

How has Violent Behavior or Tendencies Evolved in the United States?

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Abstract

This study examines historical events in American history and connections them into the application of violence tendencies. By examining sociohistorical contexts of the Wild West, Urban Violence, World War I & II, and using that to connect to the theme of patterns that can be observed in societal unrest to periods of violence. Studying these time periods includes the discussion of the lack of structure within society that forms the causation of humans to act out in extreme ways. Observing these instances in a historical context allows the study to discuss and link this unrest to similar cases in modern society following a Post-Covid Society. Noting the connection between unrest and human violence tendencies, this research makes inferences on possible theories to prevent these violent tendencies observed throughout history.

Keywords: World War I, World War II, societal unrest, society, violent tendencies, urban violence, human nature, history

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The future of law enforcement rests of the ability of authorities to be able to correctly analyze patterns taken from America's history of violence. History provides us lessons of past wars, protests, and violent-filled eras in the country's history, society can take measures to not repeat mistakes that led to civil unrest and raised crime rates. Crime in the United States is a reoccurring problem that shows no means of resolving itself. The findings of the research seek to understand how society has developed over time from the viewpoint that focuses on violent events that have happened in America from the 1900s to 2023.

Over the last few months, this research focuses on analyzing the development of violent tendencies by observing historical events throughout American History. The research dives into past events to make connections about widespread public unrest that leads to violence in society. Firstly, described are the patterns of violence in an overlook starting from the 1900s to present and connections in human behavior that can be examined through periods of violence using analysis of eras of the Wild West Expansion and Urban Violence. World War I & World War II's public reaction allows an analysis of the comparison of the two events. The study aims to point out key differences and similarities in the public overview of the war to connect how public unrest can cause eras of violent occurrences. The end goal is to discuss what implications can be gathered based on the information in today's present time. By pointing out connections, this study hopes to discuss how experts can use these connections to possibly predict what the future of violence could look like and prevention methods. These historical events that hold large cultural change, incur the patterns of human reaction that is a common denominator to the connection between social change and violent tendencies throughout history.

Ungoverned Lands: Wild West and Urban Violence

From a brief overview of the historical aspects of violence, a relation in social change seems to be a prevalent figure in the cause of acts of violence in society. Historians can date back periods of these violent social outbreaks to the origins of social bandits in the conquest of the West, the development of urban violence, and social dilemmas. By analyzing the period of the Westward Expansion leading to the violence associated with the Wild West, the state of unrest and lack of authority established in these new lands, led to more violent matters of control. Ambitious frontier explorers sought to build settlements in the new land, introducing a unique period of self-government. This social unrest was a direct cause of the lack of government control in the new territories and the fast-paced changes that went into the development of this western land. The Wild West was a period of uncertainty and the expansion of unmanned land in the open areas of land in the United States. Law was self-governed, as the government has loose rein of a proper social justice system in the face of the development of these new lands and towns. Vigilantism acted as the means in a fear-based control of the population that inhabited these areas. Individuals that resorted to this means did so – in more violent ways, often gaining reputations in this brute force and violent tendencies towards other people. Notable key figures in the history of the Wild West like Billy the Kid, Pretty Boy Floyd, and John Dillinger acted as social bandits that were acting on the change of Western America. (Brown, 1978).

Similarly, urban violence starting in the mid-1900s in cities like New York, during the pre-civil war decades ran rampant with murder and gang violence. The growing of urban cities led to the development of urban centralized violence. In the major cities of New York, Chicago, and others – the rise of crime started to peak as more diversity of classes and culture mixed. Gangs formed within these communities and organized crime started to gain traction among these urban developments. Criminal heads like Arnold Rothstein, among many others, reined as

heads of these violent crime groups (Brown, 1978). America's urban areas became hubs of violence that frequented these cities in the past and present.

In these specific times, America was undergoing large structural changes that brought social change to the country. Social integration is an important factor to consider when considering the rise of crimes that were being committed in these two situations. Gauging the violent tendencies that arose in these situations, a connection in human behavior can be concluded. Human behavior was dependent on the stability of society; if the state of society was lacking in the proper structure or engaged in mass changes, a level of uncertainty produced more extreme reactions. In the Wild West, territorial expansion, frontier settlers resulted in using more extreme measures of order to replace the lack of government ones in this "newer society" that the west proposed.

Connecting the same theory to the rise of urban violence, it is assumed that with the further establishments of more industrialized cities and the mixture of diversity, that is produced levels of uncertainty with the restructuring of city authority that rushed to adjust to the larger influx of people. Plessner (2019) accounts this viewpoint of realizing that huge changes in these sorts of high violence times, encouraging people to view society as, "spatiotemporally structured execution of embodied relationships to the environment," (p. 273). He hints to the viewpoint that when societal changes do occur – the reaction of people is to respond to this change of normality as more of a chaotic scene. Without the structure of society that they had known, humans compensate with these responses of extreme reactions. This change could potentially indicate the heightened periods of violence that can commonly be seen in these periods of United States History.

Public and Government Relationship in World War I & World War II

Observing the public reaction from events like World War I (WWI) and World War II (WWII) can be used to compare how the people and government decisions correlate to outbreaks of violence. The relationship of people to the trust of the United States government relates to the central idea of proper structure of the government allows the lessened occurrences of violence in the United States from a historical perspective. The more trust that the people had for the rationality and stability of their government's decisions the less they were more likely to take measures to fulfill the "justice" that they feel is lacking. The public response to both WWI and WWII varied depending on the different levels of stability that the people felt the government offered.

There was anti-war violence during WWI due to public outcry and this stability in the relationship between citizens and their government. Public opinion of the war felt as if their government put them in the war-stricken times without good reason. It caused a state of social change that presented uncertainty and financial struggle due to the war efforts within the United States. Due to this change, people acted out in protest, using the concept of "taking measures into their own hands". An Anti-conscription meeting was held in New York (June 15, 1917). It was a meeting that consisted of about 2000 people but ended in a near riot (Brooks, 1978). Organizations, like the People's Council of America, arose that represented the public's distress towards the war. They advocated for peace and democracy instead of violence. In Boston, protesters held an anti-war parade in July 1917, where as many as 8,000 people participated in. Farmers in Oklahoma marched to the capital to protest. The pre-war country was a violent and chaotic time in American history. (Brooks, 1978). Due to the public's opposition to the war, violence in the states increased.

Comparing this to WWII, there were fewer protests and people tended to support the war more. Effective government action to handle this situation reassured the safety of citizens and ensured that the reason for war was met with conviction. (Brooks, 1978). Researcher Roger Baldwin shared his remarks on the reactions towards WWII, inciting that compared to the first, there was no public hysteria, riots, or protests of the war in the war at the same levels of WWI (Brooks, 1978). The differences in the two wars rely on the handling of them by the government. A connection between the human reaction towards change, as mentioned in the Wild West and Urban Violence Comparison, is that violent tendencies interlock with periods of social change and stability. War times are the epitomes of this change, yet the handlings between WWI & WWII resulted in different levels of stability. Brooks (1978) recalls that Attorney General Earl Warren of California testified before a congressional hearing concerned with certain actions within the war, warning that, “my own beliefs concerning vigilantism is that the people do not engage in vigilante activities. So long as they believe that their government through its agencies is taking care of their most serious problem” (pg. 542). Using the historical events that revolve around huge social change helps us to clarify important aspects in the reduction of crime rates in the sense of general trust in the government.

Solution and Present Day

By learning from patterns in the human violence in society over America’s history, it may be possible to use these connections in the present day to prevent social violence. Presently (2023), the nation is faced with the recovery of the COVID-19 pandemic, political strife, and international tensions from other parts of the world, representing an uncertainty within the nation. The United States faces the threats of increasing gun violence, online crime, and gang related violence. For example, Pittsburgh University has faced 3-separate shooting threats in the

final two weeks of school in their 2022-2023 year. ABC News reports that in 2020, gun related deaths increased by 25% from 2019 (Lenthang, 2021). Being able to progress forward with the knowledge of the mistakes that were made in our past allows us to be more informed of what to expect going forward (Armstrong 2006; Burke 2004). This allows experts to hypothesize how law professionals and government can reform to plan forward in ways that minimize this connection between social change and violence. Lawmakers and government officials need to be able to reassure citizens and reinstate their trust in their authority. They must be willing to help individuals “gain a sense of identity” (Tonja & Viljoen, 2016), to release stress that is centered around the shifts in normalcy affecting United States’ citizens. Government support in regulation of gun laws and the increase of mental health concerns that come from the post-pandemic state of the nation pose a situation to the anxiety created by these times. By nurturing this confidence in society and applying steps to ensure an easier adjustment period, citizens will be able to adapt better to their new circumstances. (Huy, 1999). The assurance of protection to citizens through the political tension helps citizens build rapport towards through government and establishes this trust.

Tendencies to violence can be connected to the general human reaction towards societal change that leads to a disparity in what may have been considered normal. In periods of development or country hardship with the lack of structure, as observed in the historical references, people acted out based on the flow of huge change. Lawmakers can analyze historical events in the country’s history to try to predict periods of violence and curb it through prevention methods that led to reassurance and government support. To quell the troubles of the human consciousness that could propose a means to lower violence tendencies in the future. Only when

society allows itself to remain structured do citizens feel less obligated to take extreme measures, as observed in the research.

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