992



SOURCE: François Bourguignon and Christian Morrisson, *Inequality Among World Citizens: 1820–1992* (Paris: Département et Laboratoire d'Economic Théorique et Appliquée, Ecole Normale Supérieure, 2001).

Global Calories Per Day Per Person

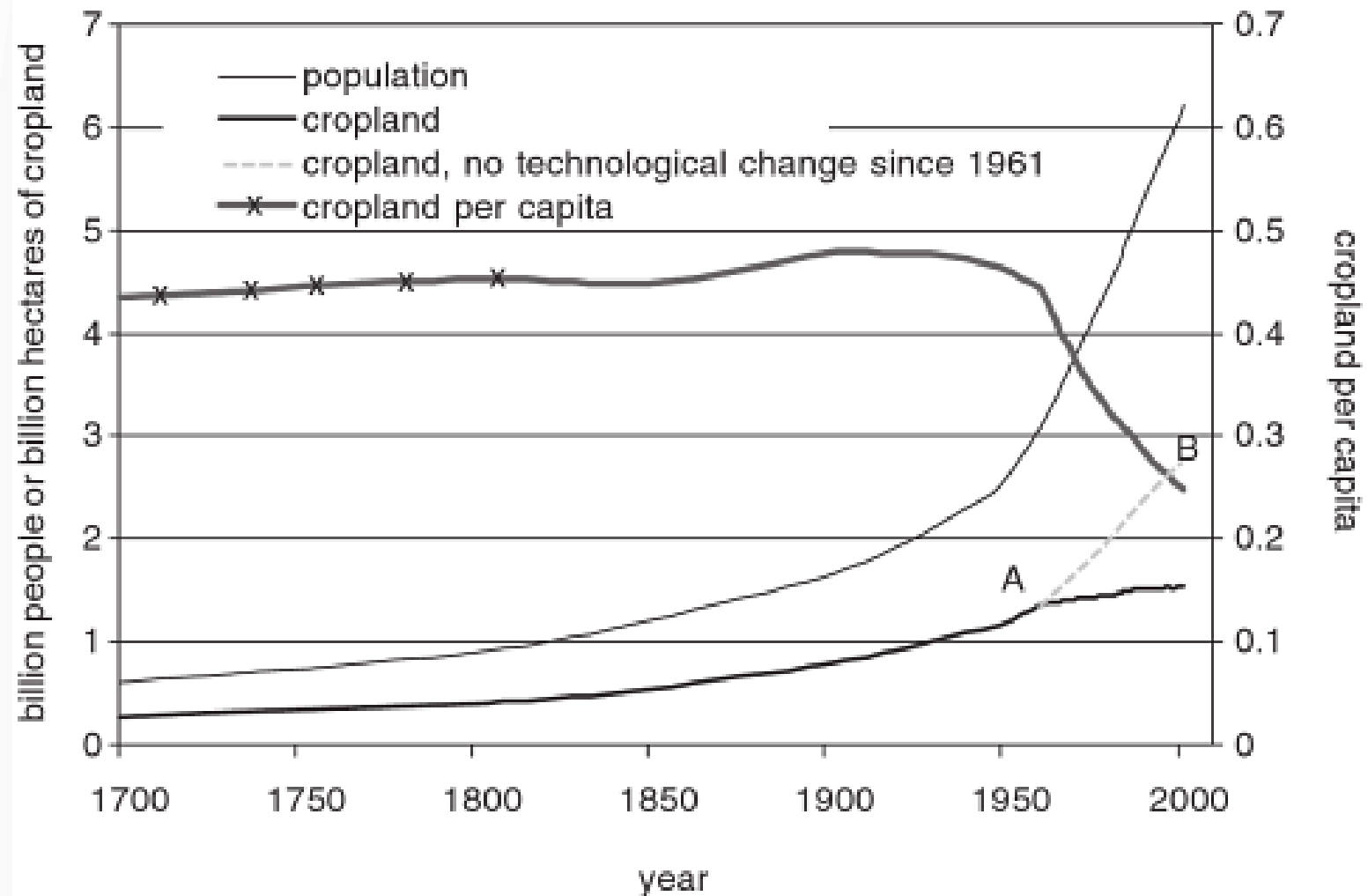
Figure 2.1
FOOD SUPPLIES VS. TIME, 1936–2002



SOURCES: Indur M. Goklany, "Meeting Global Food Needs: The Environmental Trade-Offs Between Increasing Land Conversion and Land Productivity," *Technology* 6 (1999): 107–30; World Resources Institute, EarthTrends database, www.wri.org (accessed June 23, 2005).

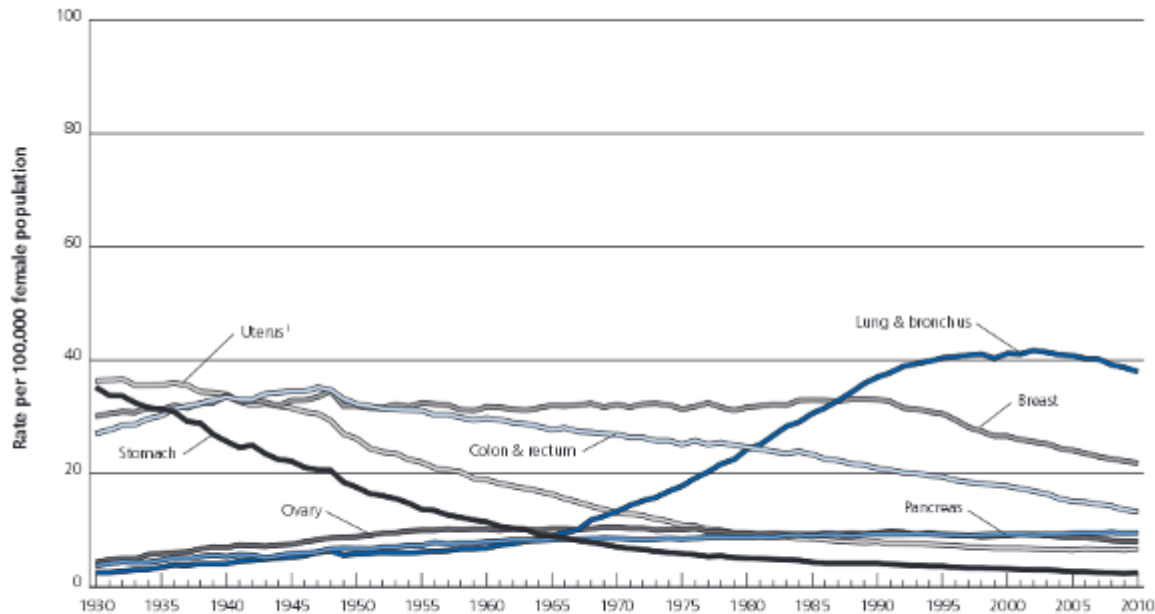
Global Cropland Per Person

Figure 6.2
GLOBAL CROPLAND AND CROPLAND PRODUCTIVITY, 1700–2002



U.S. Cancer Age-Adjusted Mortality

Age-adjusted Cancer Death Rates*, Females by Site, US, 1930-2010



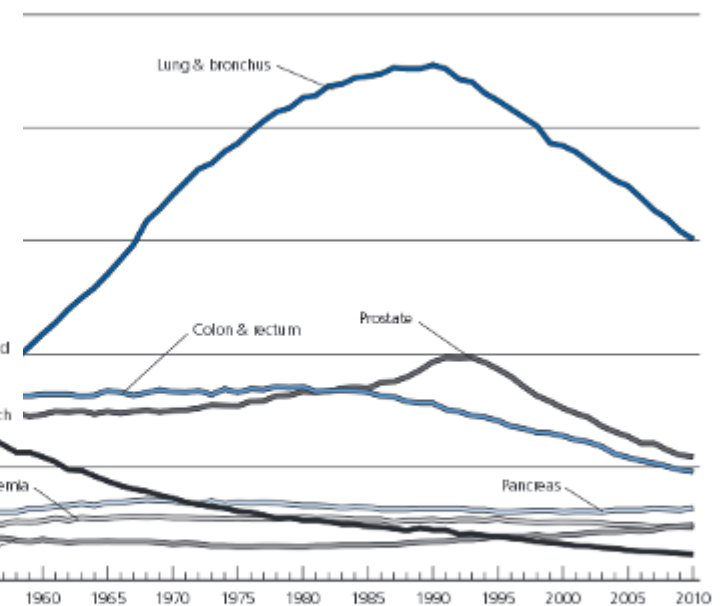
*Per 100,000, age adjusted to the 2000 US standard population. †Uterus refers to uterine cervix and uterine corpus combined.

Note: Due to changes in ICD coding, numerator information has changed over time. Rates for cancer of the lung and bronchus, colon and rectum, and ovary are affected by these coding changes.

Source: US Mortality Volumes 1930 to 1959 and US Mortality Data 1960 to 2010, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

©2014, American Cancer Society, Inc., Surveillance Research

Age-adjusted Cancer Death Rates*, Males by Site, US, 1930-2010



*Per 100,000, age adjusted to the 2000 US standard population.

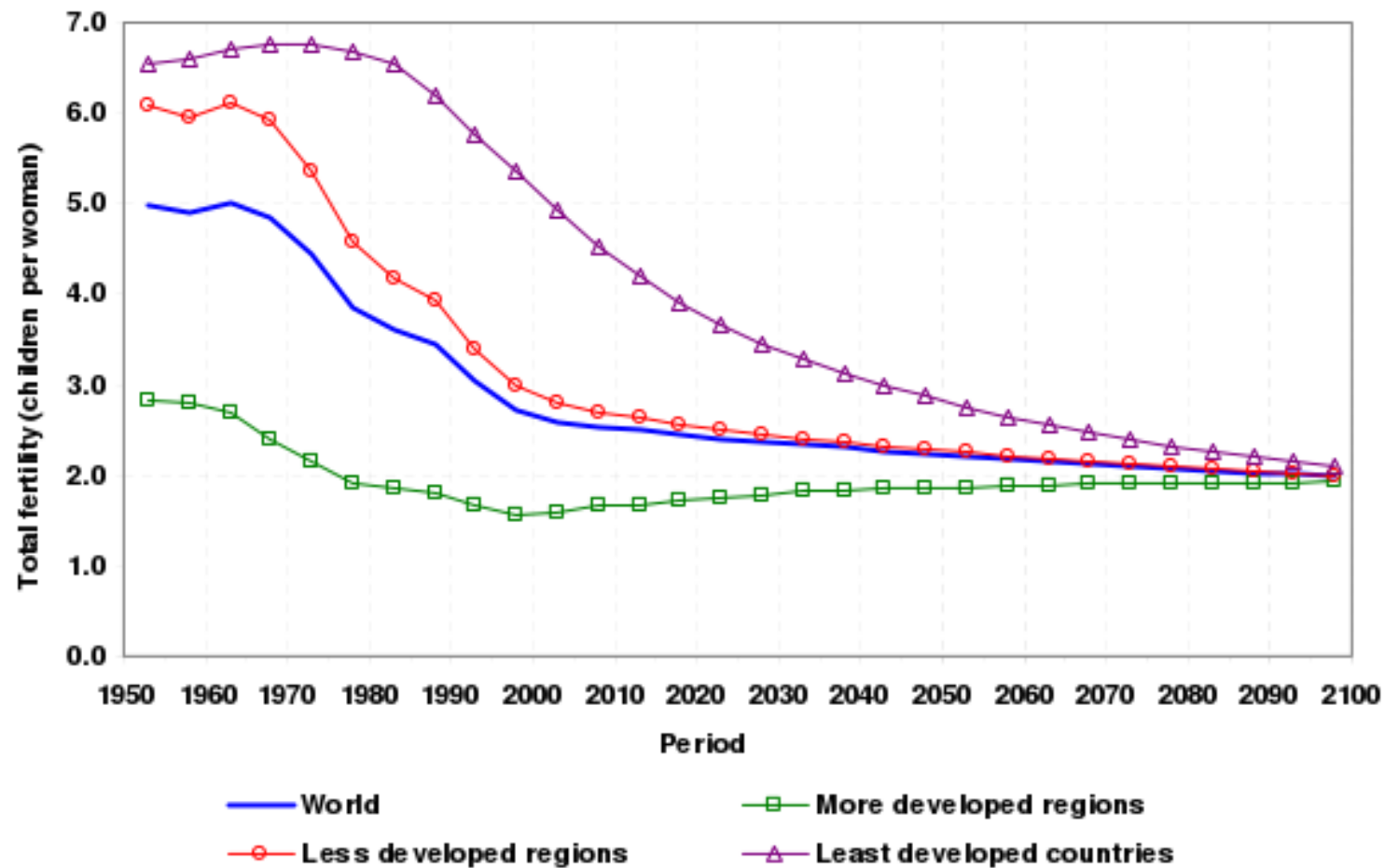
Note: Due to changes in ICD coding, numerator information has changed over time. Rates for cancer of the liver, lung and bronchus, and colon and rectum are affected by these coding changes.

Source: US Mortality Volumes 1930 to 1959 and US Mortality Data 1960 to 2010, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

©2014, American Cancer Society, Inc., Surveillance Research

Global Fertility

Figure II.1. Total fertility trajectories for the world and development groups, 1950-2100 (medium variant)



Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2013). *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision*. New York: United Nations.

War Deaths Per Capita

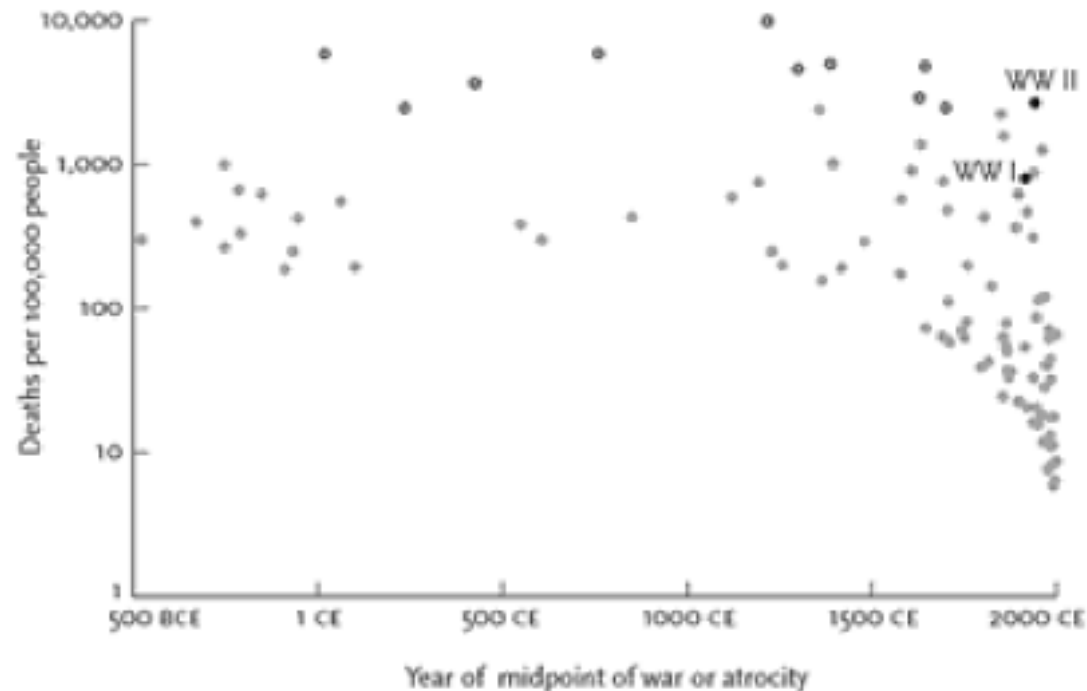
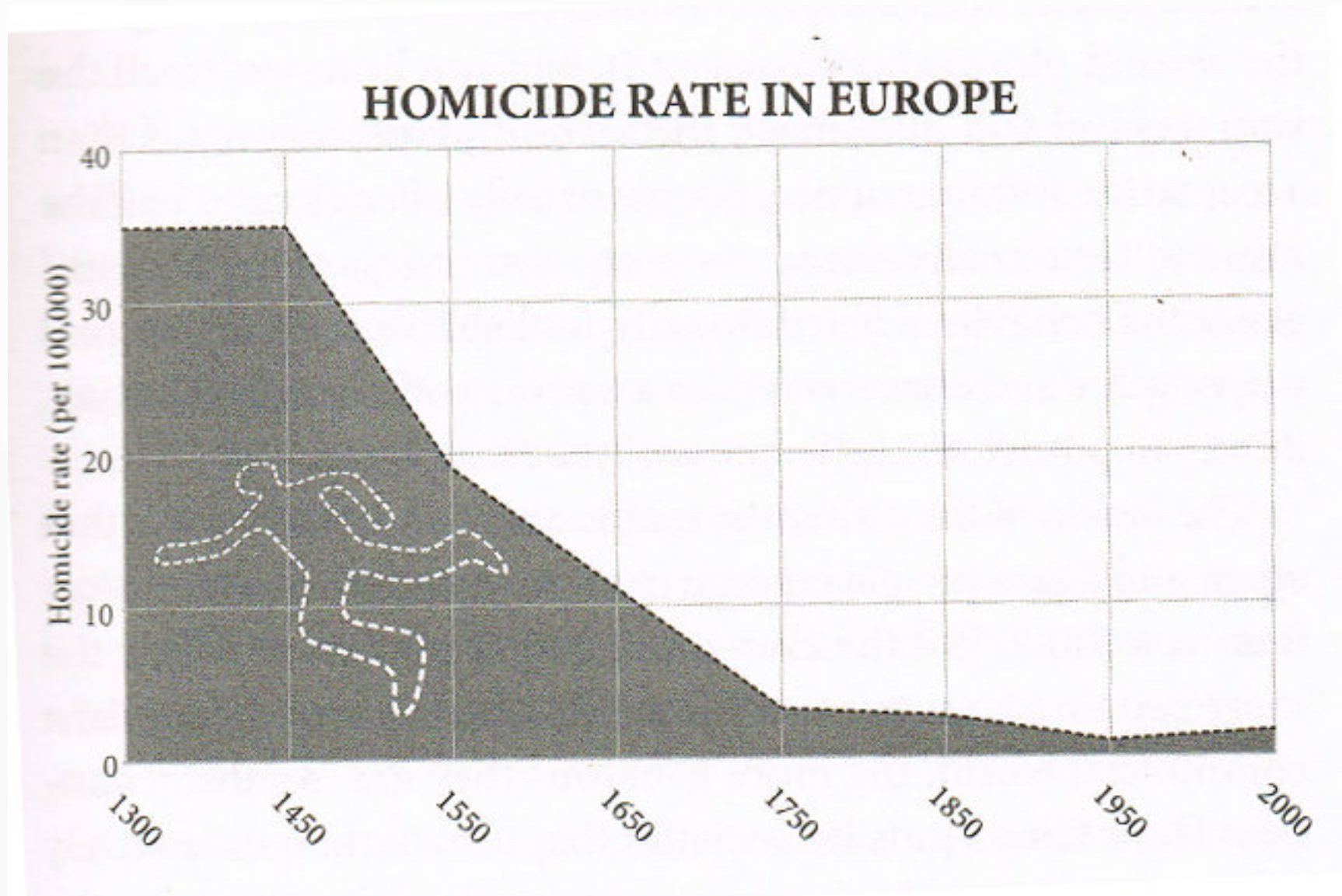


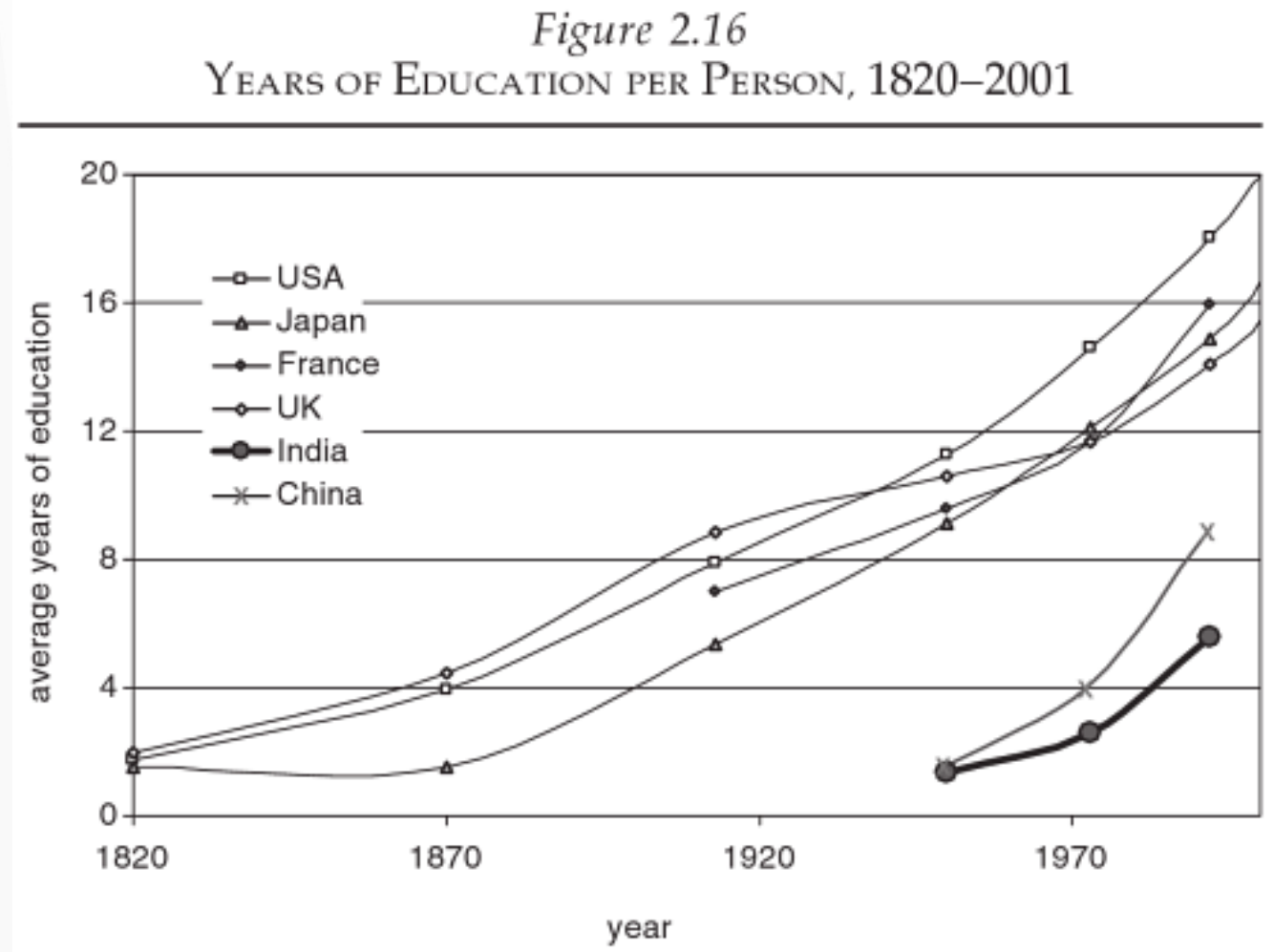
FIGURE 5–3. 100 worst wars and atrocities in human history
Source: Data from White, in press, scaled by world population from McEvedy & Jones, 1978, at the midpoint of the listed range. Note that the estimates are not scaled by the duration of the war or atrocity. Circled dots represent selected events with death rates higher than the 20th-century world wars (from earlier to later): Xin Dynasty, Three Kingdoms, fall of Rome, An Lushan Revolt, Genghis Khan, Mideast slave trade, Timur Lenk, Atlantic slave trade, fall of the Ming Dynasty, and the conquest of the Americas.

European Murder Rate



World Education Per Person

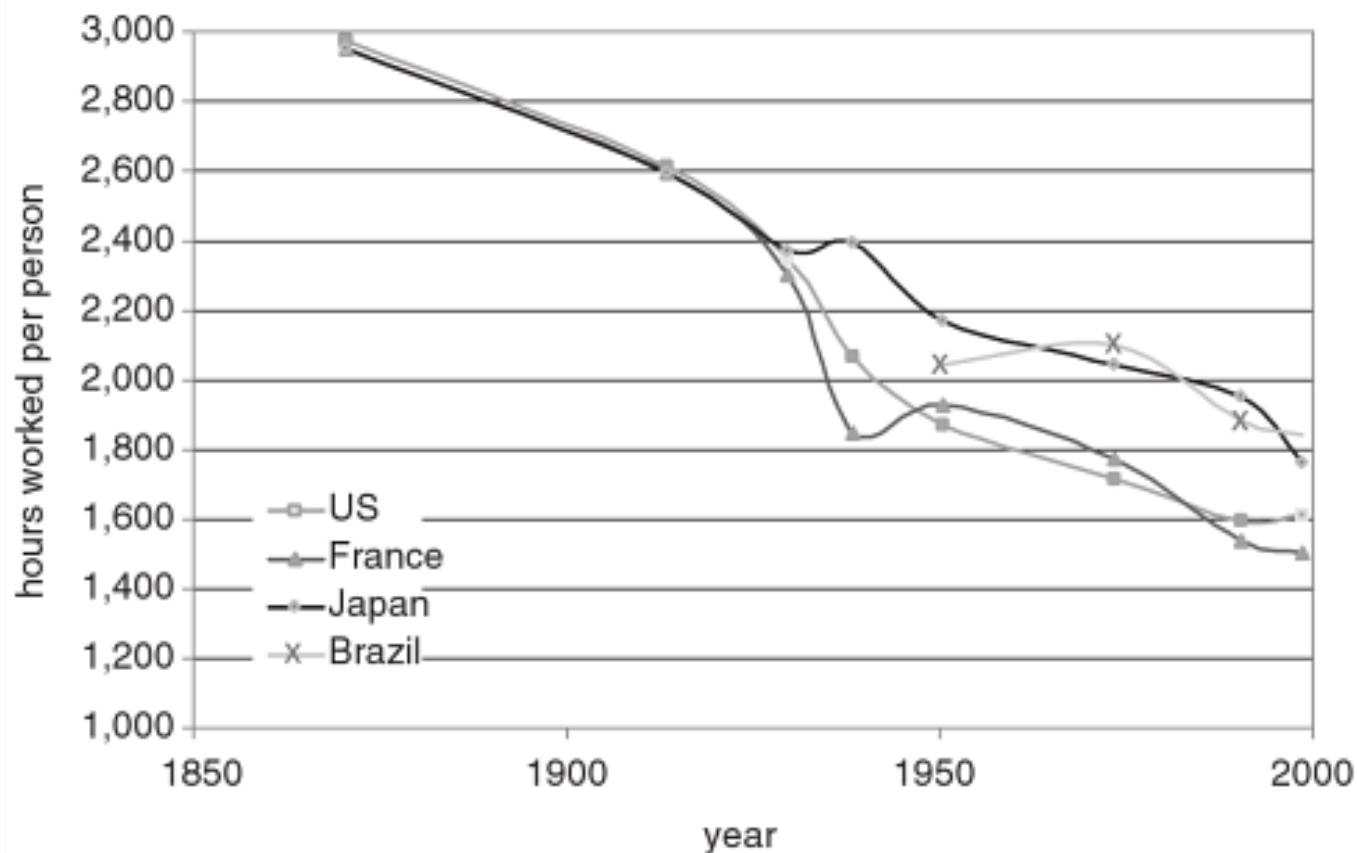
- Flynn Effect: IQ rising at 3 points per decade



SOURCES: Angus Maddison, *Monitoring the World Economy, 1820–1992* (Paris: OECD, 1995); Angus Maddison, *Chinese Economic Performance in the Long Run* (Paris: OECD, 1998); Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: Historical Statistics* (Paris: OECD, 2003), <http://ggdc.net/~maddison> (accessed July 1, 2005).

Work

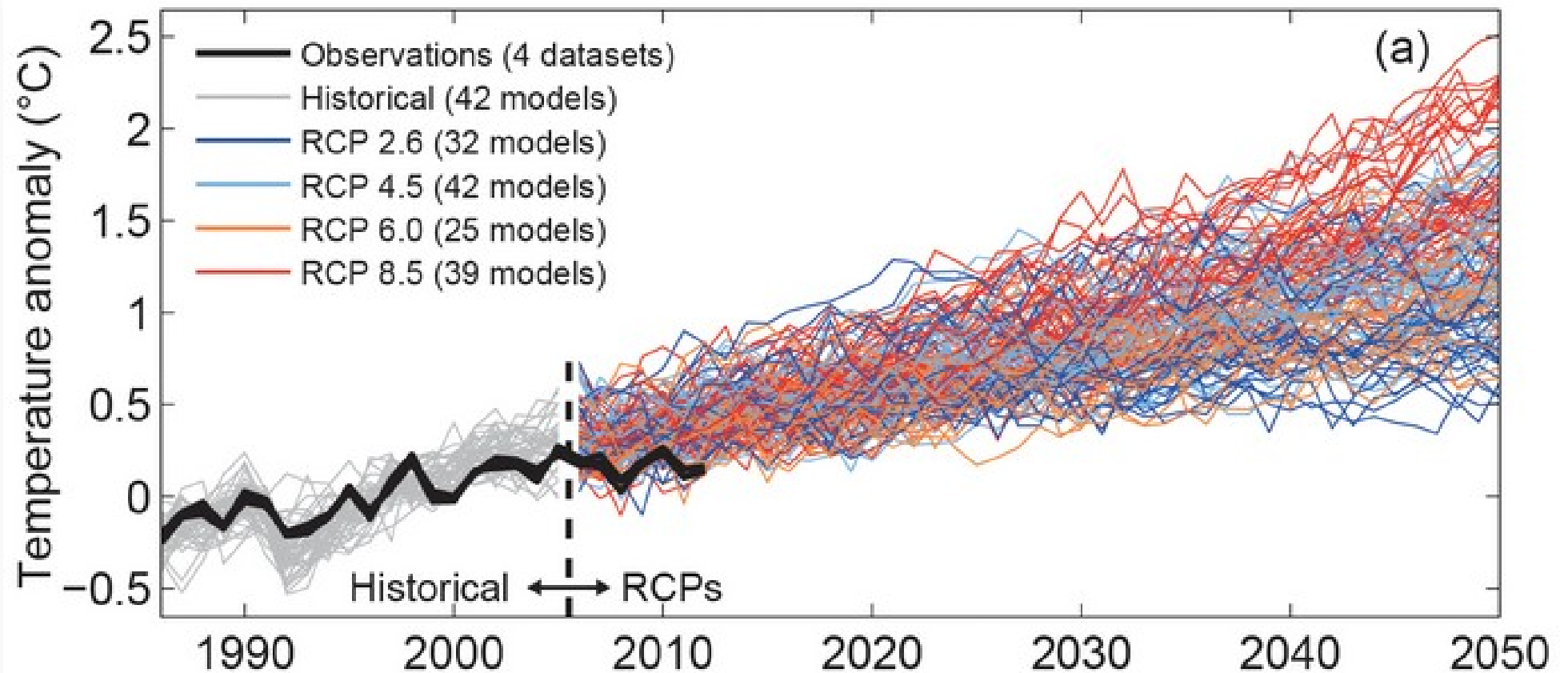
Figure 2.14
ANNUAL HOURS WORKED PER PERSON, 1870–1978



SOURCES: Angus Maddison, *Chinese Economic Performance in the Long Run* (Paris: OECD, 1998); Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective* (Paris: OECD, 2001).

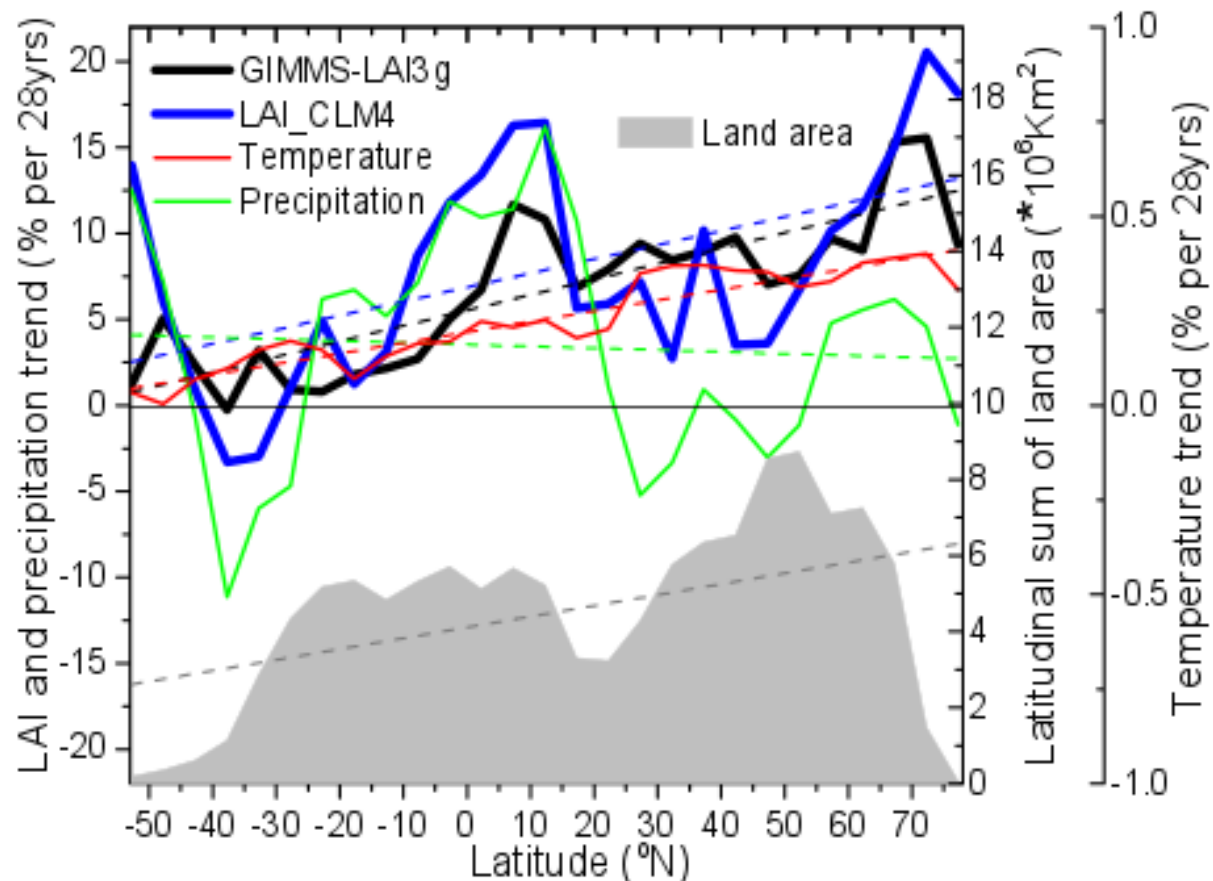
Climate Change

Global mean temperature near-term projections relative to 1986–2005



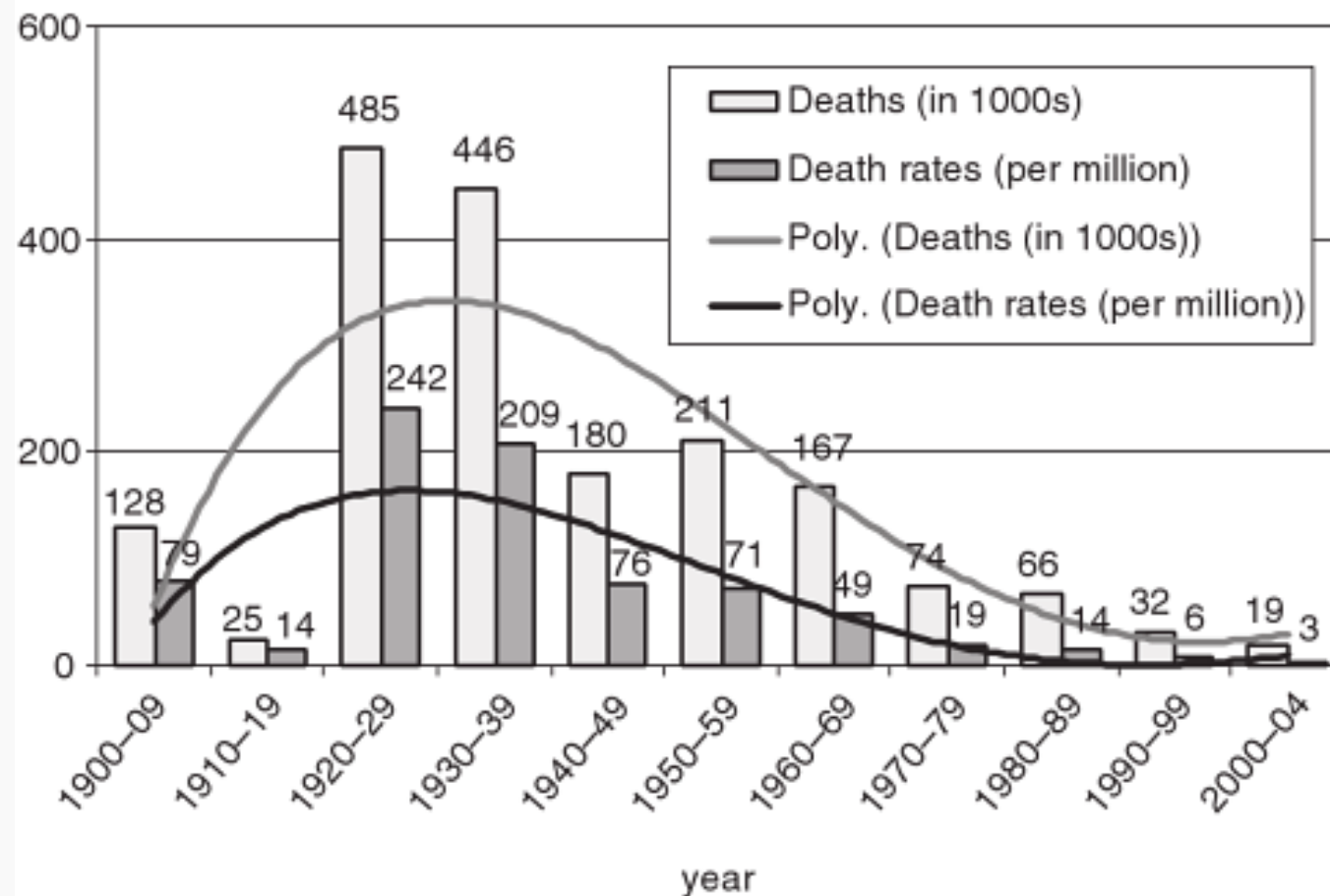
Climate Change

Figure 1. Latitudinal gradient of percentage change (%/28 yr) in GIMMS-LAI3g, LAI_CLM4, temperature and precipitation for 1982–2009. The gray histogram indicates the latitudinal sum of land area ($\times 10^6 \text{ km}^2$). Dashed lines indicate the linear fit to the latitude bands at every-5 degree.



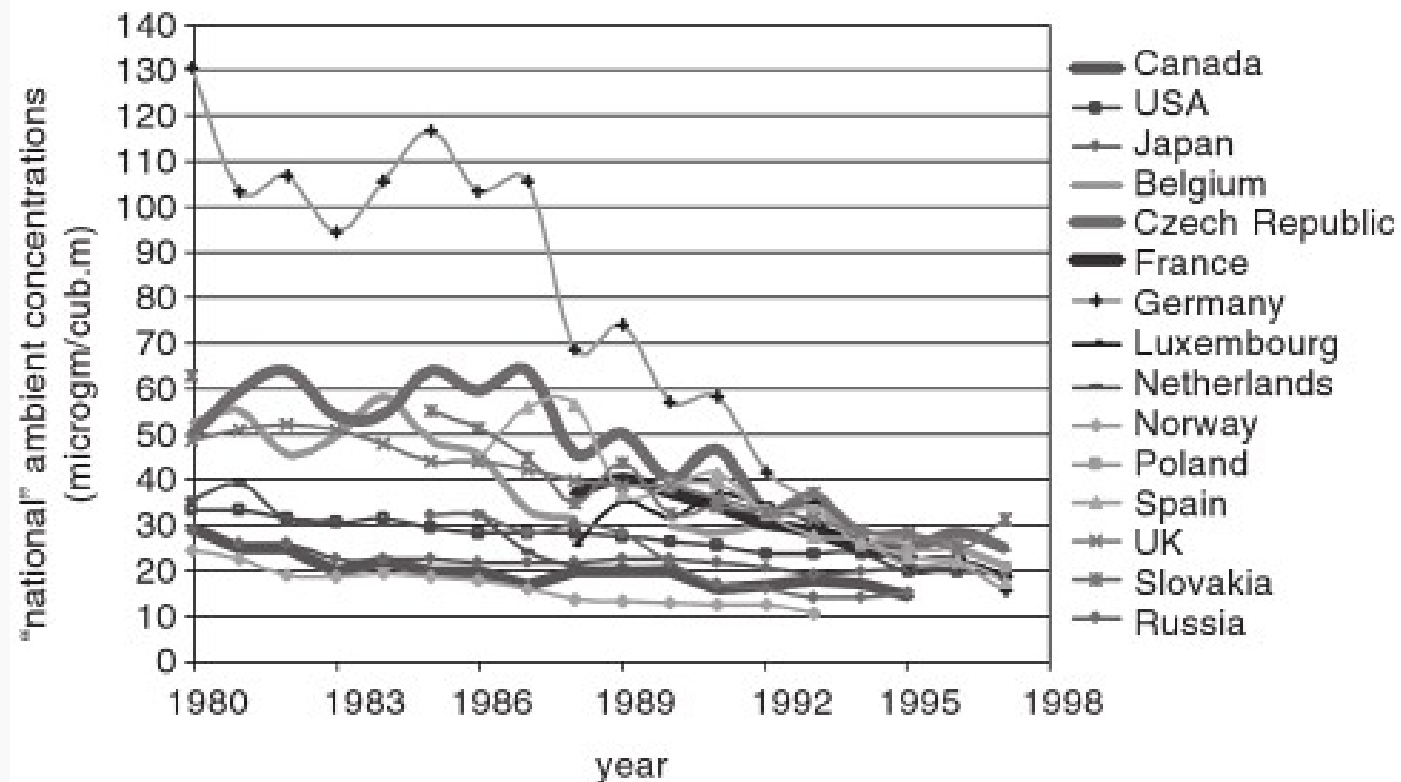
Climate Change

Figure 6.17
GLOBAL DEATHS AND DEATH RATES DUE TO CLIMATE-RELATED
DISASTERS, 1900–2004



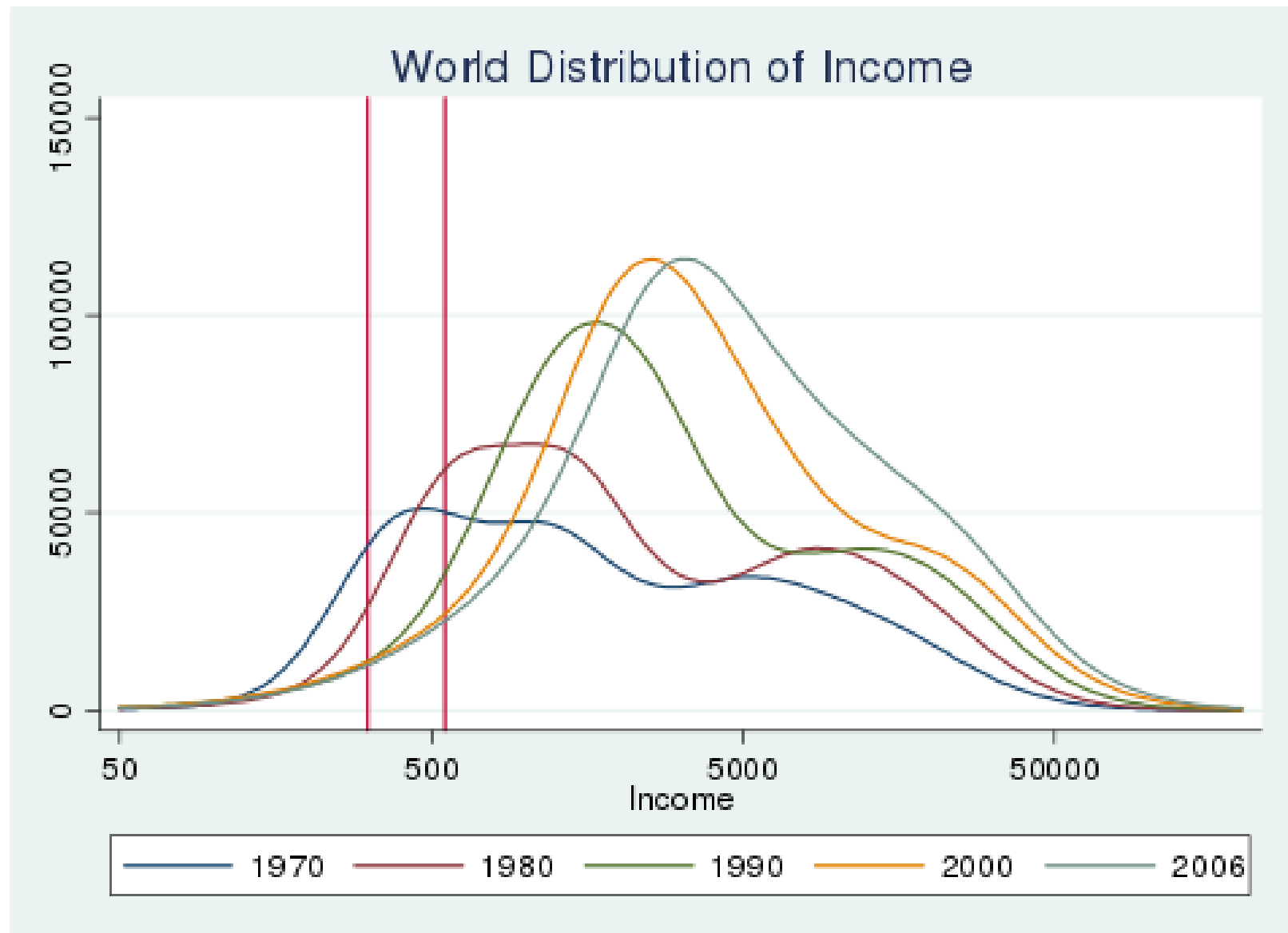
Pollution

Figure 6.11
AMBIENT SO₂ CONCENTRATIONS, 1980–1997,
VARIOUS OECD COUNTRIES



SOURCES: OECD, *OECD Environmental Data Compendium 1997* (Paris: OECD, 1997); OECD, *OECD Environmental Data Compendium 1999* (Paris: OECD, 1999).

Inequality

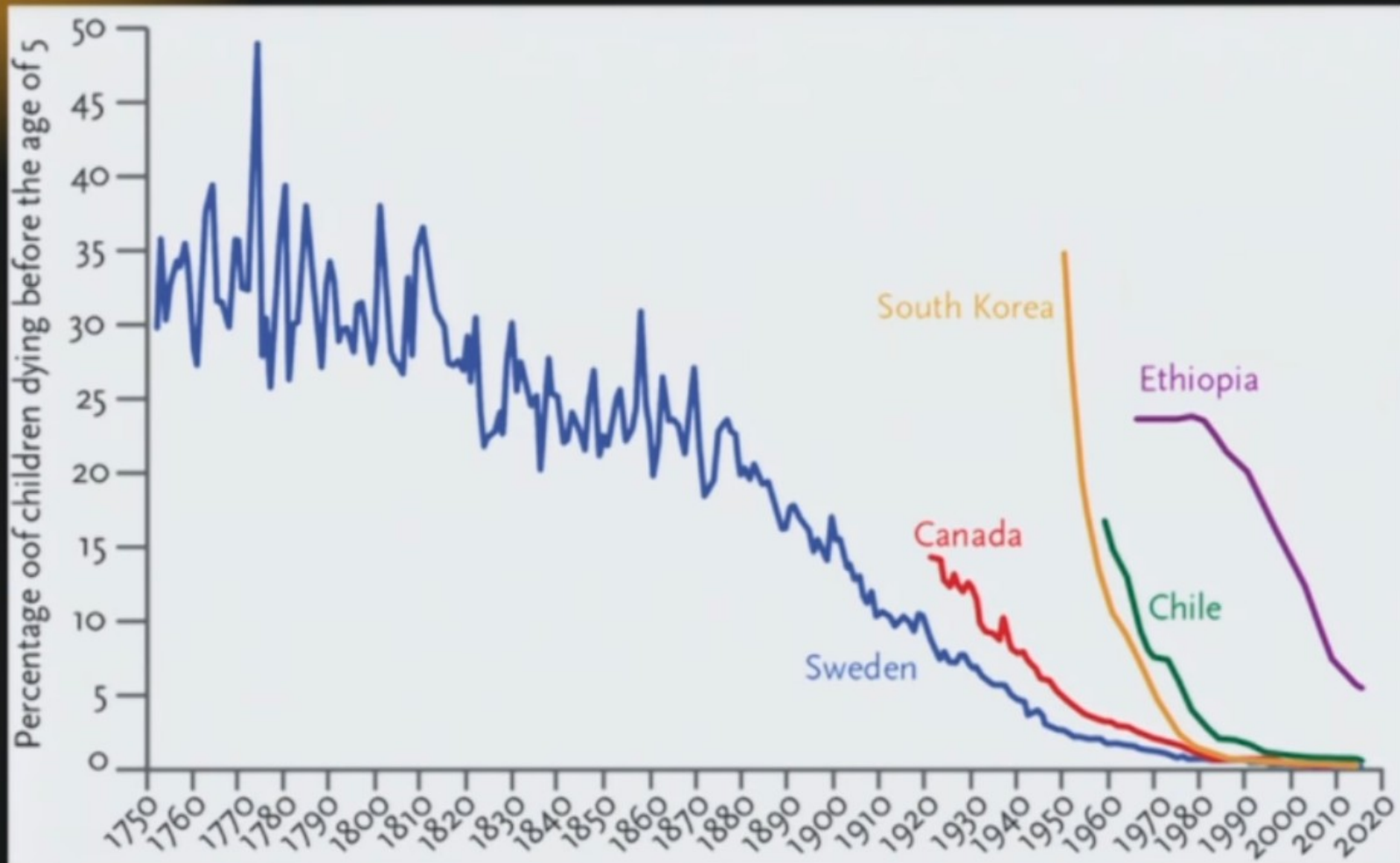


Psychological Benefits of Optimism

- Increased happiness, decreased depression (Seligman 2005).
- Less likely to die of heart attack (Giltay 2004).
- Tend towards better moods, more persevering and successful, better physical health (Peterson 2000).
- Higher incomes (Diener 2002).
- Better relationships (Gable 2004).
- More creative thinking to solve problems (Isen 1987).

Child Mortality

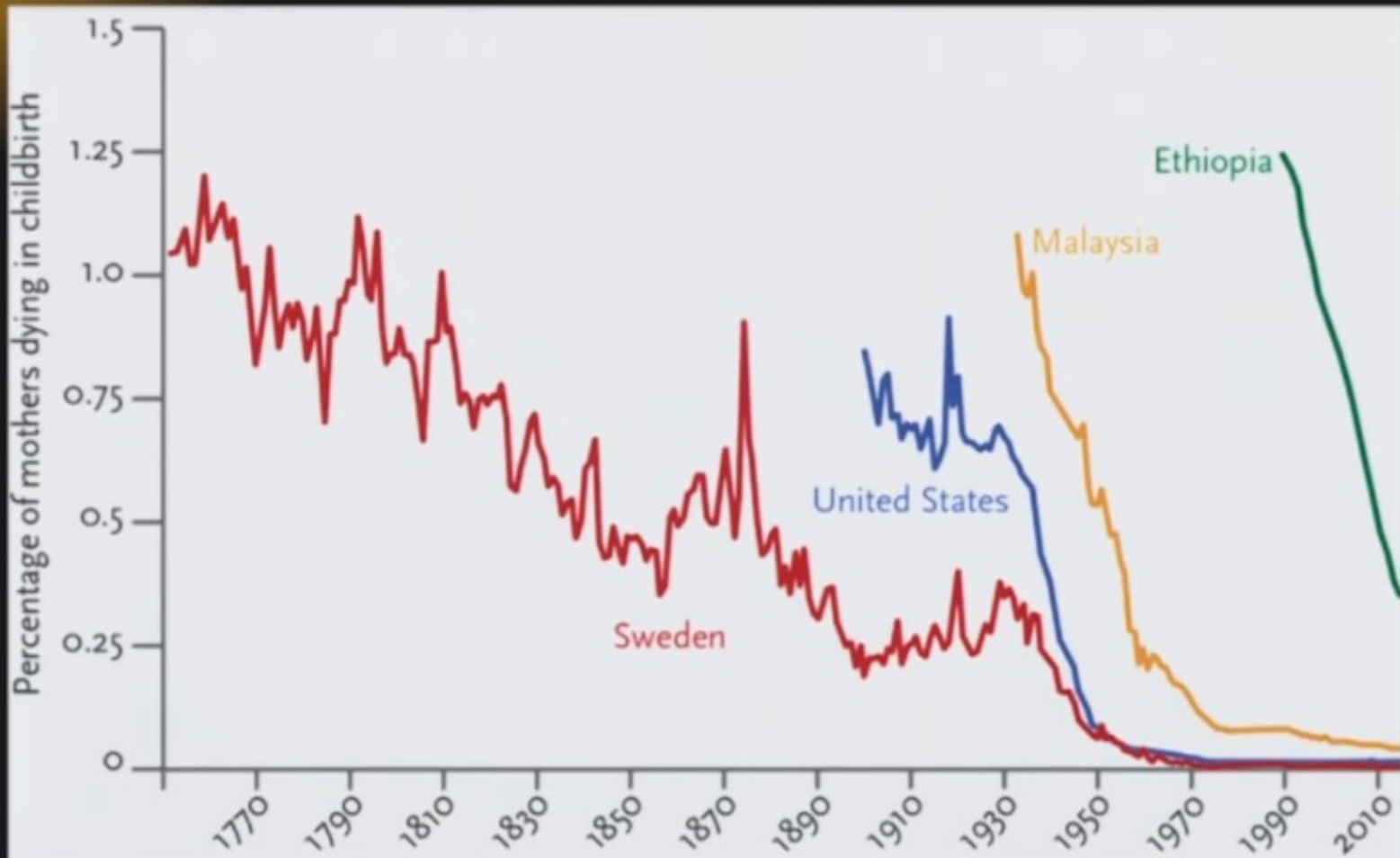
Child Mortality, 1751-2015



Source: Our World in Data, based on UN; Human Mortality Database

Maternal Mortality

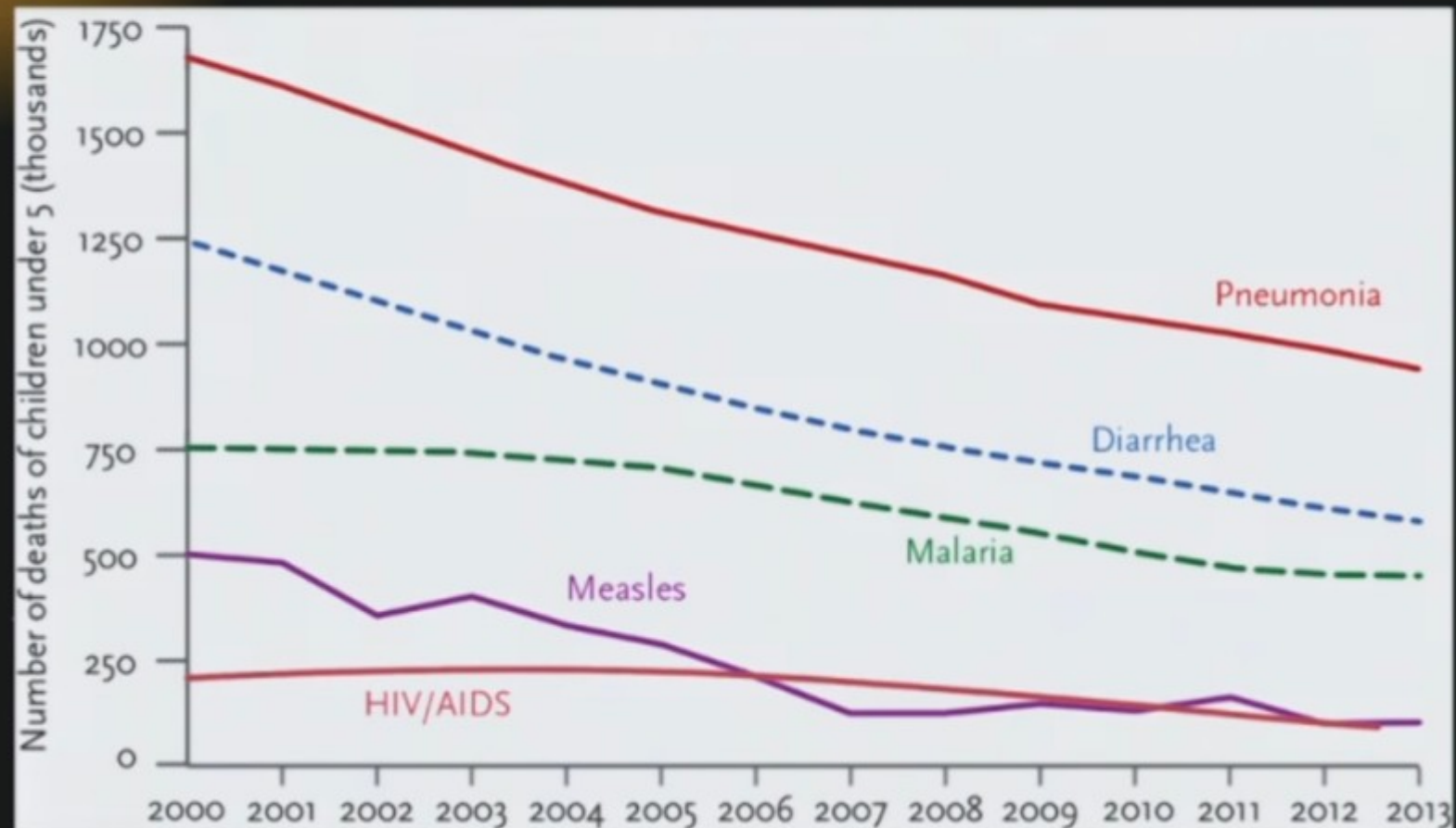
Maternal Mortality, 1751-2013



Source: Our World in Data, based partly on Gapminder

Infectious Diseases

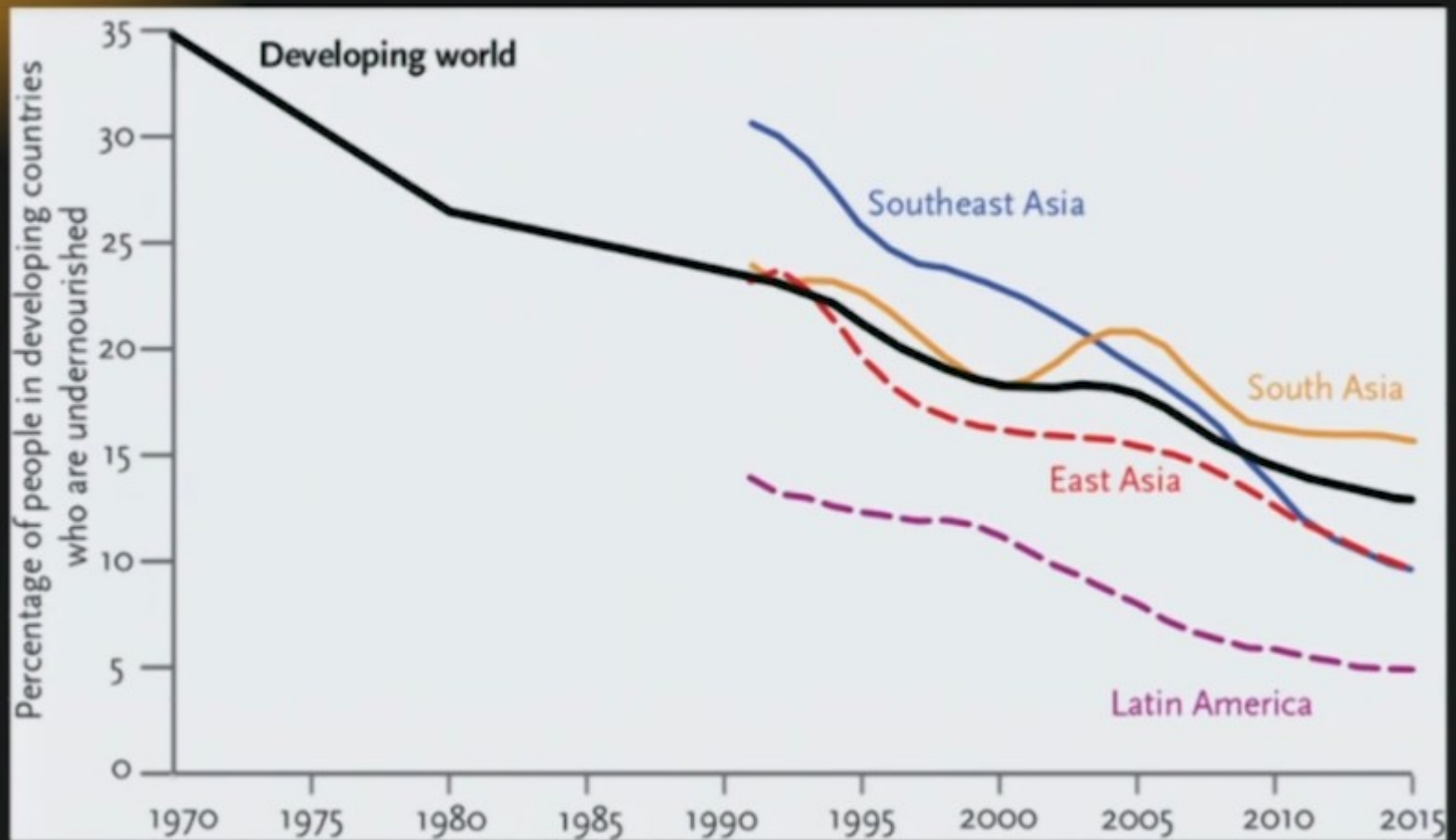
Childhood Deaths from Infections Disease, 2000-2013



Source: World Health Organization

Undernourishment

Undernourishment 1970-2015



Source: Our World in Data, based on UN FAO

Famine Deaths

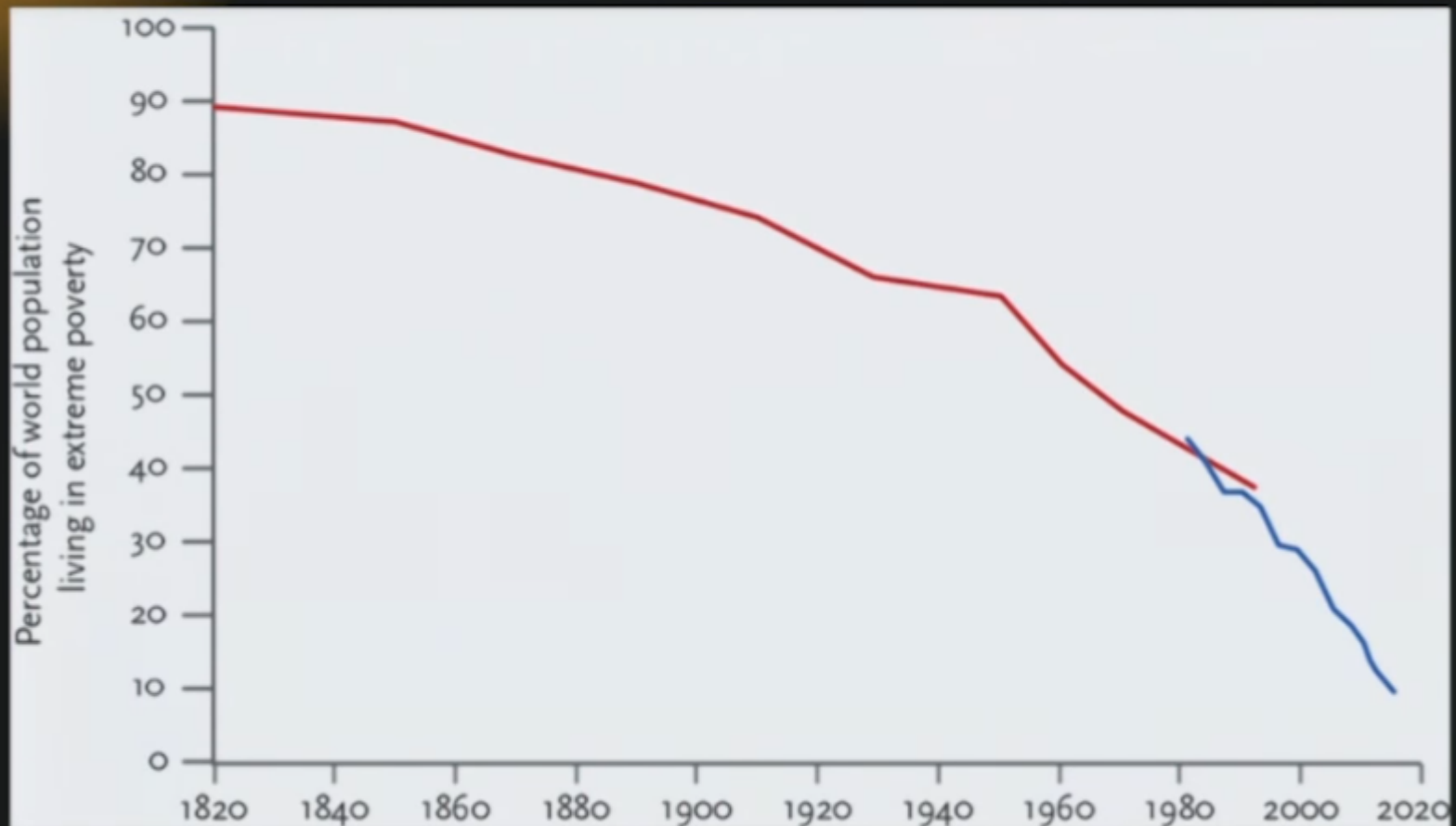
Famine Deaths, 1860-2016



Source: Our World in Data, based on Devereux 2000; Ó Gráda 2009; White 2011; EM-DAT

Extreme Poverty

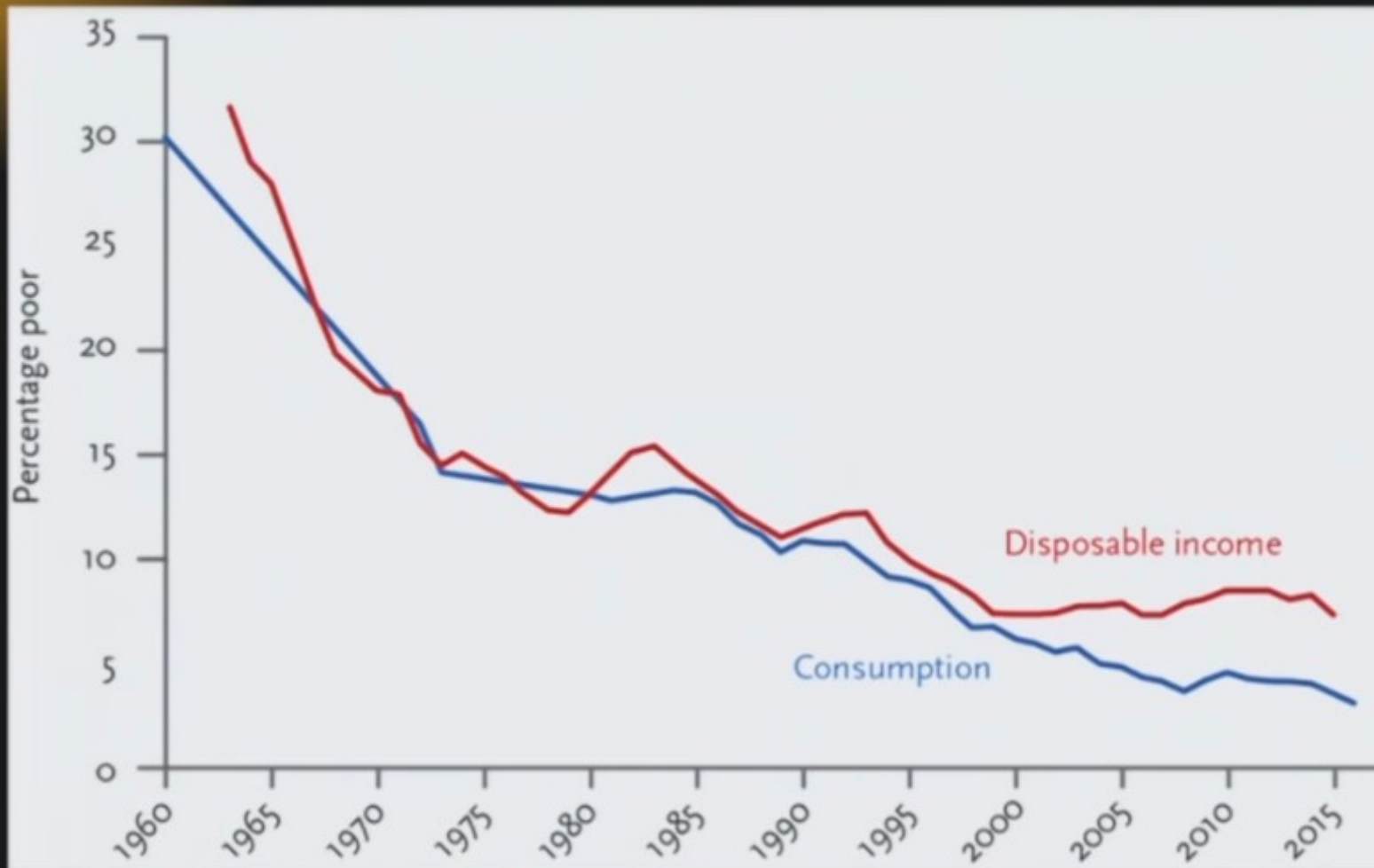
Extreme Poverty, 1820-2015



Source: *Our World in Data*, based on Bourguignon & Morrison 2002; World Bank

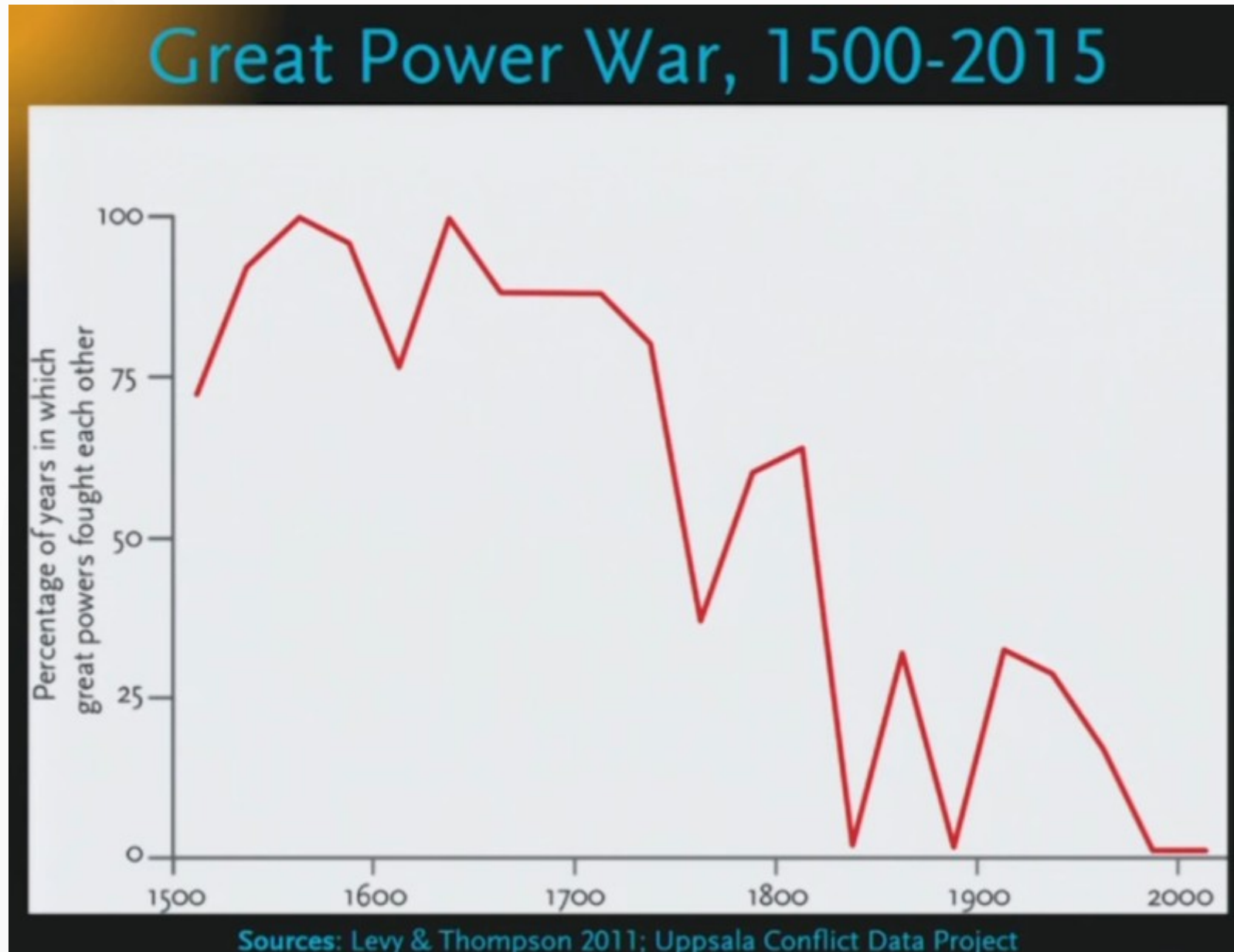
U.S. Poverty

Poverty, US, 1960-2016



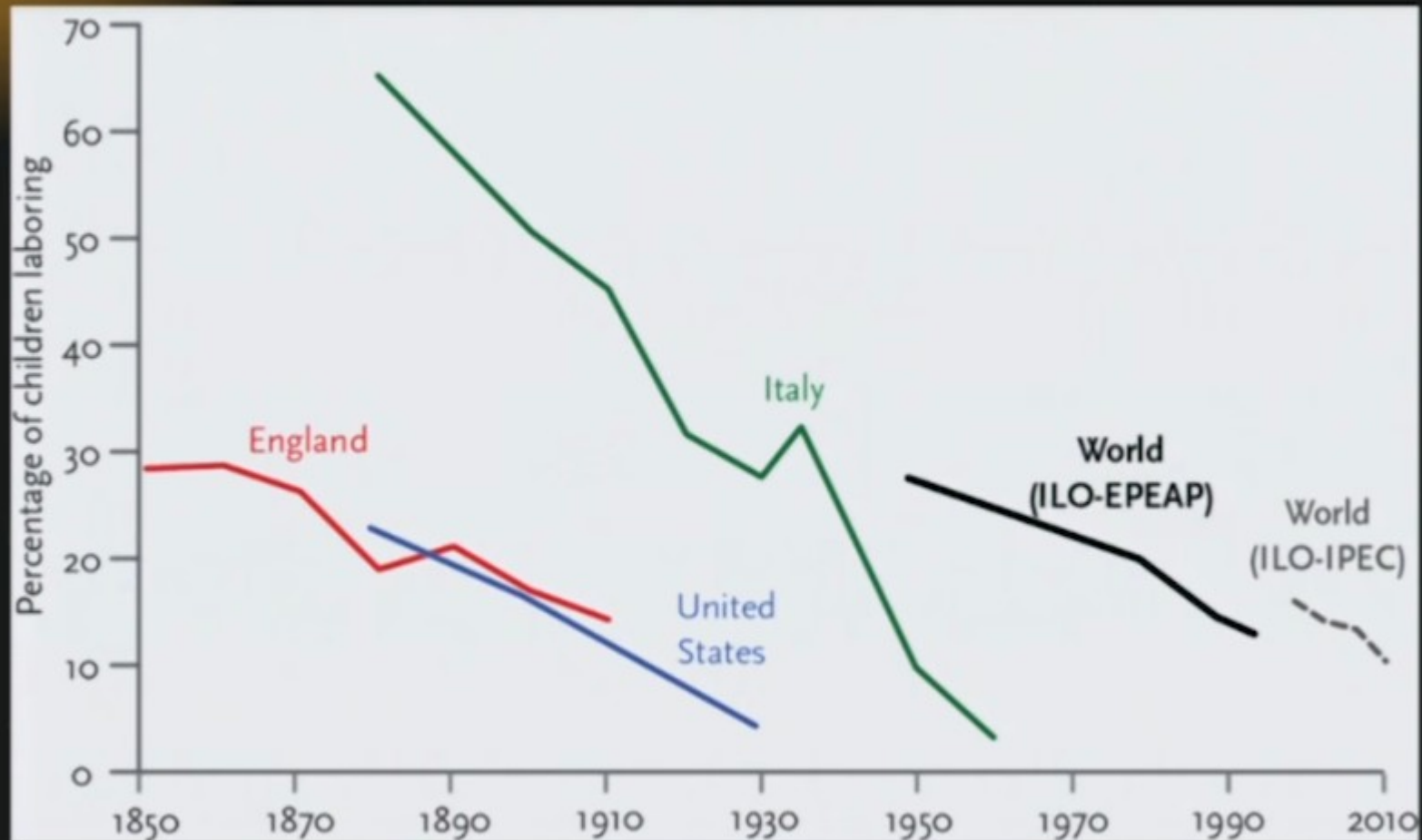
Sources: Meyer & Sullivan 2012; Meyer, personal communication

Great Power Wars



Child Labor

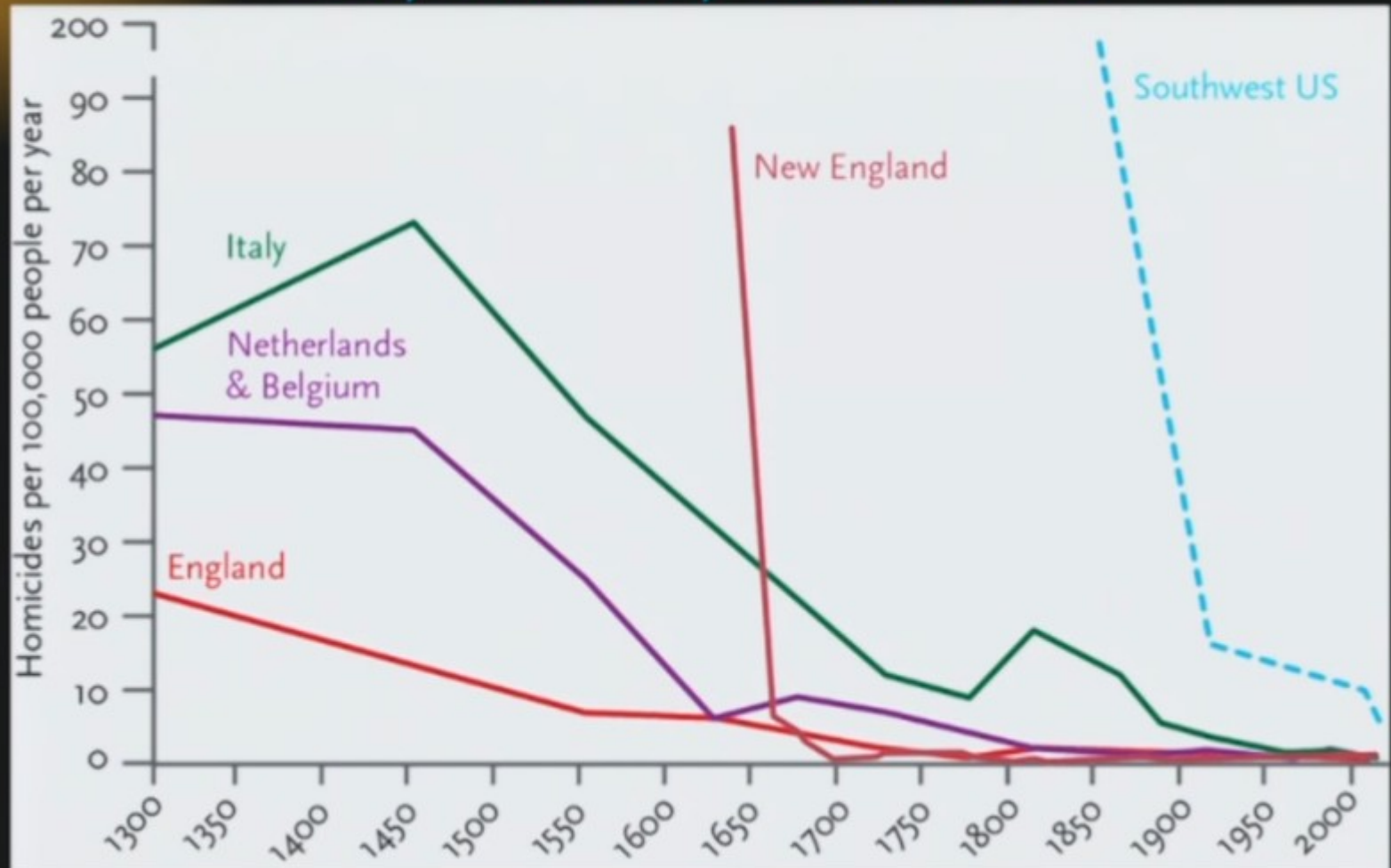
Child Labor 1850-2012



Sources: Our World in Data; Cunningham 1996; Whaples 2005; ILO-IPEC

Homicide Rates

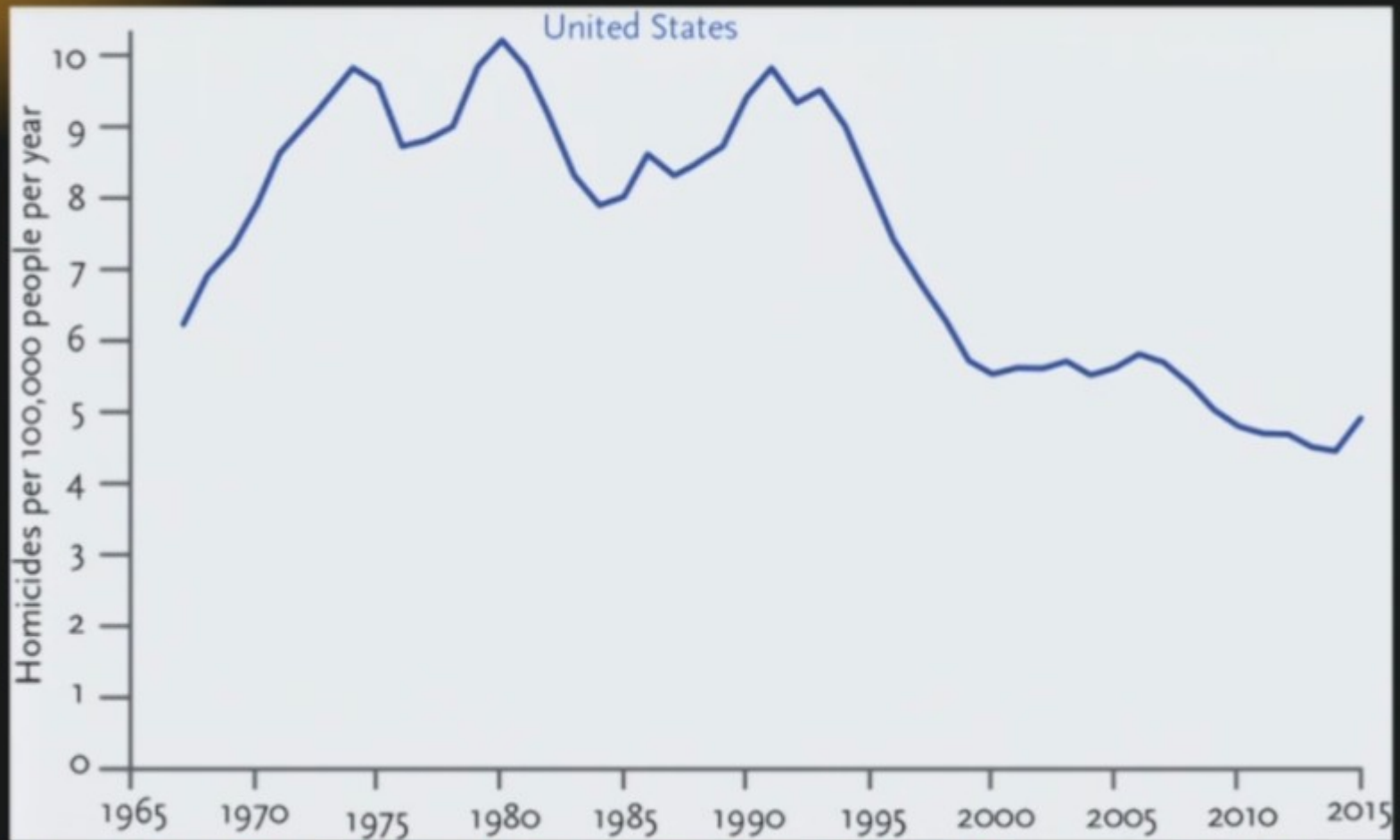
Homicide Deaths, Western Europe, US, Mexico, 1300-2015



Sources: Eisner 2003; Roth 2009; FBI; Vilalta personal communication

U.S. Homicide Deaths

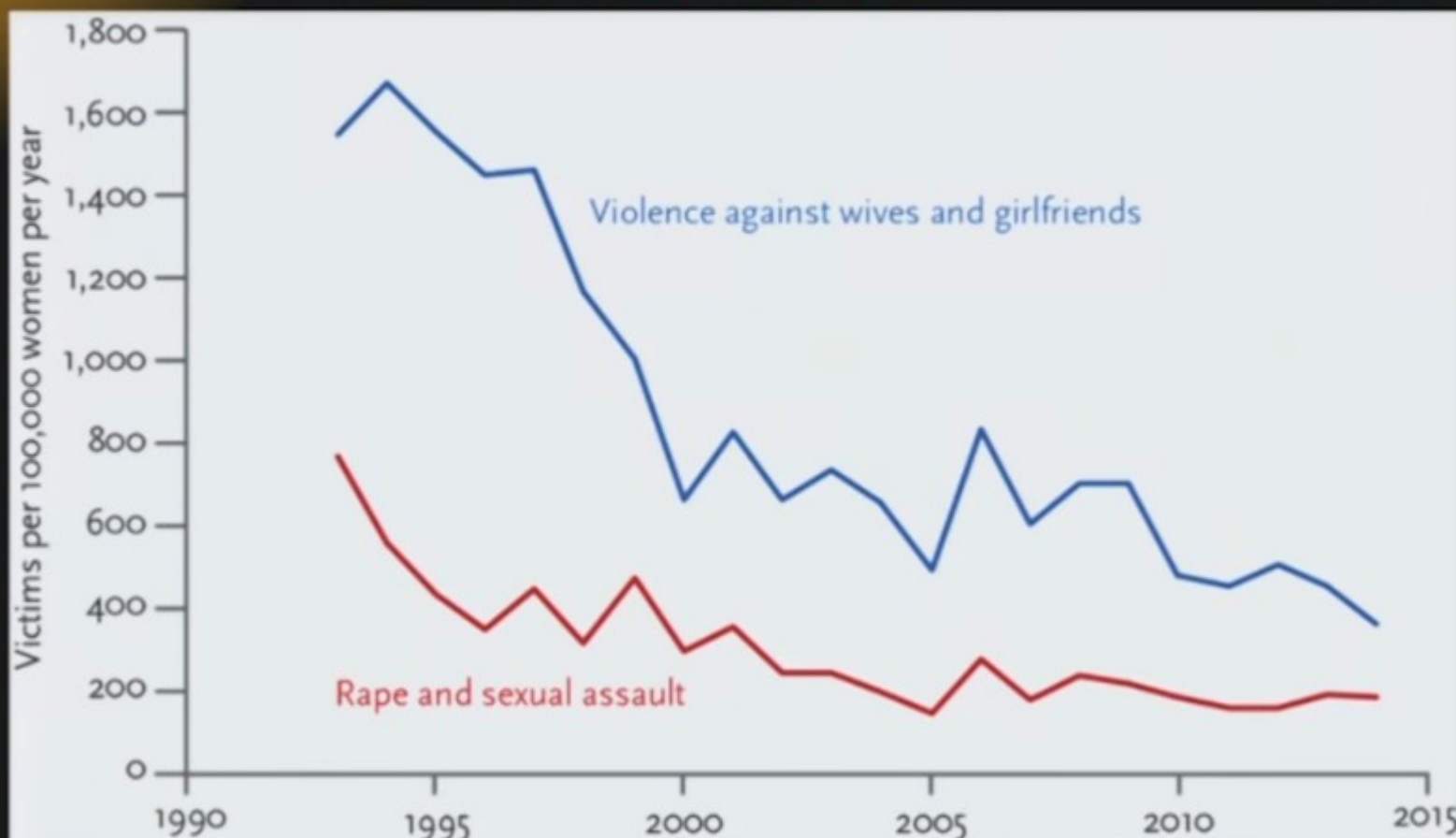
Homicide Deaths 1967-2015



Sources: FBI; Office for National Statistics (UK); Krug et al. 2002; UN Economic & Social Council

Rape

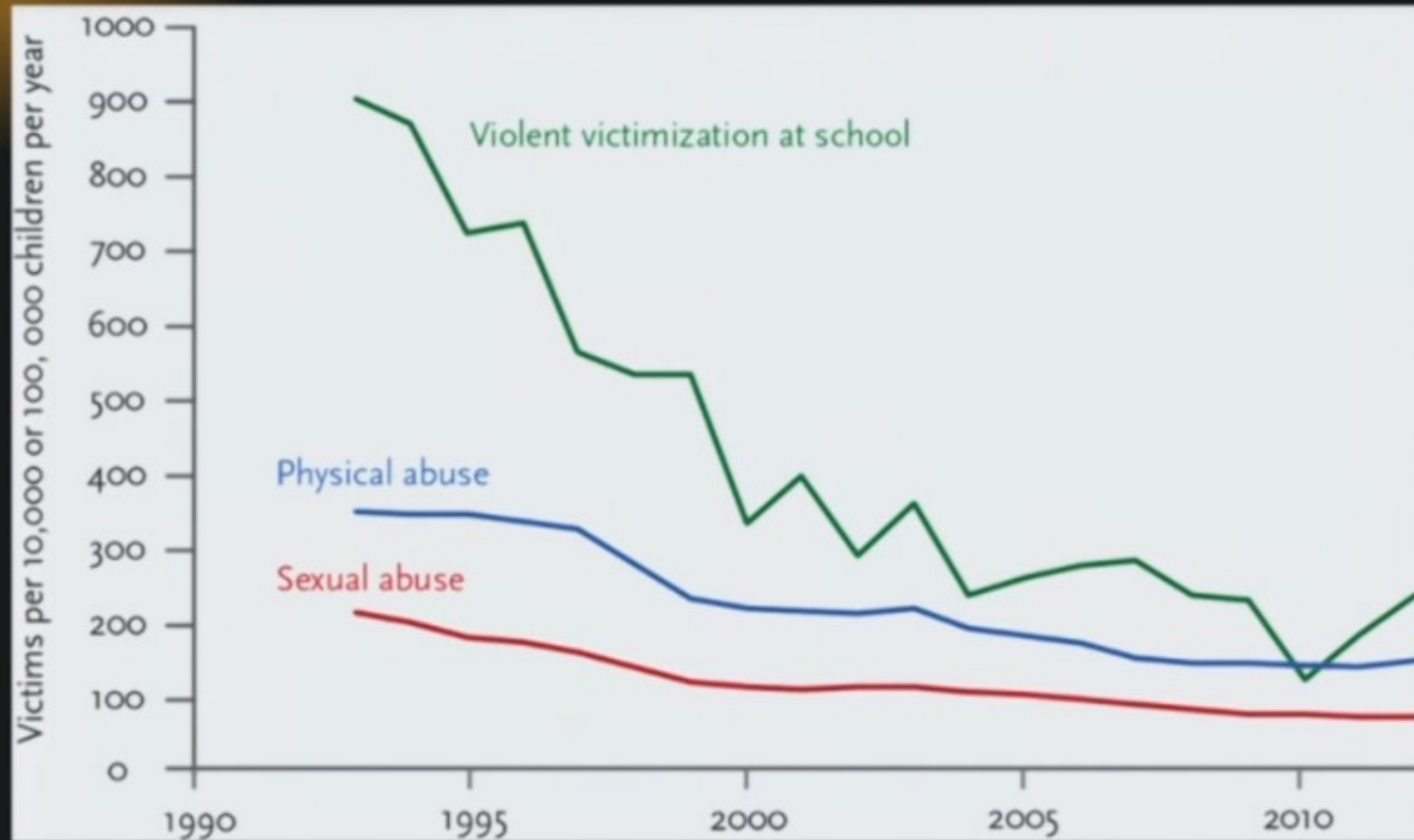
Rape & Domestic Violence, US, 1993-2012



Source: US Bureau of Justice Statistics

Victimization of Children

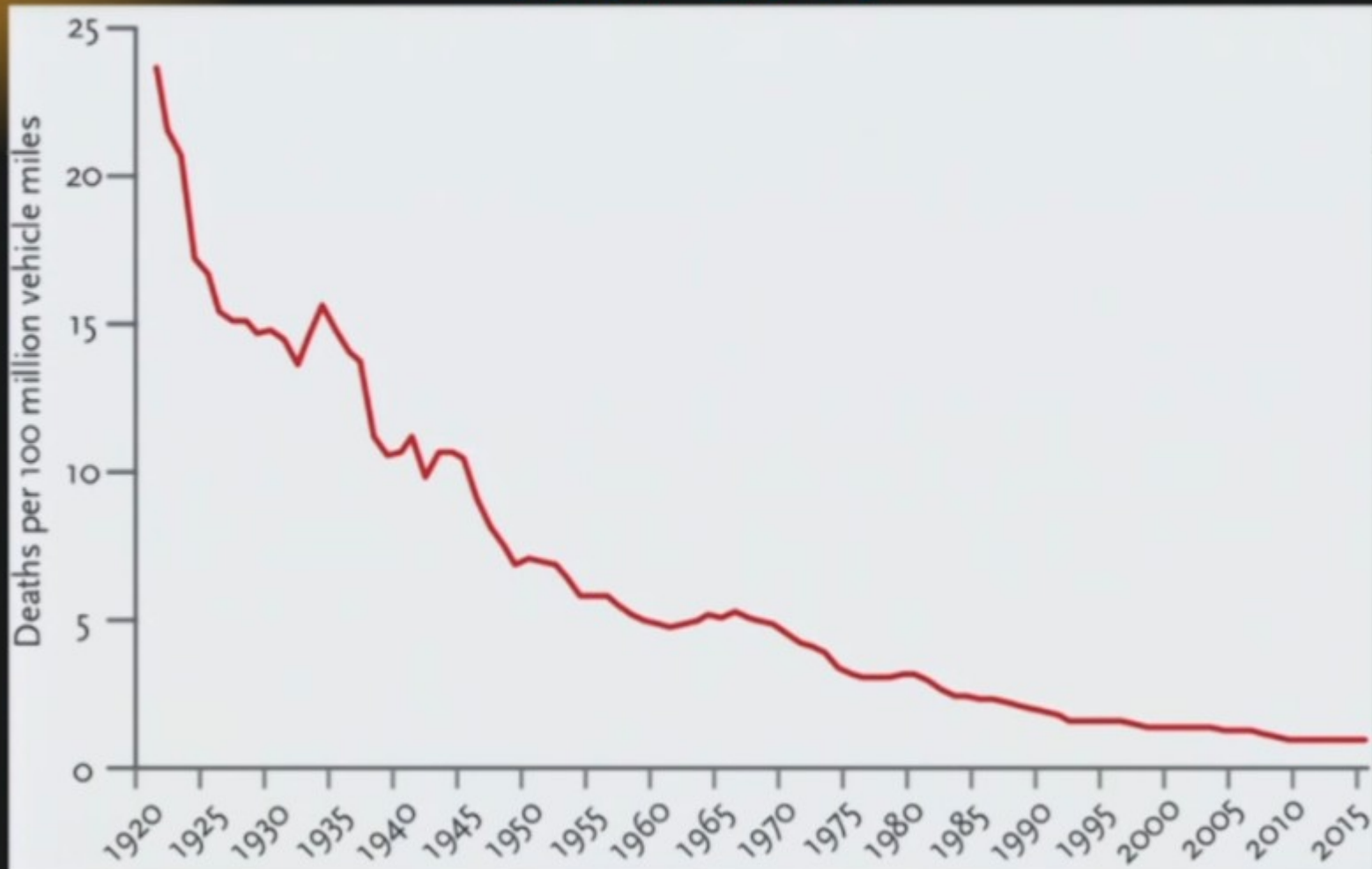
Victimization of Children, US, 1993-2012



Sources: Finkelhor 2014; Nat. Child Abuse & Neglect Data System; US Bureau of Justice Statistics

Motor Vehicle Deaths

Motor Vehicle Accident Deaths 1967-2015



Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

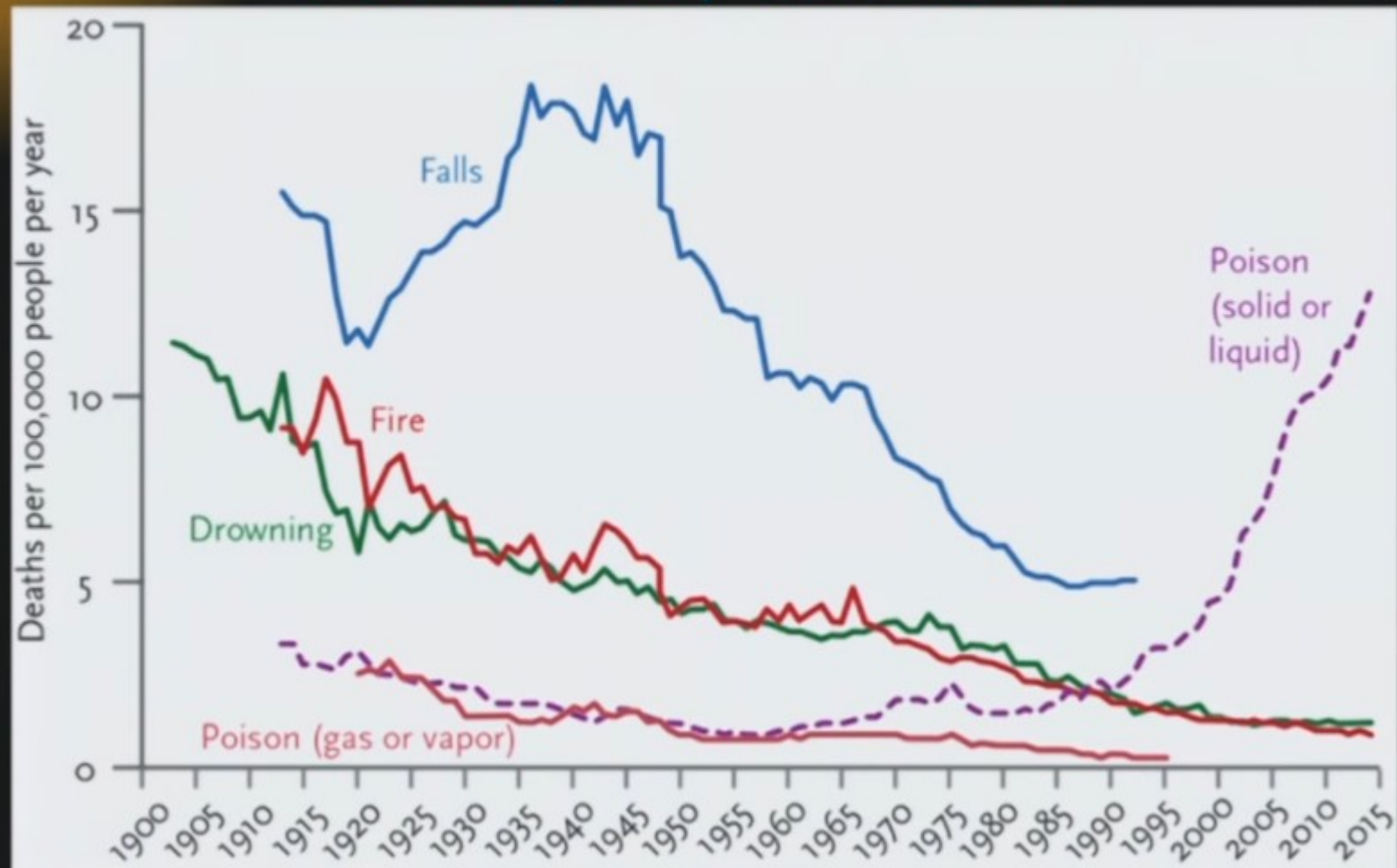
Plane Crash Deaths

Plane Crash Deaths 1970-2015



Falls, Fires, Drowning, Poison

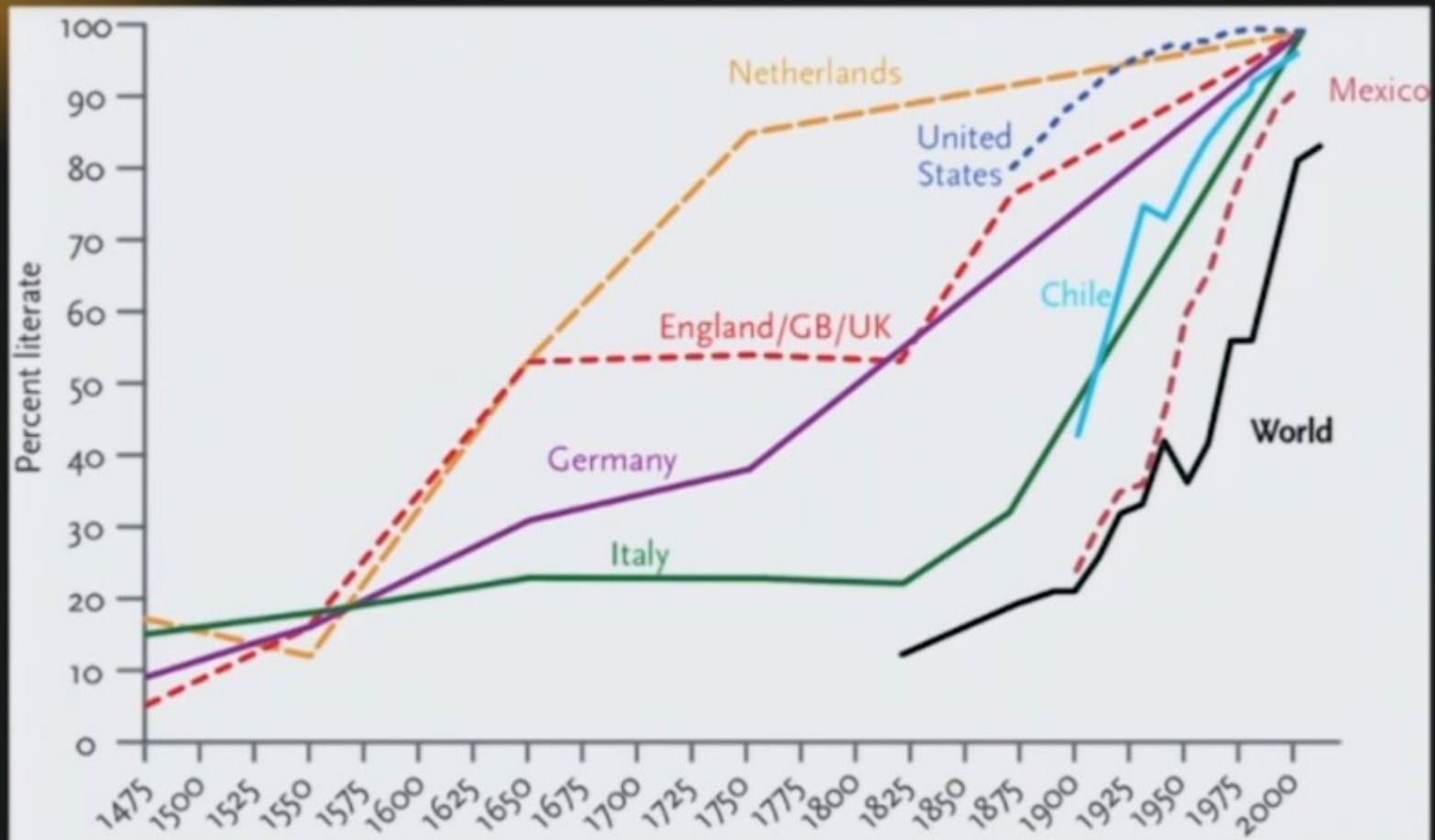
Deaths from Falls, Fires, Drowning, Poison, US, 1903-2014



Source: National Safety Council

Literacy

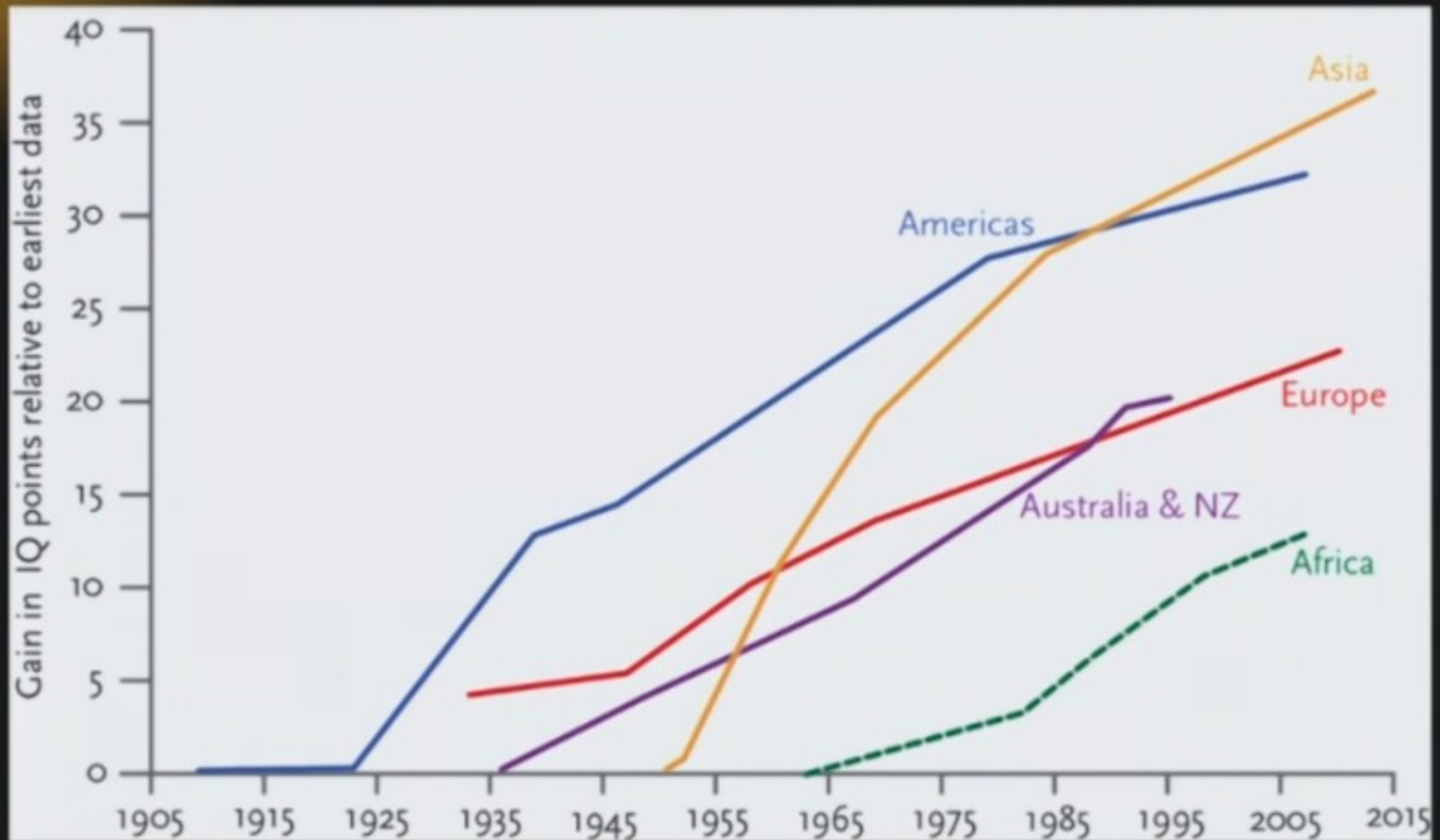
Literacy, 1475-2010



Sources: Our World in Data, based on Van Zanden et al.; Nat. Ctr. for Education Statistics; CIA

IQ Gains

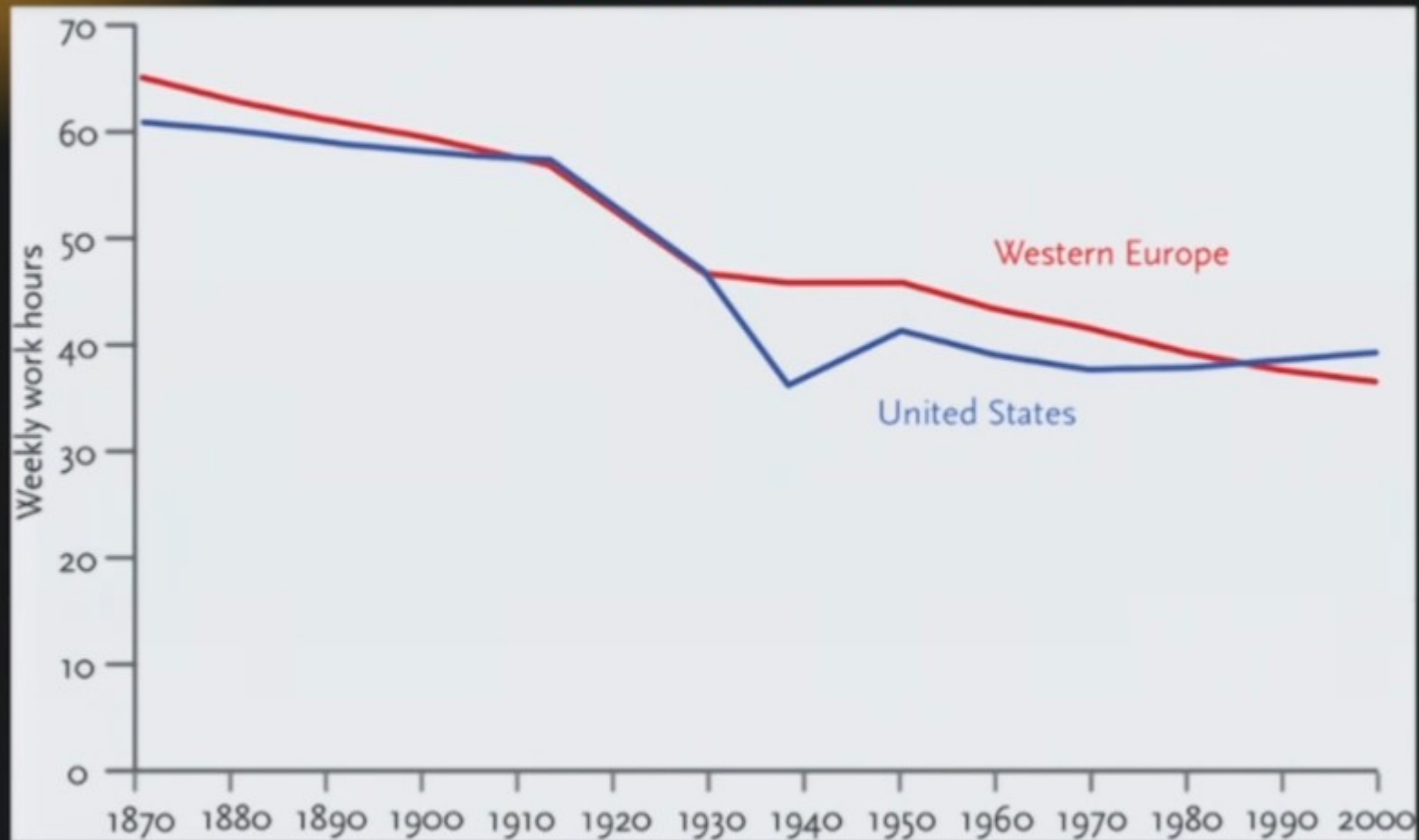
IQ Gains 1909-2013



Source: Pietschnig & Voracek 2015

Work Hours

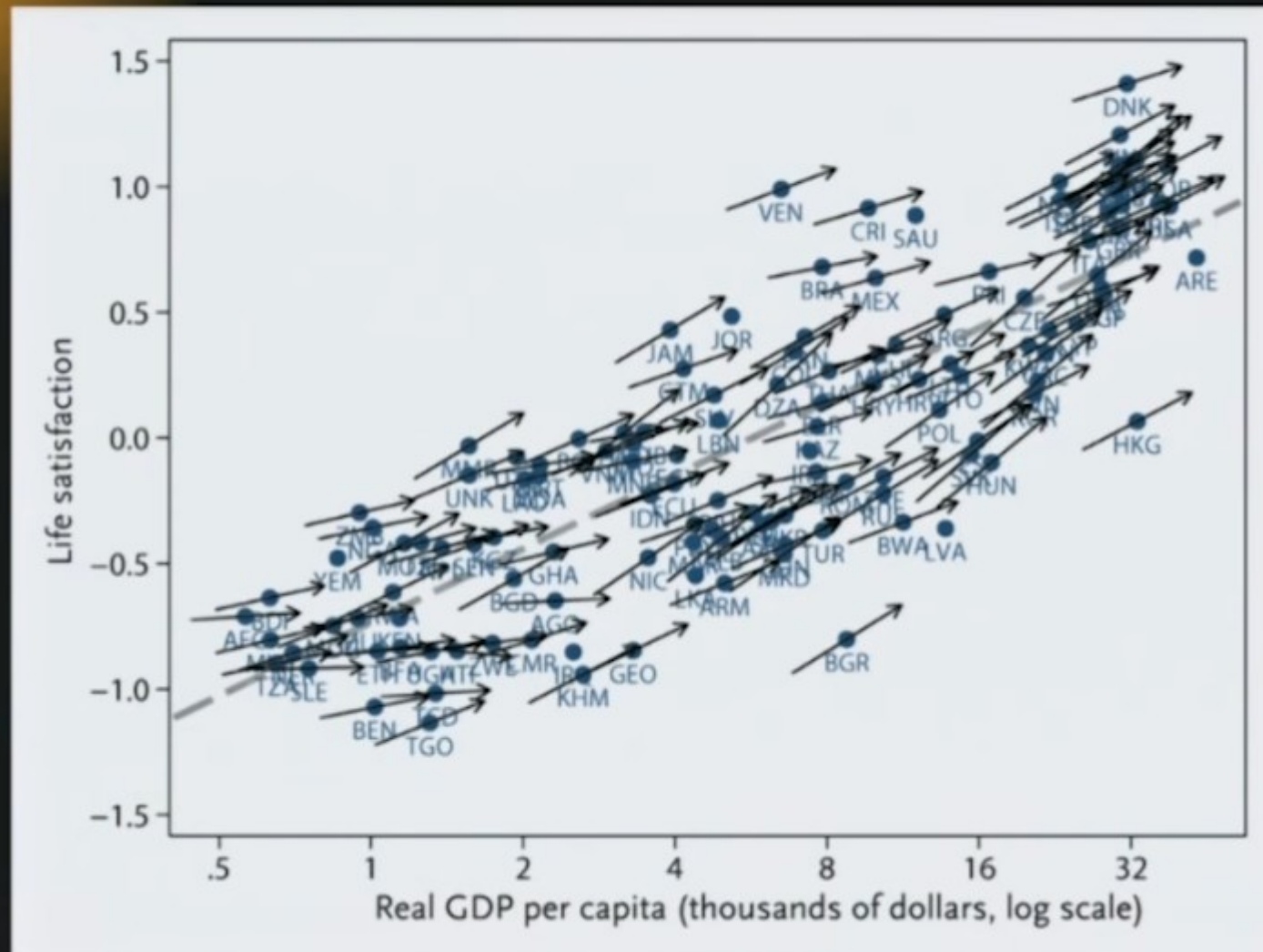
Work Hours, W. Europe & US, 1870-2000



Source: *Our World in Data*, based on Huberman & Minns 2007

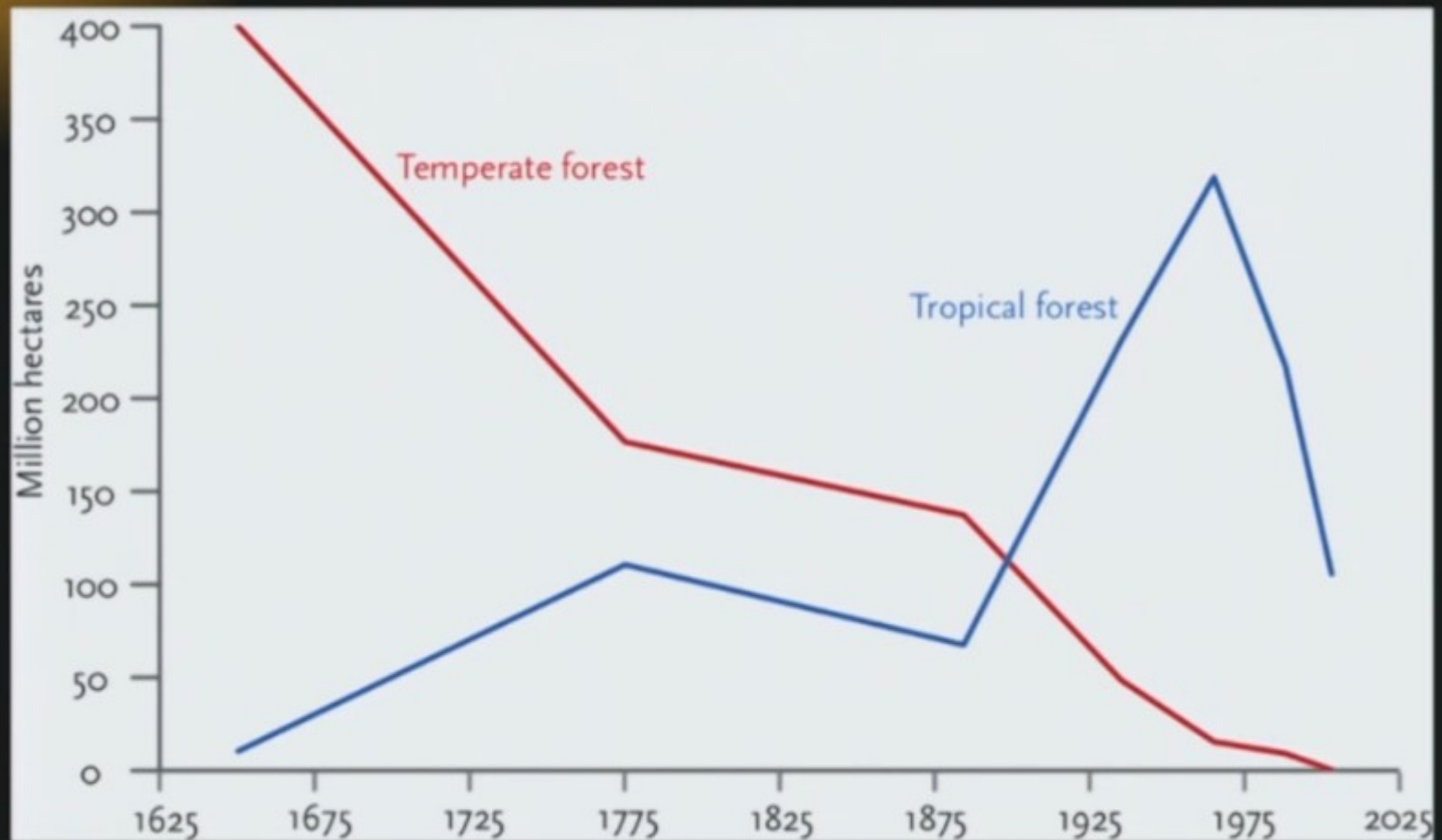
Life Satisfaction vs Income

Life Satisfaction vs. Income, 2006



Deforestation

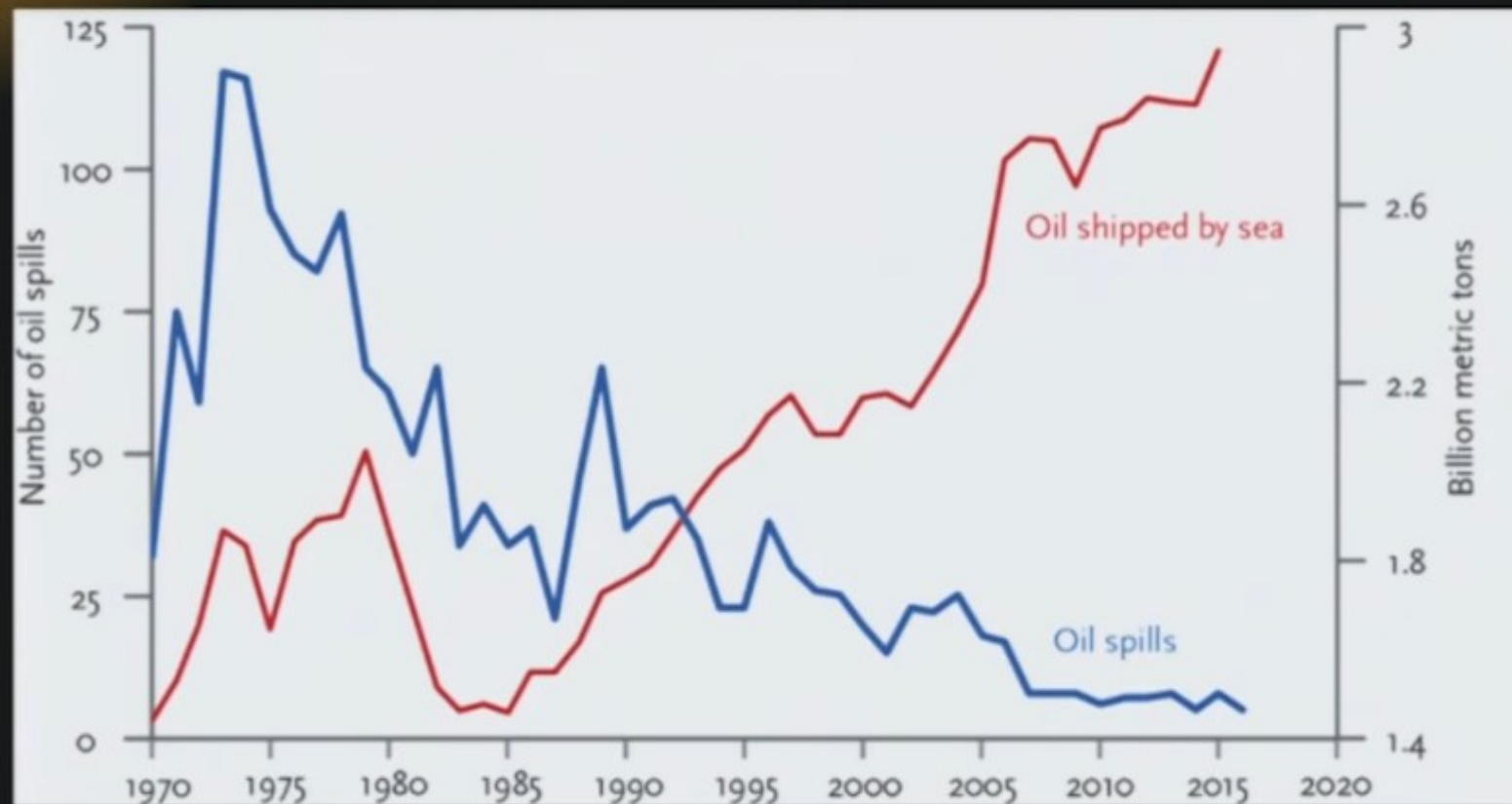
Deforestation 1700-2010



Source: UN Forest and Agricultural Organization

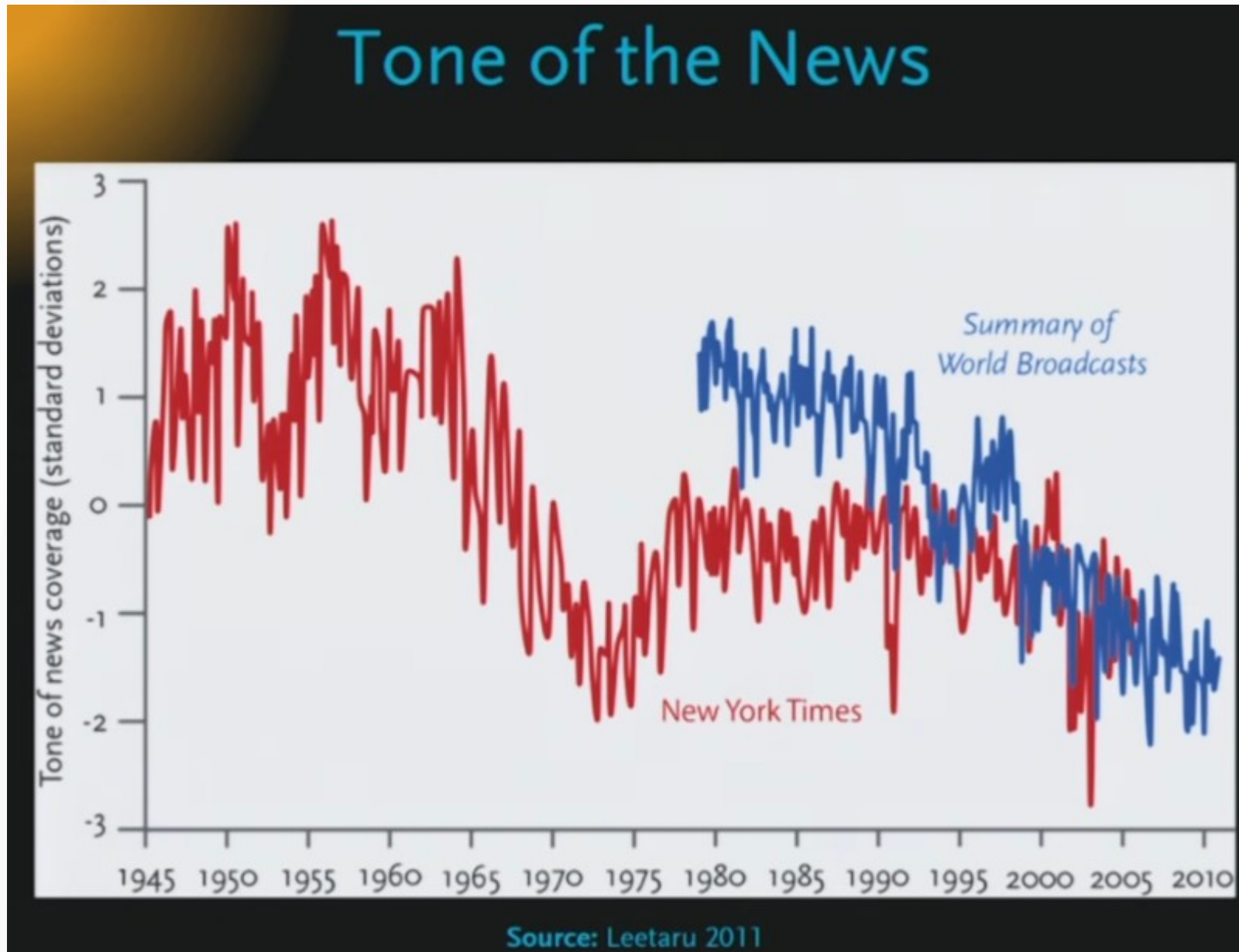
Oil Spills

Oil Spills 1970-2016



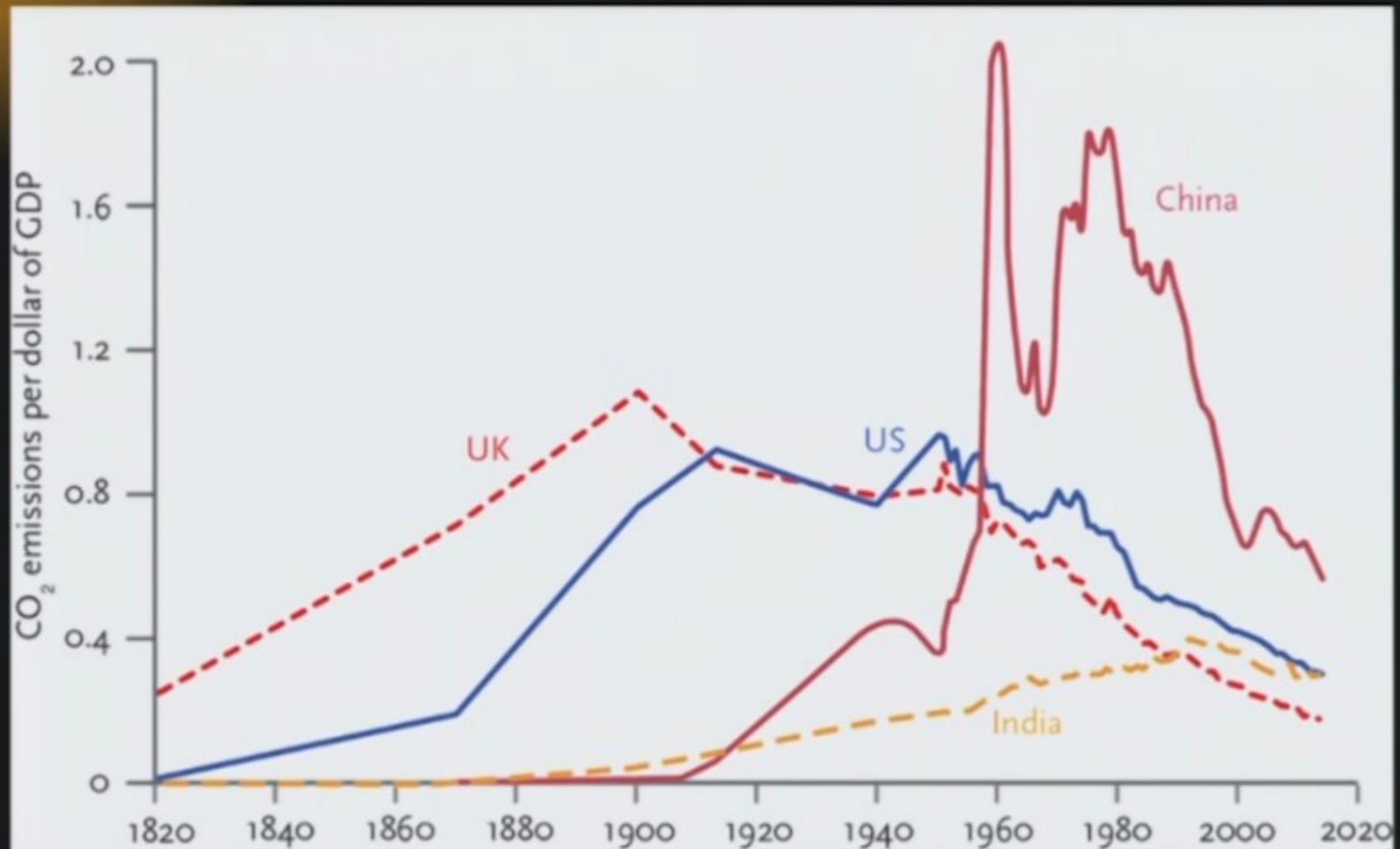
Source: Our World in Data, based on International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation

Tone of News Coverage



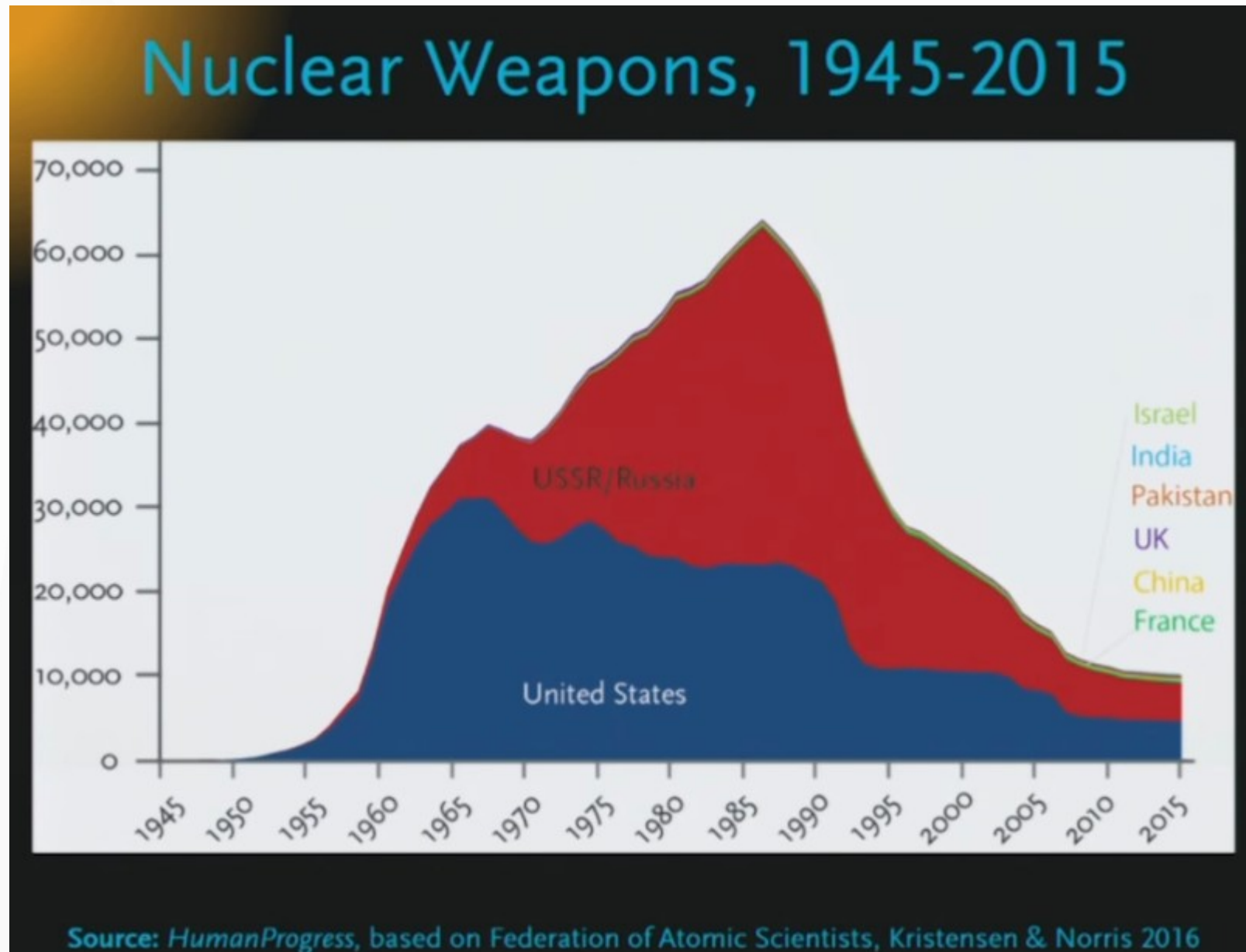
CO2 Emissions per GDP

CO₂ Emissions Per \$ GDP, 1820-2014



Source: Our World in Data, based on Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center

Nuclear Weapons



“Realism”

- "Realism" is often status quo biases and emotional prejudices wrapped in a pretense of objectivity and balance.
- Actually cynical because it disregards optimistic evidence.
- One way to tell a "realist" versus a realist: Are they curious about the evidence of optimism?
- True realism usually warrants, at minimum, some optimism.

Call to Inaction?

- No! Let's work to improve the world more.
- Economic progress seems to be the main driving force.
- Morality seems to be progressing (may be correlated with wealth).
- As Ridley writes, progress has occurred despite the "chiefs, priests, and thieves."

Quote

- “Despite “recklessly” increasing its numbers... humanity has never been better fed, healthier, or longer lived... the average person's life span has more than doubled. He is better educated and wealthier. She is freer to choose her rulers and express her views... Her professional, social, and physical mobility... is less likely to be circumscribed by caste, class, location, or other accidents of birth. Not only is work less physically demanding, he works fewer hours, earns more, and has more leisure time at his disposal. The proximate causes for the improvements in the human condition... are the forces of technological change and economic growth, supplemented by trade in products, ideas, and technologies.” (Goklany)

Bryan Caplan's Beautiful Bubble

- “Why put so much distance between myself and the outside world? Because despite my legendary optimism, I find my society unacceptable. It is dreary, insipid, ugly, boring, wrong, and wicked. Trying to reform it is largely futile; as the Smiths tell us, “The world won't listen.” Instead, I pursue the strategy that actually works: Making my small corner of the world beautiful in my eyes.”

Bryan Caplan's 10 Steps to a Beautiful Bubble

- 1) Amicably divorce your society. We're not right for each other.
- 2) Unless you can do something about a problem, don't worry too much about it.
- 3) Read history books instead of news.
- 4) Emotionally distance yourself from toxic people.
- 5) Stop worrying about first world problems
- 6) Fill life with joy
- 7) Make friends who share your likes instead of your dislikes
- 8) Search for a meaningful life (including work)
- 9) Date people who share your values
- 10) Now that your life is in order, explore the dumb world around and go home to your beautiful bubble

Best Objections

- Nuclear War
 - Number of warheads on a good downward trend but of course it doesn't take many to cause a disaster
 - We got through the cold war (with some close calls!), so at least some evidence that humans can handle it. Even tyrants are somewhat rational.
- Unexpected Disaster
 - The more average wealth & energy, the better our chances
 - Burden of Proof on the Pessimist.
- Global Government
 - My biggest fear. Without competition between governments, it can get scary
 - Seastedding, going to other planets.

Best Objections

- Superintelligent Artificial Intelligence
 - Pinker is skeptical, thinks AI will just augment, General AI may be incoherent
 - Burden of Proof on the Pessimist.
- World War III
 - Always possible but even WWII wasn't much of a blip in the trends
- Terrorism
 - It's terrible but a blip in the big scheme of things
 - Burden of Proof on the Pessimist.
- GMO, CRISPR-Cas9, and other Scary Biological Advances
 - For hundreds of years, we've been doing GMO through radiation, now we are surgical

Best Objections

- Authoritarianism
 - Certainly possible and our political system tends to encourage emotional appeals
 - Nevertheless, it has been on the decline. Burden of Proof on the Pessimist.
- Climate Change
 - Burden of Proof on the Pessimist.
- How can a human race that reacts in the ways it does to modernity be trusted to use those gifts responsibly?
- Even a slight loss of modernity will cause great havoc

You'll Do Great Today

