Anthropology of War

- What is war and how does it differ from capital punishment?
- How common was warfare in the past compared to the present?
- How deadly was warfare in the past and present?
- Why are there so few women warriors?
Standard Definitions for War or Collective Aggression

War
Any sort of inter-group fighting between socially organized and recognized. Thus, it is distinguished from simple murder or assault.

- **Feuding** - fights among members of the same political community.
- **Internal Warfare**: fights between members of different political communities of the same culture or society.

- **External warfare**: fights between political communities of different societies. In these cases there may not be technological parity and their may be organizational differences.
An Alternative Definition of War: Social Substitutability

- Capital Punishment and War are the same except the last criterion is only true for war
  - Collective armed conflict (variable)
  - Approved by the community
  - Morally justified
  - Participants esteemed by their community
  - Entails organized, planned, and premeditated attacks (variable)
  - Serves identifiable instrumental objectives (revenge, defense, appropriation, or excision)
  - **Social substitution governs the targeting of individuals for lethal violence**

The transition to war

The shift from capital punishment to warfare occurs when we move from an individual homicide followed by the execution of the killer by the victim’s aggrieved kin to

War in which an unsuspecting relative or co-resident of the perpetrator of an initial homicide is killed in blood vengeance by the homicide victim’s aggrieved next of kin or co-residents leading to a cycle of revenge

The key innovation is social substitutability. Kin or co-residents of the perpetrator are legitimate targets of retribution.
Modified Definition of War

- A form of intergroup fighting done by socially organized combat teams coupled with the notion of “social substitutability” whereby any member of the enemy group is a legitimate target.

- Social substitutability distinguishes feud from true war.
Some Peaceful Societies

- No warfare but some lethal violence
  - Semai
  - !Kung
  - Copper Eskimo

- No warfare and no lethal violence
  - Mbuti Pygmy
  - Siriono
  - Hutterites
  - Tristan da Cunha
### Some general contrasts between “primitive” and modern warfare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primitive</th>
<th>Modern</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of enemy</td>
<td>known</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal stake</td>
<td>direct</td>
<td>indirect or absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of coercion</td>
<td>difficult or impossible</td>
<td>standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>time period</td>
<td>homicides per 100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1951-56</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basoga (Uganda)</td>
<td>1952-54</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>4.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>5.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middlesex, England</td>
<td>1580-1603</td>
<td>6.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samoa (Western and American)</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>9.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>10.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>1948-52</td>
<td>15.1</td>
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<td>Kent, England</td>
<td>13th century</td>
<td>15.1</td>
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<td>Colombia</td>
<td>1960</td>
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<tr>
<td>!Kung</td>
<td>1920-55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>58.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tepoztlan, Mexico</td>
<td>1920-55</td>
<td>ca. 59.0</td>
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<td>Yanomamö</td>
<td>1970-74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mexican mestizo village</td>
<td>1961-65</td>
<td>251.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Casiguran Agta*</td>
<td>1977-84</td>
<td>326.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Murngin (Australia)</td>
<td>1906-26</td>
<td>ca. 330.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goilala (New Guinea)</td>
<td>1896-1946</td>
<td>533.0</td>
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<td>1963-82</td>
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<td>1940-62</td>
<td>683.0</td>
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<td>Newa (New Guinea)</td>
<td>1959-68</td>
<td>778.0</td>
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*While the Agta figure was obtained during a period of intense socio-demographic stress and alcohol use, the author’s supporting information (pp. 388-97, 537-43) suggests that a high rate of homicide, perhaps a third to half of that reported at present.

Source: Knauff, *Current Anthropology* 28(4) 1987
A note on homicide rates

- Only one homicide every 15-20 years in a society of 150 yields a homicide rate of 33.3 to 44.4 per 100,000 per annum.

- Consequently, such societies appear to be relatively peaceful even though these rates are on a par with a large American city.
Percentage of population killed yearly in tribal and state societies

From Keeley, Figure 6.1, page 89
*War Before Civilization*
Percent Killed and Wounded in Specific Battles

From Keeley, Figure 4.1, page 64
War Before Civilization
Deaths in warfare as a percentage of all deaths

- Quadan #117
- Jivaro
- Port Rupert
- Yanomamö
- All Quadan
- Mae Enga
- Oneota
- Dugum Dani
- Yanomamö
- NE Plains
- Vedbaek
- Huli
- Anggor
- Gebusi
- Tevlec
- Coastal California
- Aztec 15th
- Skateholm
- France 19th
- W. Europe 17th

percent population killed in warfare
Why are There So Few Women Warriors?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Endogamy and/or exclusive external war</th>
<th>Women Warriors Present</th>
<th>Women Warriors Absent</th>
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<td>9</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some community exogamy and some internal war including feuding</th>
<th>Women Warriors Present</th>
<th>Women Warriors Absent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>34</td>
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</table>

P<0.01, Fisher's Exact Test, two-tailed
Nine of the 67 societies surveyed had women warriors and all were found in societies with community endogamy and/or exclusive external war.

**Groups with women warriors:**
- Comanche
- Crow
- Delaware
- Fox
- Gros Ventre
- Maori
- Majuro
- Navaho
- Orokaiva