Threads

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Concurrency

• Virtualization
  – Virtual CPUs
  – Virtual memory

• Concurrency
  – In the user space by running multi-threaded programs
  – In the kernel space too!

• OS Issues
  – How to support multi-threaded programs?
  – How to coordinate accesses to shared resources?
Motivation

• Process is a cool abstraction to run a new program
  – OS provides protection and isolation among processes

• But, …
  – A single process cannot benefit from multi-cores
  – Very cumbersome to write a program with many cooperating processes
  – Expensive to create a new process
  – High communication overheads between processes
  – Expensive context switching between processes

• How can we increase concurrency within a process cheaply?
What is a Thread?

- A thread of control:
  A sequence of instructions being executed in a program
- A thread has its own
  - Thread ID
  - Set of registers including PC & SP
  - Stack
- Threads share an address space
- Separate the concept of a process from its execution state
#include <stdio.h>
#include <pthread.h>

void *hello (void *arg)
{
    printf ("hello, world\n");
    ...
}

int main()
{
    pthread_t tid;

    pthread_create (&tid, NULL, hello, NULL);
    printf ("hello from main thread\n");
    ...
}
Address Space with Threads
Processes vs. Threads

• A thread is bound to a single process
• A process, however, can have multiple threads
• Sharing data between threads is cheap; all see the same address space
• Threads are the unit of scheduling
• Processes are containers in which threads execute
  – PID, Address space, user and group ID, open file descriptors, current working directory, etc.
• Processes are static, while threads are the dynamic entities
Benefits of Multi-threading

• Creating concurrency is cheap

• Improves program structure
  – Divide large task across several cooperative threads

• Throughput
  – By overlapping computation with I/O operations

• Responsiveness
  – Can handle concurrent events (e.g. web servers)

• Resource sharing

• Utilization of multi-core architectures
  – Allows building parallel programs
## OS Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># threads per addr space:</th>
<th># of addr spaces:</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Many</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>MS/DOS</td>
<td>Traditional UNIX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Early Macintosh</td>
<td>Xv6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Many embedded OSes</td>
<td>Mach, OS/2, Linux, Windows, Mac OS X, Solaris, HP-UX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(VxWorks, uClinux, ..)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Threads Interface

• Pthreads (POSIX Threads)
  – A POSIX standard (IEEE 1003.1c) API for thread creation and synchronization
  – API specifies the behavior of the thread library
  – Implementation is up to development of the library
  – Common in Unix-like operating systems
    • Linux, Mac OS X, Solaris, FreeBSD, NetBSD, OpenBSD, etc.

• Microsoft Windows has its own Thread API
  – Win32/Win64 threads
Pthreads (1)

• Thread creation/termination

```c
int pthread_create (pthread_t *tid,
                    pthread_attr_t *attr,
                    void *(start_routine)(void *),
                    void *arg);

void pthread_exit   (void *retval);

int pthread_join    (pthread_t tid,
                    void **thread_return);
```
Pthreads (2)

• Mutexes

```c
int pthread_mutex_init
    (pthread_mutex_t *mutex,
     const pthread_mutexattr_t *mattr);

void pthread_mutex_destroy
    (pthread_mutex_t *mutex);

void pthread_mutex_lock
    (pthread_mutex_t *mutex);

void pthread_mutex_unlock
    (pthread_mutex_t *mutex);
```
Pthreads (3)

- **Condition variables**

```c
int pthread_cond_init
    (pthread_cond_t *cond,
     const pthread_condattr_t *cattr);

void pthread_cond_destroy
    (pthread_cond_t *cond);

void pthread_cond_wait
    (pthread_cond_t *cond,
     pthread_mutex_t *mutex);

void pthread_cond_signal
    (pthread_cond_t *cond);

void pthread_cond_broadcast
    (pthread_cond_t *cond);
```
Kernel-level Threads

- **OS-managed threads**
  - OS manages threads and processes
  - All thread operations are implemented in the kernel
  - Thread creation and management requires system calls
  - OS schedules all the threads
  - Creating threads are cheaper than creating processes
  - Windows, Linux, Solaris, Mac OS X, AIX, HP-UX, …
Kernel-level Threads

Process A

A's thread 1

Context switch

A's thread 2

Process B

B's Thread 1

... 

User-mode

Kernel-mode

Context switch
Kernel-level Threads: Limitations

• They can still be too expensive
• Thread operations are all system calls
• Must maintain kernel state for each thread
  – Can place limit on the number of simultaneous threads
• OS must scale well with increasing number of threads
• Kernel-level threads have to be general to support the needs of all programmers, languages, runtime systems, etc.
User-level Threads

• Threads are implemented at the user level
  – A library linked into the program manages the threads
  – Threads are invisible to the OS
  – All the thread operations are done via procedure calls (no kernel involvement)
  – Small and fast: 10-100x faster than kernel-level threads
  – Portable
  – Tunable to meet application needs
User-level Threads: Limitations

• Usually, rely on non-preemptive scheduling
  – Preemptive scheduling can be emulated using Unix signals

• OS can make poor decisions as it is not aware of user-level threads
  – Scheduling a process with only idle threads
  – Blocking the entire process when a thread initiates I/O
  – Unscheduling a process with a thread holding a lock

• All blocking system calls should be emulated in the library via non-blocking calls to the kernel
  – Requires coordination between kernel and thread manager

• Cannot leverage multi-core CPUs
User-level Threads

- Process A
  - A's thread 1
    - User-level thread library
  - A's thread 2
    - Context switch
  - A's thread 2
    - Context switch

- Process B
  - B's Thread 1

User-mode

Kernel-mode