

Just Under The Skin

A Veneer of Civilization

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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I like to watch NFL football. It's one of my favorite things to do, especially on a Sunday. But football is an aggressive, violent sport. When an offensive lineman and a defensive lineman hit each other at each snap, it's like the effect of a 30-35 mile-per-hour traffic accident on the body. So, grown, very large men are flying all over the field, and injuries of all sorts are common during a game. It seems that injury timeouts happen—sometimes it seems like it's once or twice every drive. It's really not, but they happen very frequently—every one or two drives during a game.

The average NFL player has a 4.1% chance each game of suffering an injury that will prevent him from playing in the next game. And it's basically the same throughout most of the positions on the field, except for running back—they tend to get hurt more often than any other position. The league and the players' union has been criticized for years about not doing something about the high rates of player injuries. But in a sport like that, there is not a whole lot they can do. And lately the focus has been on concussions, and we are not going to talk about concussions. But they could occur in what I'm going to talk about.

Some have called football chess on a 100-yard field of bright green grass, and others have called it a substitute for war. A few weeks ago, in the Steelers-Browns game in Cleveland, the war element raised its ugly head higher than normal, and a significant brawl occurred as the game was ending. Browns' defensive end Miles Garrett tackled and tussled with the Steelers' quarterback, a young man by the name of Mason Rudolph, who just happens to have graduated out of high school here in Rock Hill. Of course, everything blew up at that point, when that happened. It all ended with Garrett ripping off Rudolph's helmet and smashing him over the head with it. The benches cleared, and all kinds of stuff happened over there. There were eight seconds left in the game. It was really quite pointless.

Well, the NFL suspended Miles Garrett indefinitely. He'll be out at least this season and who knows how much longer. They fined him \$45,623 (if you want to be exact). Rudolph actually received a stiffer fine: \$50,000, for grabbing the back of Garrett's helmet. Some think he actually incited Garrett to retaliate, but the NFL, in their investigation, could find no evidence of it.

For the melee that transpired between the two teams, two additional people were suspended, and a total of \$732,422 in fines were handed out to 33 players and both teams. By the way, both teams received a \$250,000 fine each for failing to keep players off the field. The NFL is holding its breath this weekend as the Steelers and the Browns are playing again in Pittsburgh. That'll be tomorrow at one o'clock. You'll want to watch.

That's just a football example. I haven't even started in on hockey, have I?

The sad thing is that this kind of violence is not uncommon in our world today. There seems to be a deep anger that seething just under the skin of too many people in our society, and it's ready to erupt when it's touched off by any kind of spark. It could be as simple as disrespect, or even a seemingly small disagreement on a closely held belief.

Even here in Charlotte in September 2016, a tense but peaceful protest over a police shooting suddenly turned violent and bloody. We had three nights of rioting, and they ended with one protester dead (at the hands of another protester), numerous police officers injured, and many cars and businesses vandalized along the protest route. And that's just Charlotte. These kinds of things are happening all over this country and all over the world.

Wikipedia keeps a list of major riots for each year. For 2019, the list (we are almost into December, which is hard to believe) of 2019's most violent riots is 22 items deep, whereas the 2018 list was only seven long, and 2017's list had only 12. So, 2019 has been a rather violent year for riots.

Most of these riots did not take place in America. There were a few in France and a few in Britain. In fact, just a few days ago, on November the 25th, a brawl among as many as 100 knife- and machete-wielding youths of both sexes—both teenage boys and girls—turned into a violent riot at a movie theater in Birmingham in the UK. Police had to rush there, and used their batons and Tasers and police dogs to bring everything under control. They arrested five of these teenagers, and seven policemen went to the hospital.

One major protest that did not make the 2019 list was the ongoing protest in Hong Kong, which I was kind of scratching my head over. Why did not Wikipedia put that one in there? But they had an actual, whole long article on it. The rioting over there started against an extradition bill that may have further eroded Hong Kong's autonomy under Chinese rule, which is kind of funny to think about—"autonomy under Chinese rule." But that's the way they frame it.

The protests have actually been going on since March 15, so they are about eight months old now. So far, only two have died, which is good that it is only that few. But more than 2,600 have been injured, and the police there have put about 4,500 people in prison. And it's kind of funny: Though the bill that they are protesting against was officially withdrawn in October, they are still protesting out there, agitating to force the government to see to other pro-democracy demands. And because they are still protesting, it could break out in more violence at any time.

I do not want to make too much of this. It's not my intention to do so. I just wanted to bring it to your attention. But I do want to remind us that the veneer of civilization runs quite thin over human nature. We tend to think, "Things do not happen like that nowadays! This is the 21st century." But, the truth is out there that they do happen. Maybe not on our street, but they are happening in various places around the country and around the world. We need to remember that violence is a key component of human nature without God.

Remember, it was Cain's first resort when he got his feelings hurt, and so he took it out on his brother Abel, who was the supposed source of his not being accepted before God.

The Earth before the flood, Moses tells us in Genesis 6:11, "was corrupt before God, and . . . filled with violence." And the apostle Paul warns us, bringing this up to the present in II Timothy 3, that the last days will be "perilous," and people will be "without self-control, brutal, [and] . . . headstrong" (II Timothy 3:3-4). I just named a couple of those that are in that long list. Violence will be name of the game during the Great Tribulation.

My point is that we should not become too comfortable in our oh-so-sophisticated society. Our culture's seeming contentment and non-aggression are the proverbial lipstick on a pig. In time, it will show its true nature.

