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# Diversity & Human Rights *focus*

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.” -Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 3

## The Evolution of Human Aggression: Lessons for Today’s Conflicts

*Stephen M. Downes is Professor and Associate Department Chair of the University of Utah Department of Philosophy.*

The University of Utah’s Barbara L. and Norman C. Tanner Center for Nonviolent Human Rights Advocacy presents a conference February 25 - 27 entitled “The Evolution of Human Aggression: Lessons for Today’s Conflicts.”

“Curbing human violence is one of the four great challenges humanity faces in the 21st century,” notes University of Utah Biologist David Carrier.

“Homicide, domestic violence and warfare have been hallmarks of our species from the beginning. Our ability to prevent violence in the future will depend on our understanding of the interactions between human nature and environmental, social and cultural circumstances. Evolutionary biology has an important role to play in achieving this understanding.” In other words, in order to prevent violence, we must first understand it.

Viewing aggression from an evolutionary perspective presents a highly complex picture. One might imagine the evolutionary approach would have led researchers to converge on one view — for example, that humans have evolved to be the most violent of all species — but this is far from the case.

Presenters at the conference will explore many aspects of human and primate aggressive behavior and conciliatory behavior. Frans De Waal, the conference keynote speaker, will lead the proceedings with a discussion of reconciliation among the great apes and other animals. De Waal’s research has led him to an optimistic outlook on the role of reconciliation in human affairs. The other conference keynote speakers are Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, co-authors of *The Truth about Cinderella*, a revealing work about the evolutionary roots of domestic violence, specifically violence directed against step-children. Daly’s and Wilson’s research extends to the sources of homicidal behavior in general. In their presentation, they will discuss the complex web of social and biological causes that lead to murder.

Conference presenters include a wide range of well-known researchers in anthropology, archaeology, endocrinology, evolutionary biology, political science, primatology and psychology. Anthropologist Richard Wrangham will present on his view that human inter-group violence is best understood as an imbalance of power system. Psychologist Steven Pinker will present and defend the view that despite common perception, rates and levels of human violence are in decline.

Political Scientist Dominic Johnson will report on the results of his recent experiments on novel predictors of levels of aggression in policy options.

A large number of other exciting presenters will also weigh in on the topic.

The conference will also include a poster session, during which researchers (both faculty and graduate students from Utah and further afield) will present accessible snapshots of their recent research findings. Discussion will culminate with a community panel during which members of several groups who confront violence in society in various ways will discuss the practical implications of the scientific work with other conference participants.

George Cheney, director of the Barbara L. and Norman C. Tanner Center for Nonviolent Human Rights Advocacy, sums up the conference by saying: “The topic of this year’s conference highlights how our evolutionary heritage sets the stage for certain dimensions of conflict — and cooperation — in today’s society. Full comprehension of the roles of violence and the possibilities for peace in the contemporary world requires that we look to science, as well as to the social sciences, the humanities and the arts, for key parts of the puzzle of human struggle.”

More information about the conference is located at <http://www.humanrights.utah.edu>



# Diverse Business Day

at the Utah State Legislature

*"...our community family is large and diverse. It includes all of us..." Mayor Ralph Becker, State of the City Address*



**DATE:**

February 24, 2009

**TIME:**

9:00 a.m.

**PLACE:**

Utah State Capitol  
East Multipurpose  
Room 130

*Continental breakfast  
included.*

We invite minority-owned businesses to join us as we engage in this opportunity to learn how a bill becomes law and how you can effect change. Discover how to build robust communities through civic involvement— a responsibility to ensure prosperity and equality for all. Special guests include Senator Ross Romero, Representative Mark Wheatley and Senator Luz Robles. A highlight of this event is a formal introduction on the floors of the Utah House of Representatives and Utah State Senate. Please come, learn and be recognized for the invaluable economic development contribution you make in building our community.

*Equal in Dignity and Rights*



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