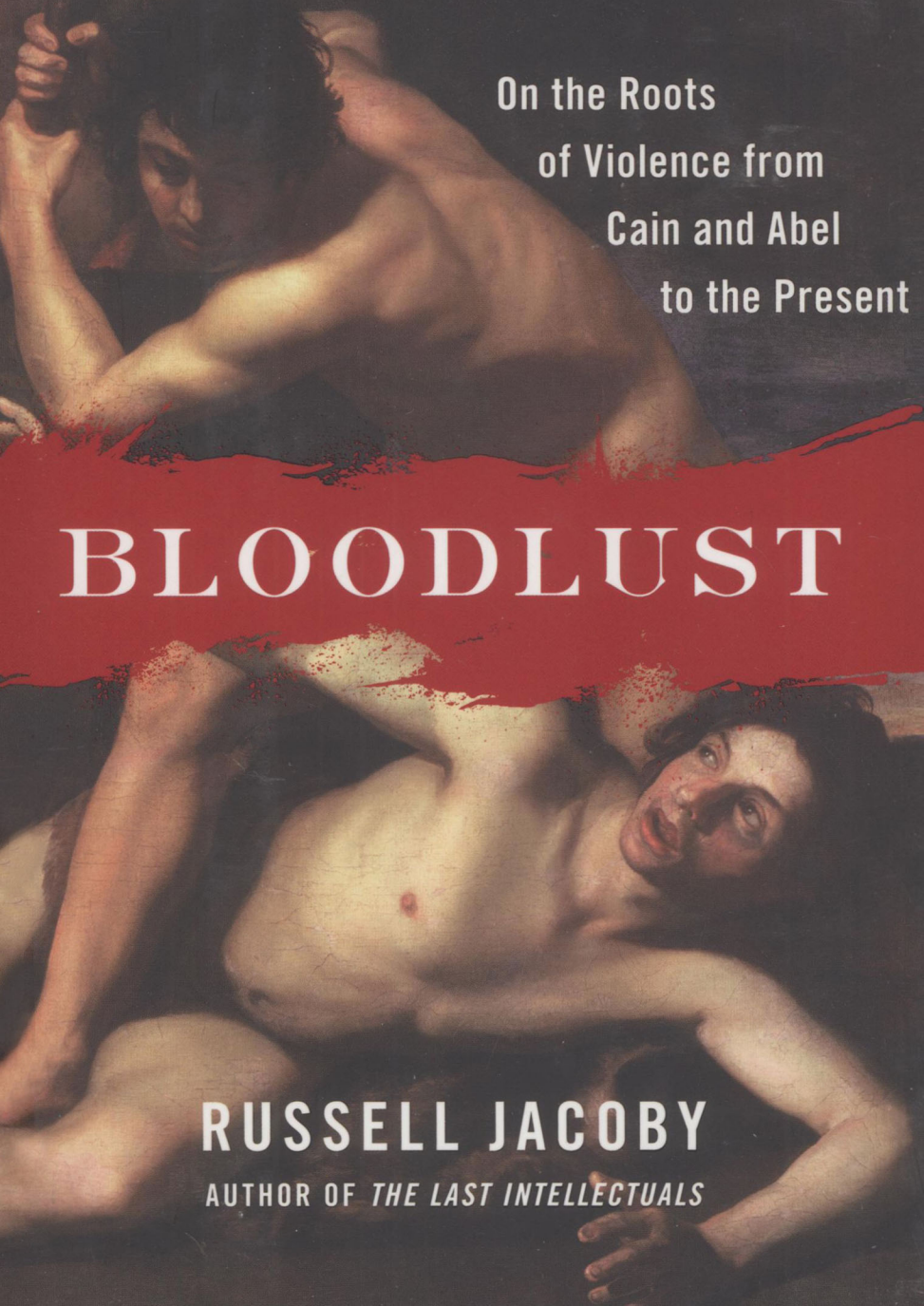
"*Bloodlust* takes us beyond fratricide and shows us, like Caliban gaping into the mirror, the real 'enemy within.' This is humanist scholarship at its most engaged." —CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS



On the Roots of Violence from Cain and Abel to the Present

# BLOODLUST

RUSSELL JACOBY

AUTHOR OF *THE LAST INTELLECTUALS*

# BLOODLUST

*On the Roots of Violence from Cain and Abel to the Present*



RUSSELL JACOBY

Free Press
New York London Toronto Sydney

Free Press
A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020



First Free Press hardcover edition April 2011

FREE PRESS and colophon are trademarks of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases,
please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales at
1-866-506-1949 or business@simonandschuster.com.

The Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau can bring authors
to your live event. For more information or to book an event,
contact the Simon & Schuster Speakers Bureau at
1-866-248-3049 or visit our website at www.simonspeakers.com.

Designed by Carla Jayne Jones

Manufactured in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Jacoby, Russell.
Bloodlust : on the roots of violence from Cain and Abel
to the present / Russell Jacoby.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Violence—History. 2. Violence—Psychological aspects. I. Title.
HM1116.J33 2011
303.609—dc22 1020028150

ISBN 978-1-4391-0024-0
ISBN 978-1-4391-1756-9 (ebook)

# ALSO BY RUSSELL JACOBY

*The Repression of Psychoanalysis*

*Dogmatic Wisdom*

*Social Amnesia*

*The End of Utopia*

*The Last Intellectuals*

*Dialectic of Defeat*

*Picture Imperfect*

*For Cristina and "Dice"*

# PREFACE

And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." Such are the details of the first murder in the Judeo-Christian world. Motive? Unclear. Means? Unclear. Penalty? Unclear. The killing of Abel by Cain has been called "the first genocide."[1] Half of mankind slays the other half.

Several millennia later, not much has changed. Despite an ocean of words about violence—its origins, course, and prevention—something has gone virtually unrecognized: its primal form is fratricide. This observation contradicts both common sense and the collective wisdom of teachers and preachers, who declaim that we fear—and sometimes should fear—the "other," the dangerous stranger. Citizens and scholars alike believe that enemies lurk in the street and beyond the street, where we confront a "clash of civilizations" with foreigners who challenge our way of life.

The truth is more unsettling. It is not so much the unknown that threatens us but the known. We disdain and attack our broth-

ers—our kin, our acquaintances, our neighbors—whom we know well, perhaps too well. We know their faults, their beliefs, their desires, and we distrust them *because* of that. The most common form of violence is violence between acquaintances or neighbors or kindred communities within nations—civil wars writ large and small. From assault to genocide, from assassination to massacre, violence usually emerges from inside the fold rather than outside it. A Hindu nationalist assassinated Mohandas Gandhi, "the father" of India (as Nehru called him) and a pioneer of nonviolent politics. An Egyptian Muslim assassinated Anwar Sadat, the president of Egypt and a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. An Israeli Jew assassinated Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister and also a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Each of these assassins was a good son of his country and religion.

Civil wars are generally more savage and bear more lasting consequences than state-versus-state wars, and they increasingly characterize contemporary strife. Many more died in the American Civil War—at a time when the U.S. population was a tenth of what it is today—than in any other American conflict; its long-term effects probably surpass those of the others as well. Major bloodletting of the twentieth century—hundreds of thousands to millions of deaths—occurred in civil wars such as the Russian Civil War, the Chinese Civil War of 1927–37 and 1945–49, and the Spanish Civil War. In Iraq today—leaving aside causes and blame—the number of people killed in sectarian warfare between Sunnis and Shiites far exceeds the number slain by foreign troops. "By any definition, Iraq is already in a state of civil war," stated two political scientists in 2007.[2] The ongoing civil wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have already caused millions of deaths, with the world taking little notice.

World War II, a signal example of twentieth-century international conflict, also presents a paradigmatic case of fratricide: the extermination of the Jews. Anti-Semitism as it developed in Germany (and Austria) did not target a bizarre or foreign population. On the contrary. The German Jews were extraordinarily well

assimilated and successful. They were the very opposite of outsiders. In the professions of law, medicine, journalism, science, music, and banking, they belonged to the establishment. German anti-Semitism targeted neighbors, not strangers.

The situation in Eastern Europe, where most Jews lived and most of the slaughter took place, did not always differ from that of Western Europe. Many Eastern European Jews were integral to society. A film by the Polish documentary filmmaker Agnieszka Arnold, *Where Is My Older Brother, Cain?*, revisited the killing of the Jews in Jedwabne, a small town in northeastern Poland. Excellent relations had prevailed between Jews and Poles in that region. "Everybody was on a first-name basis," recalled a resident interviewed by Arnold.[3] But one summer day in 1941 half of the population killed the other half, the entire Jewish population of approximately 1,600 people; the Jews were mainly herded into a barn, which was set afire. The Princeton historian Jan T. Gross, who investigated the mass murder, titled his account *Neighbors*.[4]

The extermination of European Jews prefigures more recent mass killings—in Cambodia, in Bosnia, in Rwanda—perpetrated not by foreigners but by neighbors. Serbs and Muslims lived together for centuries in Bosnia and had intermarried and worked together. Even to one another, Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda were not clearly distinguishable. As the French Africanist Gérard Prunier put it, the Rwandan genocide possessed a "neighborly quality" and proceeded "home-by-home." He suggests that in order to fathom it, "one should imagine a world in which many of the German SS would have had Jewish relatives"—a perspective that subverts the conventional idea that genocide arises from hatred of the "other."[5] This notion is almost exactly wrong. The German Christians and the German Jews, the Serbs and the Muslims, the Iraqi Sunni and the Shiites, the Hutus and the Tutsi knew each other well. Fratricide does not arise from a lack of understanding. Its origins may be just the opposite.

On the fifth anniversary of September 11, 2001, a news article reported that during the previous year homicides in the

United States had increased to about seventeen thousand.[6] We obsess about strangers piloting airplanes into our buildings, but in the United States in 2005 six times the number killed in the World Trade Center were murdered on the streets or inside our own homes and offices. The news of the uptick in homicides—a 4.8 percent increase—received virtually no attention, perhaps for obvious reasons. Its news value was hardly comparable to that of suicidal bombers and their victims. The murders stretched out over a year and across the country; in kind and degree they also recur more or less each year.

These regular losses serve to remind us that the majority of criminal violence takes place between people who know each other. Domestic violence speaks for itself. Cautious citizens may push for better street lighting, but they are much more likely to be assaulted, even killed, in the light of the kitchen by someone familiar than in a parking garage by a complete stranger. A study of homicides in New York City from 2003 to 2005 found that three-quarters of the perpetrators knew their victims.[7] National crime reports confirm that the majority of homicides happen between friends or associates. For rape and assault, the numbers tilt even more toward the familiar. You have more to fear from a spouse, an ex-spouse, or a coworker than you do from someone you don't know.[8] City gangs overwhelmingly target other city gangs, a few blocks away.[9] Like, not unlike, prompts violence.

Where I live in Los Angeles, the public schools look forbidding. High chain-link fences almost entirely surround them. During the day a police car lingers in front of the entrance to the high school. The fear, of course, is of an eruption of violence, but school violence does not usually emanate from intruders. Who is kept out by the fences? The police in the idling car hope to deter the students inside the school.

The proposition that violence derives from kith and kin overturns a core belief that we assault and are assaulted by those who are strangers to us. If this were so, the solution would be at hand. Get to know the stranger. Talk with the stranger. Reach out. The

cure for violence is better communication, perhaps better education. Study foreign cultures and peoples. Unfortunately, however, our brother, our neighbor, enrages us precisely because we understand him. Cain knew his brother—he "talked with Abel his brother"—and slew him afterward.

If threat emerges not from the strange but from the familiar, is it nonetheless possible that the strange and familiar may be connected? Sigmund Freud argued this some time ago. He contended that the link between the German words for "uncanny" (*unheimlich*) and "familiar" (*heimlich*) suggests an inner connection between the two. What frightens us as strange might be something eerily familiar. The work of Freud may help to chart the underground sources of fratricidal violence. We hate the neighbor we are enjoined to love. Why? Perhaps small disparities between people provoke greater hatred than do the large ones. Freud introduced the phrase "the narcissism of minor differences" to describe this phenomenon. He noted that "it is precisely the little dissimilarities in persons who are otherwise alike that arouse feelings of strangeness and enmity between them."[10]

Freud first broached the narcissism of minor differences in "The Taboo of Virginity," an essay in which he also took up the "dread of woman." Is it possible that these two notions are linked? That the narcissism of minor differences, the instigator of enmity, arises from differences between the sexes? The literary and philosophical critic René Girard may also help illuminate the menace posed by the familiar. His work has long centered on what he has called "mimetic desire" and its relationship to violence. Girard challenges the usual inclination to prize likeness in society. "In human relationships words like *sameness* and *similarity* evoke an image of harmony," he writes.[11] But for Girard similarity leads to aggression and rivalry. Not differences but their absence is the danger.

These ideas of similarity and its discontents run against the common understanding of global conflict. We like to believe that world hostilities are driven by antagonistic principles about how society should be constituted. To hold that differences of scale—

relative economic deprivation, for instance—not substance divide the world seems to trivialize the stakes. Rather, we prefer the scenario of clashing civilizations, such as the hostility between Western and Islamic cultures. Presumably fundamentalist Muslims advance tenets that conflict with those of the West. Perhaps extremist Muslim anger, however, stems not from differences between the two cultures but from their diminution. What infuriates these fundamentalists is not the West's distance from them but its encroachment; they seethe at copying Western society. Osama bin Laden rails at Muslims for "imitating" Westerners. "The Jews and Christians have tempted us with the comforts of life and its cheap pleasures and invaded us with their materialistic values."[12]

The subject of violence has generated a library of books and studies. Scholars usually distinguish interpersonal violence such as homicide and rape from collective violence such as wars and riots. Historians like to look at particulars—this murder, that war—and wind up with slender conclusions. Sociologists and political scientists like to look at multiple events and wind up with many conclusions, usually self-evident and jargonized. "My aim is a general theory of violence as situational process," writes one sociologist, who considered thirty varieties from muggings to sports hooliganism. "All kinds of violent confrontations have the same basic tension . . . called non-solidarity entrainment."[13]

Of late the sociobiological approach to violence, never completely out of fashion, has returned with a vengeance. Almost fifty years ago Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression* and Robert Ardrey's *The Territorial Imperative* proposed biology-driven theories of violence. Advances in genetics and evolutionary biology have given new force to this perspective. Psychology as well has embraced biology and chemistry. Psychoanalysis, which overthrew the biological, has in its turn been overthrown by the biological. Psychological ailments, it is now believed, mainly derive from chemical imbalances in the brain. Psychiatrists rarely analyze their patients; they write prescriptions for them.[14]

Darwinian thought, with its emphasis on the struggle for sur-

vival, is on the ascent in political and social studies. The sociobiological theories emphasize a heritable propensity for violence at both the individual and the social level. A book on foreign policy subtitled *On the Evolutionary Origins of War and Ethnic Conflict* harnesses Darwin to global strife. "The time is right," states political scientist Bradley A. Thayer, "to bring Darwin into the study of international relations."[15] In an encyclopedic study of war, the Israeli scholar Azar Gat defends an evolutionary perspective. "There is nothing special about deadly human violence and war," he writes. For Gat, "throughout nature" violent competition is "the rule."[16] Meanwhile, studies of criminal violence invoke genetics. A well-regarded book on homicide in the United States by historian Randolph Roth closes with the primatologist Frans de Waal declaring that humans have by nature an unparalleled capacity for violence.[17]

There is nothing in this book about Darwin or DNA. The biological may indeed play a role in violence—it plays a role in everything—but it is not my focus. I am wedded to history, but I want to do more than string together events or facts. I will not pretend that I am reinventing the wheel. But perhaps I am nudging the vehicle in a new direction. I am putting together histories and reflections in order to expose the fratricidal roots of violence. I offer some ideas about these as they pertain to such twentieth-century configurations as German anti-Semitism and Islamic terrorism. In the following chapters I say nothing more about criminal and domestic violence, whose fratricidal dimension seems obvious.

*Bloodlust* is an essay, not a tome. I want to suggest, not foreclose; provoke, not pronounce. I look with awe, even envy, on the seven volumes and three thousand pages of William T. Vollmann's *Rising Up and Rising Down,* which explore violence and its justification.[18] If it fell off a high shelf—not impossible in Vollmann's earthquake-prone California—his compendium could easily kill someone, a contretemps he probably discusses somewhere. In volume one he writes about ornamental daggers; in volume three, boiling lobsters; in volume six, Apache suicides. My pages could

vanish without a trace inside his. I salute his omnivorous intellect, but my working principle differs from his: prune away rather than pile on.

This book dips in and out of history, but it remains an essay—an effort to shed light on the origins of violence. In no way do I propose a universal theory of violence, nor do I present solutions. What I offer is occasional illumination and understanding, perhaps a mixed blessing. In dictionaries as in life, *apprehension* is linked to *apprehensive*. And yet, to quote T. W. Adorno, "thought is happiness, even where it defines unhappiness."[19] In thinking about the bad, we reach for the good.

Los Angeles
May 2010

# BLOODLUST

# CONTENTS

# 1

# "KINSMEN, NEIGHBORS, AND COMPATRIOTS"

Shortly before sunrise on Saturday, March 27, 1546, Alfonso Díaz, a Spaniard and minor officiant at the Vatican, arrived in Neuburg on the Danube, a village outside Augsburg, Germany. His brother, Juan, was in Neuburg to supervise the printing of a book by a leading architect of the Protestant Reformation. Like virtually all Spaniards, Juan had begun life as a Catholic, but during his studies in Paris he drew close to the Protestants and eventually moved to Strasbourg, a Calvinist stronghold, to join them. Alfonso had remained in the Church.

Alfonso and a companion approached the inn where Juan was staying. They carried a letter for him.[1] As his companion rapped on the door, Alfonso stood out of sight. The servant who answered the door was instructed to awaken Juan, because of an urgent message from his brother. A first-person account by one Claudio Senarcleo describes the scene. "Juan was asleep in a room with me, when the young domestic came in and awakened him. He jumped out of bed, clad only in a light nightgown, and went into the front

room to receive the 'messenger' with Alfonso's letter." Alfonso stayed hidden from view as Juan received the letter. "Dawn was beginning to break, and Juan went over to the window to read it."

Alfonso stated in the letter that Juan was not safe in Neuburg; he was the object of a plot, and he should leave immediately. Senarcleo's account continues:

> While his attention was thus engaged, the assassin took out the hatchet he carried hidden inside his jacket and plunged it up to the handle into the right side of Juan's head, near the temple. In an instant all the sensory organs in the brain were destroyed, so that Juan could not utter a sound. So as not to disturb any of us with the sound of a falling body, the assassin caught Juan's body and eased it quietly to the floor, where it lay with the hatchet protruding from the head. All this was done so quickly and silently that none of us knew anything about it.[2]

Events three months earlier had set the fratricide in motion. As part of the Protestant contingent, Juan Díaz had attended a colloquy to hammer out religious unity in German states riven by the Reformation. (Like other such conferences, it ended in failure.)[3] At this gathering Juan had encountered an old Spanish acquaintance, Pedro de Malvenda, a member of the Catholic delegation, who was shocked to discover Juan among the Protestants. "What! Juan Díaz in Germany, and in the company of Protestants! . . . No, I am deceived; it is a phantom before me, resembling Díaz, indeed, in stature and in feature, but it is a mere empty image!"[4]

For Malvenda, Spain was the national embodiment of Catholicism. "To conquer one Spaniard," he reportedly declared, "was more momentous . . . than to win ten thousand Germans or numberless proselytes from other nations." Díaz must not "destroy the purity of the word 'Spanish.'" At the conference he sought in vain to bring Díaz back into the Church. He begged him to confess his sins and ask for repentance from Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and (as Carlos I) King of Spain. Malvenda also alerted