

[Editor's note: I couldn't find anything this month concerning the Amiga, so I thought I'd share this. For more, check out Bill Gates' piece. You'll find a link to it on the club website.]

5 Amazing Pieces of Good News Nobody is Reporting

If you share some uplifting link with somebody on Facebook — some video of an act of human kindness captured on camera, or this dolphin masturbating with the aid of its little fish friend — the response is usually the same. “Nice to see there are still heartwarming stories in this awful world!”

In other words, any positive news or trend is treated as the exception, when the overall arc of civilization is clearly downward. The only problem is that it is absolutely not true, and it's actually very easy to prove, as we have made it our mission to point out.

So you can sit around and worry about debt ceilings and terror attacks, but take a moment to appreciate that you happen to be alive during the goddamned golden age of human civilization. Just think about the fact that...

#5. We're Closing in on World Peace (Seriously)

This one seems laughable — mankind has gone from fighting with swords, to

muskets, to machine guns — right up to the modern era of poison gas and nukes that can murder every human on the planet in minutes. Mankind's technological growth has been marked mainly by increasingly efficient ways to slaughter each other.

Sure enough, the 20th century had to have been the most violent in human history. Two world wars, conflict in Southeast Asia, constant war in the Middle East — and those were just the ones that America was directly involved in. At the beginning of the 21st century, with Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and rumblings of war with Syria, it seems like the world is a pack of rabid dogs about to pounce on a Snausage pinata.

The Good News:

Even with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the first decade of the 21st century saw the number of annual battle deaths at its lowest ever in history.

Professor Joshua Goldstein put it best: “If the world feels like a more violent place than it actually is, that's because there's more information about wars — not more wars themselves.” Overall, we're in the midst of an unheard of “long peace,” as no major powers have clashed since World War II, replacing them with smaller wars that historically would count as skirmishes

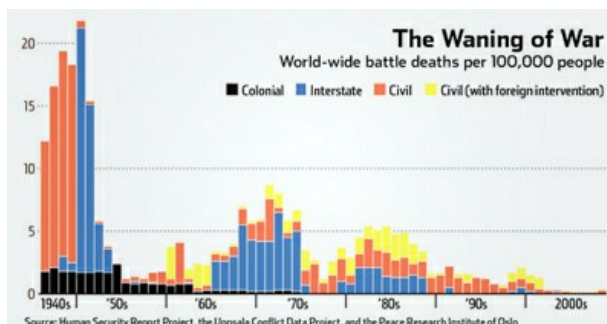
— the U.S. lost 3,400 soldiers in Afghanistan, which is terrible, but during the American Civil War, 4,700 troops were killed on one side of one single battle. Check it out in graph form below.

OK, so maybe this is just a temporary breather after the bloodbath that was the previous century? Nope — it's part of a long-term trend. As crazy as it seems to suggest it, the past couple of hundred years have been the most peaceful in world history. That's including the world wars.

(The numbers don't lie: Property crime, theft, and burglary have also all been dropping since around 1993. The De-Textbook has more on why you'd be just as safe leaving your doors unlocked now as your grandparents were in “the good old days.”)

Yes, in absolute numbers, more people died violently in the 20th century than in any other century — but that's because there are so many more people now. The chances that a person living in the 20th century would die violently were about 3 percent. That's a historically low number — it was five times higher in prehistoric societies. In tribal societies, war was a daily occurrence — just the process of everyone settling down into large-scale governments, even violent ones, was an improvement. If

our hunter-gatherer ancestors could see us now, they'd be confounded by the complete lack of annual head smashing and face stabbing (if you ever unfreeze a caveman, show him our violent video games — he'll go nuts for that shit).



And it's not just war, it's all violent deaths — in 14th century England, some cities had a homicide rate as high as 110 per 100,000 citizens. London's homicide rate in 2012 was just under 1 per 100,000. And we've previously talked about how violent crime is dropping to historic lows, even in the gun-crazy USA. No matter how you break it down, violence is slowly going out of style.

#4. Teen Are Less Likely to Smoke, Drink, or Do Drugs Than Ever

It feels like we've been steadily losing the drug war since the day drugs were invented. All we have to show for it are a pile of laughably ineffective prevention programs like D.A.R.E. and a grossly misguided attempt to imprison everyone who has ever sold or ingested narcotics. When will we ever learn that if the kids want to smoke the methamphetamine, they're going to do it?*

*Neither Cracked.com nor its parent company endorses the smoking of methamphetamine by children.

The Good News:

The National Institute on Drug Abuse has been surveying tens of thousands of high schoolers for almost four decades, and not only is drug use down, but almost every form of substance abuse is down.

The big exception is marijuana; otherwise usage of illicit drugs by high school students has been steadily falling for seven years. And weed's growing popularity is hardly surprising, as the drug inches closer and closer to legality and is generally viewed as not a big deal by pretty much everyone under the age of 65 without a law enforcement mustache. It's a far cry from the bath-salts-induced zombie apocalypse that the media would have us believe is around the corner.

And not only are the kids not injecting hardcore narcotics any more, they're also consuming alcohol at record lows, as binge drinking continued its five-

year decline right into 2012. Or maybe we just can't tell, because those shiftless teenagers are just butt-chugging their booze. But probably not.

Oh, and as of 2012, teen smoking was at its lowest rate in history.

Holy shit, it couldn't be that all of those shrill PSAs and after-school specials actually worked, could it? Actually, it just appears that, for today's kids, their anti-drug is weed.

#3. We're Getting More Tolerant

Yes, America is a country in which half a dozen states still celebrate Confederate History Month, dedicated to the memory of a government founded on the principle that God ordained one race of people to enslave another race of people. And yes, every few months a racially charged story will dominate headlines (see: Trayvon Martin), so maybe it's not too surprising that nearly half the country believes race relations are getting worse. Hell, just read the YouTube comments under any video that has a black person in it. Or even better, don't.

The Good News:

If compared to an ideal world free of prejudice, the current state of things is a shameful walrus orgy of a disaster. If compared to the actual world at any point in the past, things look pretty damn good.

For example, in 2013, 87 percent of Americans surveyed approved of interracial marriage. Just 50 years ago, over 90 percent of Americans disapproved. And while only 8 percent of U.S. marriages are between members of different races, that happens to be an all-time high. And, despite its reputation as a bastion of backward rednecks, Americans are more likely to accept neighbors of different races than are the citizens of most other countries.

“Well that's great, but what about gay marriage? That's still illegal in most of the country.” That's true, and opinion

polls are split right at 50-50, depending on whose polling you trust. But while half the country opposing a person's right to contractually chain him or herself to another seems like bad news, you again have to see how far we've come — that 50 percent approval is up by over 20 percent from the mid-1990s alone. That's a huge turnaround just since the Clinton years.

This is evidently all because of the kids. Most measurable indicators suggest that the younger generations responsible for our future are increasingly tolerant and open-minded (perhaps it's all the weed?). Maybe people can change. Or, more likely, old bigots aren't immortal and are replaced with more tolerant infants every day. Either way, the arrow is pointing up.

#2. Literacy Is at an All-Time High

Seriously, who the hell reads anymore? Go break into a random teenager's room and you won't expect to see a single book, right up until the moment the SWAT team hauls you away. The kids these days always have their hands full with an iPhone, an iPad, or a game controller. Angry Birds and Candy Crush have replaced Tolstoy and Hemingway. However you want to say it, people don't read anymore, because there's an app for that, and it's called movies, TV, and porn.

The Good News:

First, we need to point out that we live in the most literate world ever. Currently, about 99 percent of American adults can read and write. But that's America — a better question would be how the rest of the world is doing. The answer is also pretty impressive. Take India, for example, and its 1.2 billion people. Fifty years ago, only 18 percent of them could have enjoyed the Twilight saga. Today, over 60 percent of the country can enjoy literature's greatest love story. Worldwide as a whole, that figure is 84 percent.

So what are people doing with these new reading powers? At least one

survey suggests that nearly twice as many Americans are reading novels today compared to 60 years ago. Unlike the imaginary ideal 1950s living room, Mom and Pop weren't seated 'round the fire exchanging copies of the New Yorker and ruminating on the works of Fitzgerald or Steinbeck. In reality, they were probably listening to the radio and talking about how great segregation is.

Oh, and those kids with their noses buried in some Internet-capable gadget? They're not just playing games and watching One Direction videos — they're reading. Hell, how could a site like Cracked ever get this popular otherwise? Somebody's reading this stuff, we're sure of it. And you know what else they're doing? Writing. At a mind-boggling rate. Posts on Facebook, Tumblr, message boards, Twitter — it all adds up to what they call the "new literacy." Think about it — for most of recent history, written communication like that was reserved for the classroom. When our ancestors left school, only a tiny fraction ever wrote anything again besides the occasional letter, so English classes were thought of in much the same light as calculus classes today — a bunch of crap that most of us will never need again. Not so now.

All of that practice — informal as it is — really adds up. And given the need for brevity in texts and on Twitter, many of us are almost capable of concisely articulating ourselves.

#1. Worldwide, Poverty Is Dropping at a Shocking Rate

For decades now, we've watched commercials that feature some retired actor stumbling through some impoverished village in some undisclosed location to make viewers feel bad enough to donate money. Considering that we're mired in a worldwide recession, it's a sensible question: "Does any of this even make a difference?"

The Good News:

Yes! Even though lately it seems like the whole world is in a race to the bottom, the poorest of the poor are actually climbing out of the financial shithole. From 1990 to 2012, the number of the world's extreme poor was cut in half. In case you were wondering, that would be the first significant global decline in extreme poverty.

Ever.

Not bad, right?

And these aren't just statistical tricks here — when they calculate this, they're not just counting income, they account for total living conditions — infrastructure, schools, access to clean water, everything. A billion people have that stuff for the first time. And what's really encouraging is that this all happened three years ahead of the official estimates, which pegged 2015 as the soonest such a lofty goal could be achieved.

So how did this happen? International aid helped, but the big jump has been in the increased participation of

previously isolated countries in international trade. You know how people are always complaining about how "they're shipping our jobs overseas!" Well, this is where they went — to people who previously had no jobs at all. And that boom that swept across China and India is expected to continue in places like Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, and Rwanda — all of the places you previously only heard about in the context of heart-breaking ads begging for donations. If things continue at this pace, countries like Nepal and Bangladesh would likely see extreme poverty shrink to near-nonexistent levels.

Now obviously anything having to do with the economy is subject to change, often abrupt ones that occur seemingly at random (for instance, China's economic explosion is due to slow down soon), but we're keeping our eye on the overall trend here. And it's looking like as many as 40 countries might be able to eliminate extreme poverty within a few decades.

So we know it's hard to see it in the daily wash of awful headlines and celebrity scandals, but it's undeniable: We're slowly getting this "civilization" thing figured out.

...By J. Wisniewski December 23, 2013

http://www.cracked.com/article_20731_5-amazing-pieces-good-news-nobody-reporting.html/

February Calendar

February 3 — Amiga-By-The-Loop Chapter
7:30 PM — Main Grand Prairie Library
910 Conover Drive, Grand Prairie

February 3 — Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 9:15 PM — Location TBD

February 24 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

MCCC 4418 Sharpsburg Drive Grand Prairie, Texas 75052
<http://www.amigamccc.org>