

Contingency and the Nature of History

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THREE SCHOOLS OF HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION

- Those Emphasizing ***Economic or Structural*** Factors such as the role of geography, the environment, class status, etc.
- Those Emphasizing ***Cultural*** Factors such as religious belief, ethnic or kin allegiances, etc.
- Those Emphasizing ***Contingent*** Factors such as chance, luck, and the decisions of individuals



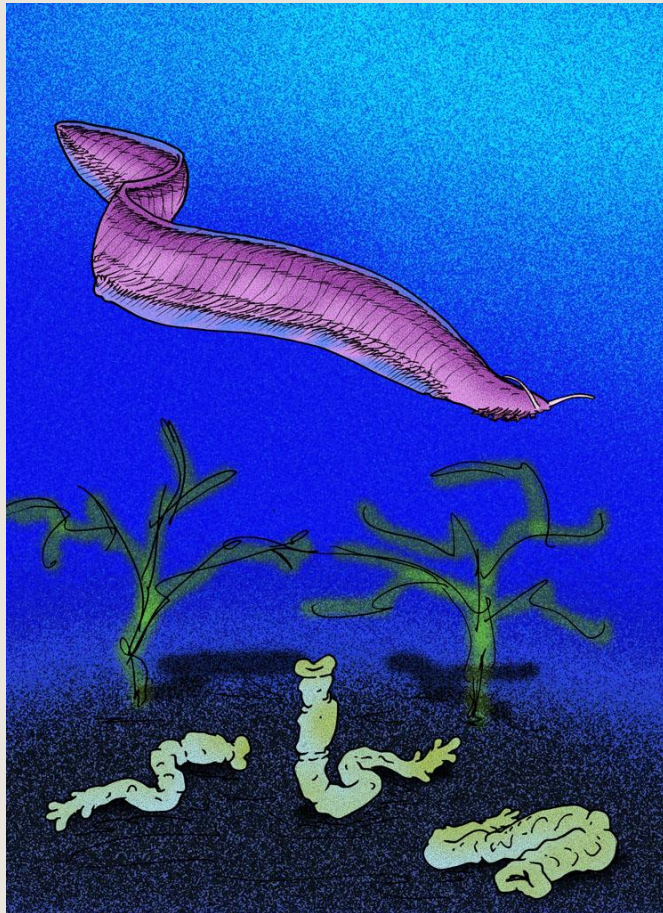
1. THE SURVIVAL OF VERTEBRATE ANCESTORS IN THE END PERMIAN EXTINCTION *250 MILLION YEARS BEFORE PRESENT*



“If *Pikaia* does not survive the [Cambrian decimation of life], we [vertebrates] are wiped out of future history – all of us from shark to robin to orangutan.” Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life*, 1989



RECENT RESEARCH ON *PIKAIA*



In the thirty years since the publication of *Wonderful Life*, there continues to be debate and uncertainty on *Pikaia* as the ancestor of all vertebrates. A 2012 study supported this view, but a 2013 response concluded that “maybe” was a better conclusion.



THE LARGER POINT ON *PIKAIA*

Gould's larger point is that 90%-96% of all species went extinct at the end of the Permian period, and that the ancestor(s) of vertebrates were very fortunate to have survived at all.



2. THE EXTINCTION OF THE DINOSAURS

65.5 MILLION YEAR BEFORE PRESENT

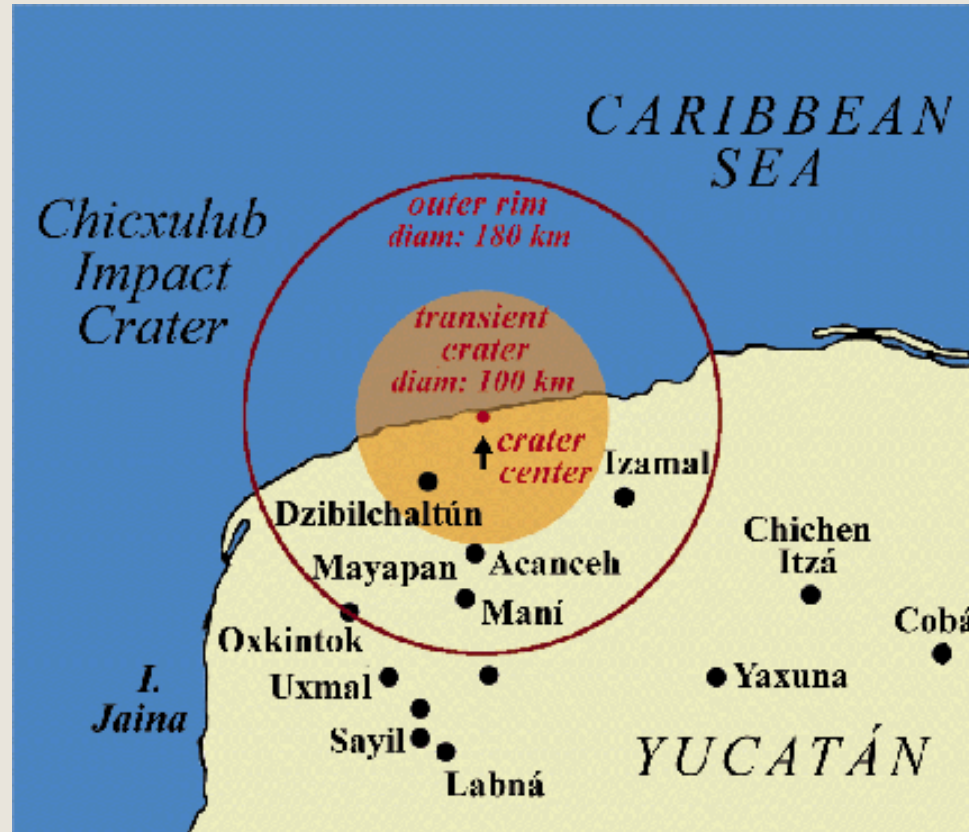


“If dinosaurs had not died in this event, they would probably still dominate the domain of large-bodied vertebrates, as they had for so long with such conspicuous success, and mammals would still be small creatures in the interstices of their world.”

Stephen Jay Gould



THE GREAT CRATER IN YUCATÁN



3. THE SURVIVAL OF HOMO SAPIENS

150,000 B.C.E.



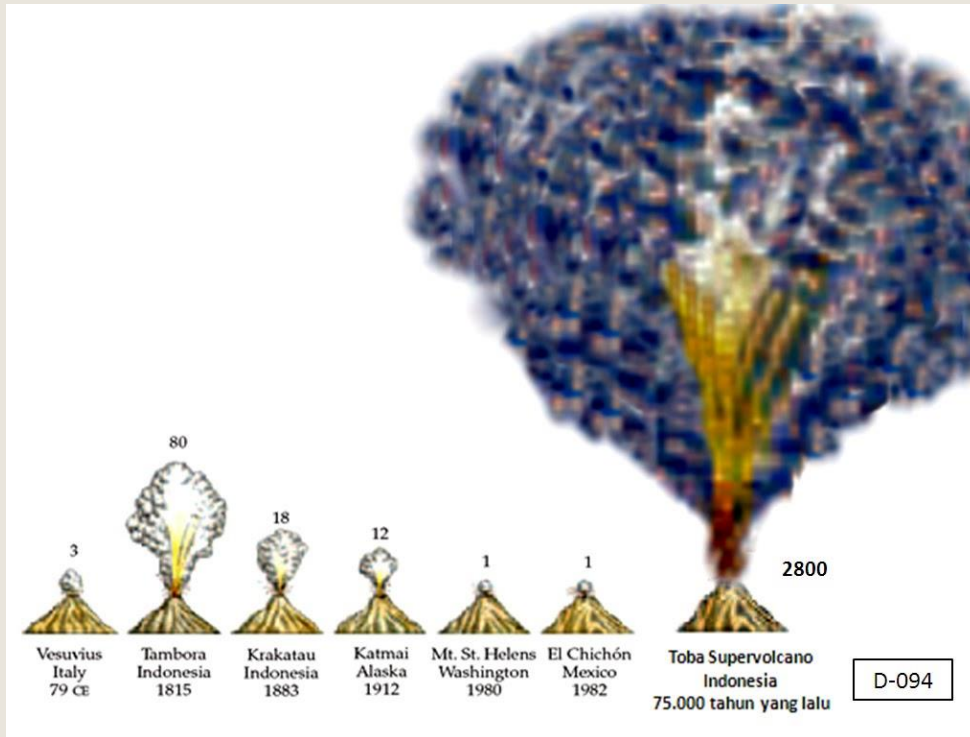
BRUSH WITH EXTINCTION, PART ONE



According to some scientists, the population of *homo sapiens* fell to as low as 600 individuals as a result of global climate that started 195,000 years ago. The temperature drop produced a world of ice and deserts. *Homo sapiens* survived in just one part of the world, on the coast of southern Africa, where they discovered the existence of local starch-rich tuber plants buried beneath the soil and shellfish preserved by locally warm waters.



BRUSH WITH EXTINCTION, PART TWO

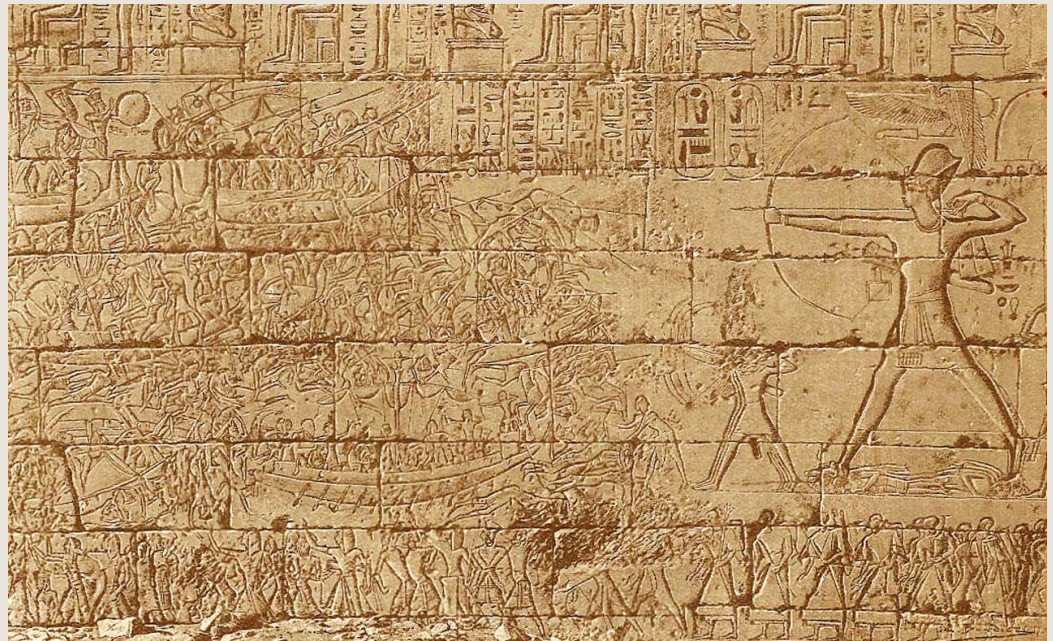


About 70,000 years ago, an incredible volcanic explosion in Toba produced so much ash that scientists estimate daylight from the sun was dimmed for six years. During this sudden period of temperature drop, it is estimated that the *homo sapien* population again declined, bottoming out at perhaps only 1000 individuals.



4. THE LATE BRONZE AGE COLLAPSE OF MEDITERRANEAN CIVILIZATIONS

~1177 B.C.E.



“The worst disaster in the ancient world, even more calamitous than the collapse of the western Roman empire.” Historian Robert Drews



THE RISE OF GREECE AND ALEXANDER



The collapse of almost all of the civilizations of the late Bronze Age (including the Mycenaean Greeks, the ancient Egyptians, as well as many others) paved the way for the rise of the Greeks, whose influence would be spread far and wide by Alexander the Great, deeply shaping the modern world.

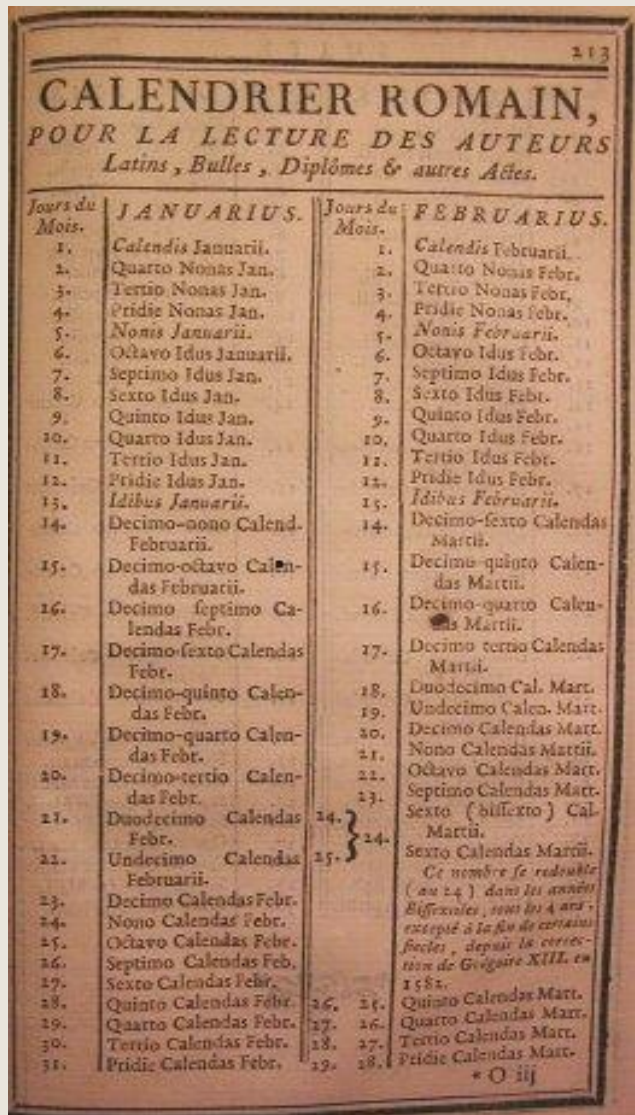


5. SCIPIO DEFEATS HANNIBAL

THE BATTLE OF ZAMA, 19 OCTOBER 202 B.C.E.



THE INFLUENCE OF ROME



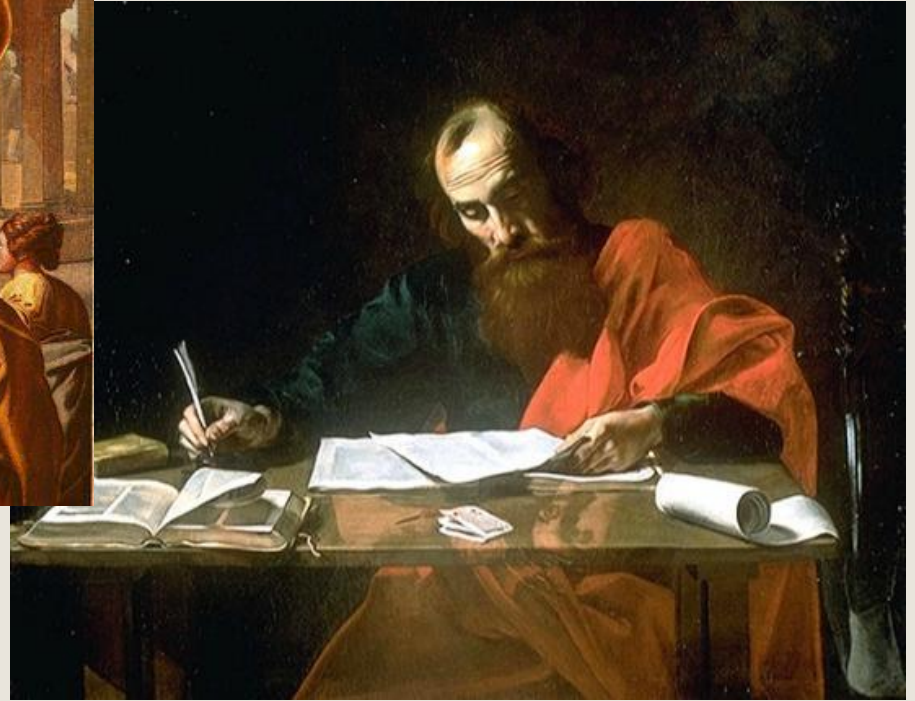
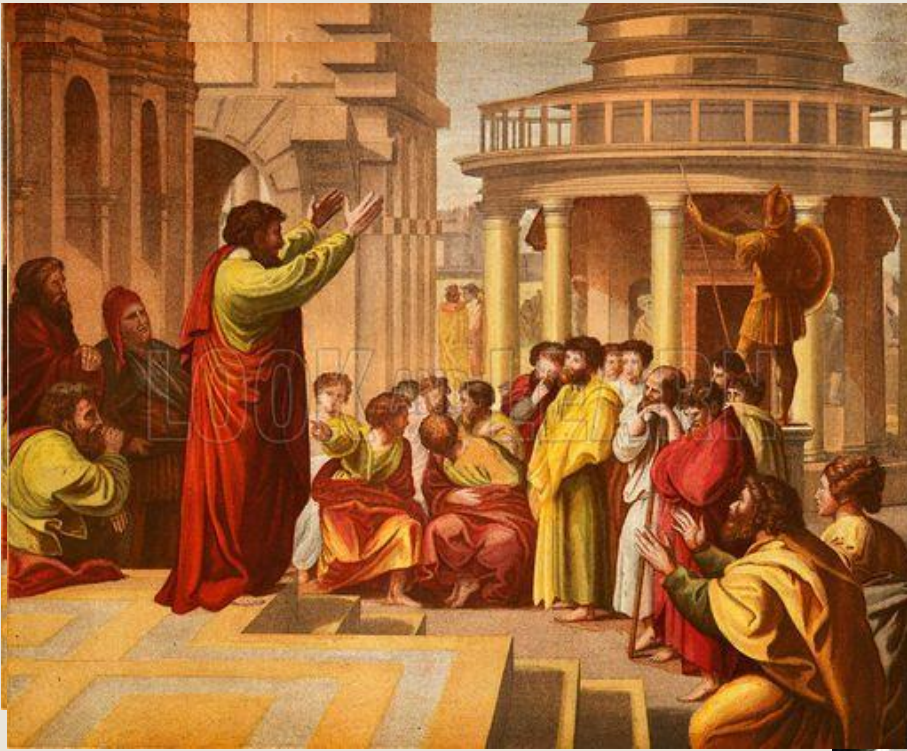
- The Romans gave us the 365 day calendar and the names of all of our months. For example, March is for the Roman god of war, Mars, while July is for Julius Caesar and August is for the first Emperor, Augustus.
- Roman weddings included a period of engagement symbolized by the giving of a ring, followed by a ceremony hosted by the bride's family and led by a priest, with public vows, the eating of cake, and a conclusion involving the greeting of the wedding guests.
- Romans celebrated birthdays with parties and presents, the first civilization that is known to have cared about the exact day of birth.



6. PAUL'S CONVERSION ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

33 A.D.





Rome would also eventually help to spread Christianity throughout the western world, but Christianity might not have survived long enough to be adopted by Constantine if not for Paul, who after his own personal conversion, went on to spread the Church throughout the Mediterranean via his missionary work and his influential writings.



7. THREE EXPLORERS AND THE RISE OF EUROPE

15TH CENTURY



ZHENG HE AND THE CHINESE TREASURE FLEETS



In the 15th century, the world's greatest maritime explorer was a Chinese admiral named **Zheng He** whose voyages were ended by the decision of the Chinese Emperor.



PRINCE HENRY THE NAVIGATOR AND THE UNEXPECTED PORTUGUESE EMPIRE



The Portuguese, under **Prince Henry**, invented a new ocean-going ship, the caravel, and succeeded in rounding, first, Cape Bojador in West Africa and, later, the Cape of Good Hope.



CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, THE AMERICAS, AND THE RISE OF EUROPE



This Portuguese success led the Spanish to gamble on **Christopher Columbus's** improbable attempt to sail to the Far East by going west. Columbus encountered the Americas, and the wealth of the Aztec and Incan empires fueled European industrialization and allowed Europeans to surpass the Chinese economy and dominate the globe over the next five hundred years.



8. GEORGE WASHINGTON SAVES THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

NEWBURGH, NEW YORK AND ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND; 1783



FOILING THE NEWBURGH CONSPIRACY



"Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country."

George Washington



GEORGE III ON WASHINGTON

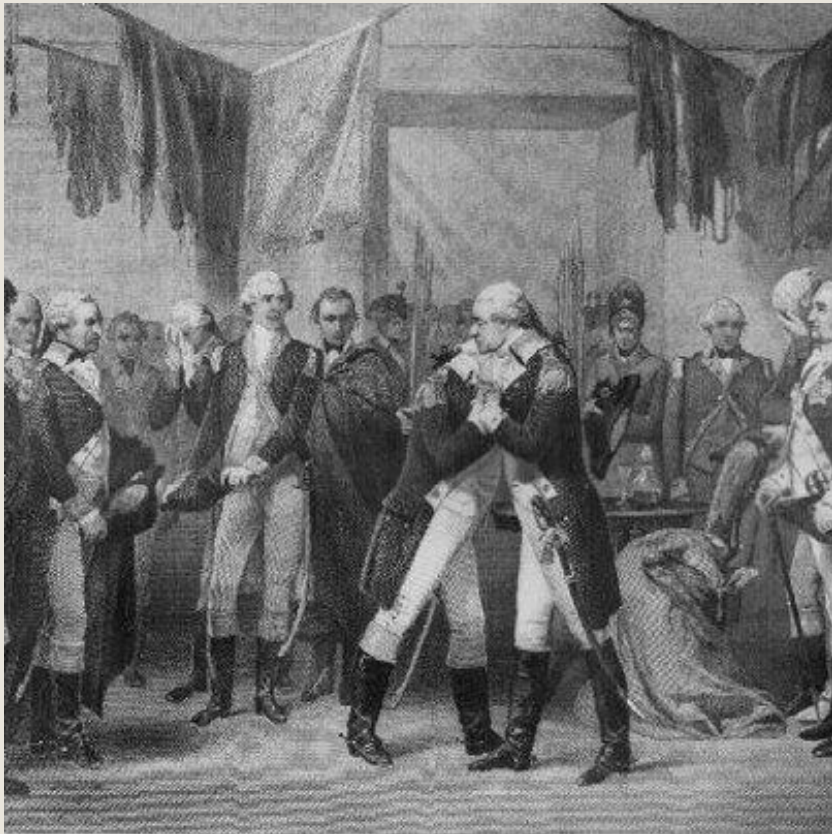
King George III asked American painter, Benjamin West, what Washington would do after winning independence.

West replied, “They say he will return to his farm.”

“If he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world.”



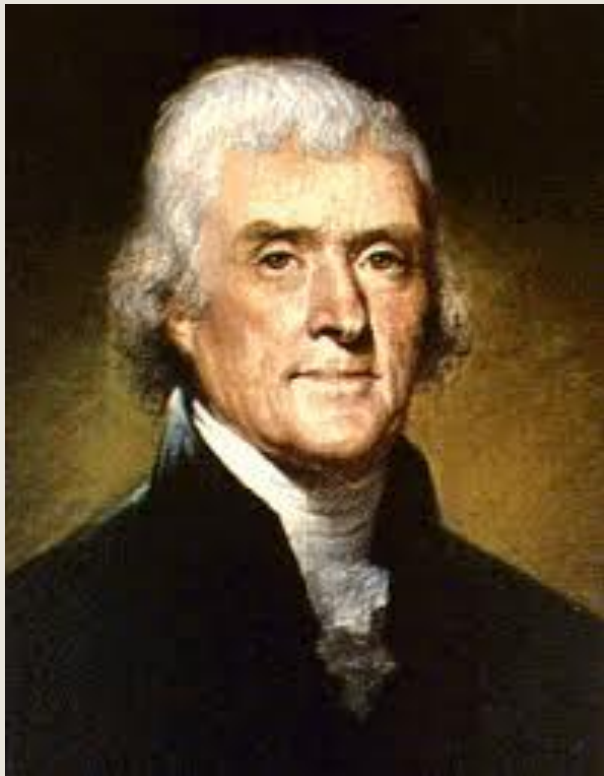
THE RESIGNATION SPEECH, ANNAPOLIS, DECEMBER 23, 1783



“Having now finished the work assigned me, I retire from the great theatre of Action—and bidding an Affectionate farewell to this August body under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my Commission, and take my leave of all the employments of public life.”



JEFFERSON ON WASHINGTON



Asked why the American Revolution had not turned violent as had the French Revolution, Thomas Jefferson replied: “The moderation and virtue of a single character probably prevented this Revolution from being closed, as most others have been, by a subversion of that liberty it was intended to establish.”



9. HITLER ESCAPES ASSASSINATION

8 NOVEMBER 1939



George Esler's bomb exploded at 9:20pm, killing eight and wounding 60, but Hitler had left at 9:07pm, having moved up his speech by 30 minutes because fog required him to take the train, instead of a plane, back to Berlin.



IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II



Estimated Total Deaths: 78 million

Soviet Union: 23 million

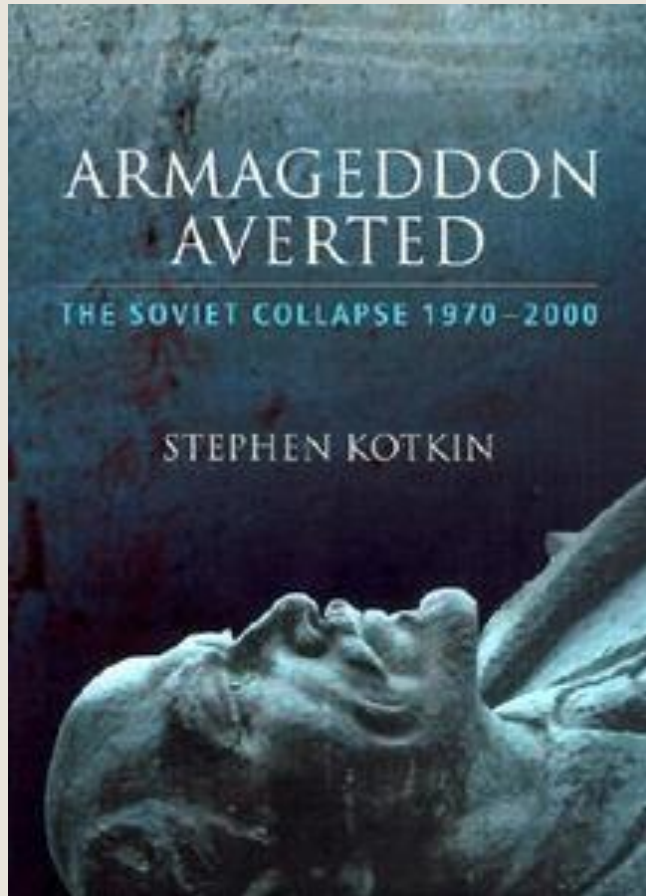
Germany: 8 million

Poland: 6 million



10. THE END OF THE SOVIET UNION

1991

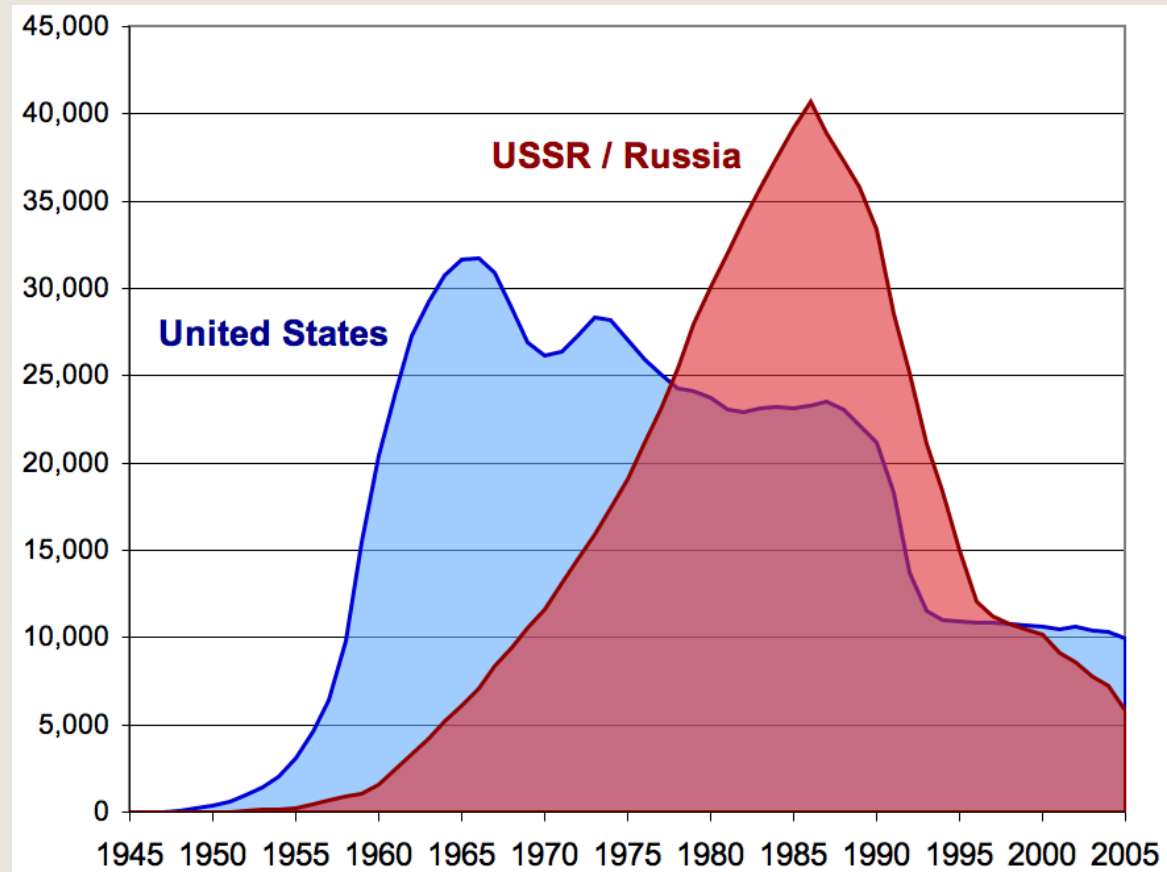


“By any reckoning, the disintegration of the Soviet Union was one of the most astonishing events in modern history. The largest and most threatening empire in the world, with five million soldiers in Soviet garrisons from Budapest to Vladivostok, fell apart and ceased to exist, its leaders abdicating under pressure from crowds of unarmed people in the streets, with barely a shot fired.”

New York Times



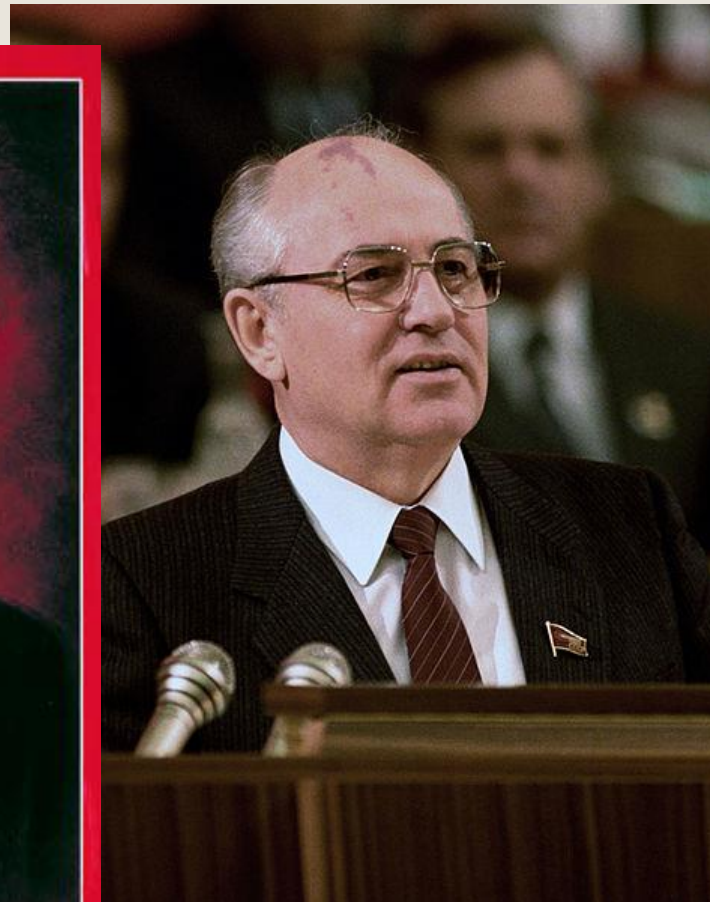
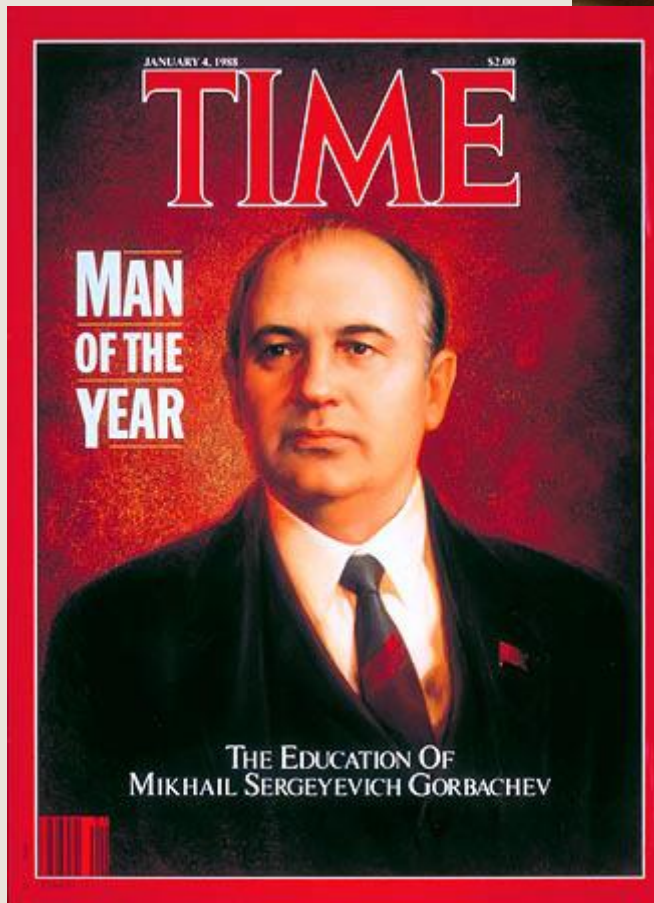
THE PEACEFUL DISSOLUTION OF THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL MILITARY ARSENAL



USA and USSR Nuclear Stockpiles, 1945-2005



GORBACHEV OPPOSES MILITARY COUP, AUGUST 1991



GORBACHEV RESIGNS DECEMBER 25, 1991

