



When Good People Think Strange Things About Dogs

Patrick Burns

I am thrilled to be here today among all you canine professionals. You see the folks in this room are more than dog trainers. You talk dogs, sleep dogs, write dogs, and debate dogs.

You're not just dog trainers.... You are also dog debaters, dog listeners, dog commentators, dog bloggers, dog list-serv managers, dog authors, dog newsletter editors.... and yes ... even dog conference presenters.

You are the people who shape – or could shape – a great deal of dog culture in this country.

Dog culture. How many of you have thought about culture in the world of dogs? Perhaps we should think of that more because, I will argue, it is culture that is responsible for the fact that so many good people think strange things about dogs.



Strange Things



To start, look around. How many people in this room are non-white? A strange question, eh? You thought this session was about dogs, didn't you? The point is that for most of the world, this discussion is strange. In much of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, dogs are not allowed indoors. Who lets an animal indoors that may have fleas and ticks, and that may eat its own feces? Who allows such an animal on the bed? Who lets it lick a child in the face? No one!

So, to put a point on it, this obsession with dogs that we have is, for the most part, a European cultural affliction. Most of the world, believe it or not, does not have this affliction. So I am odd, and you are odd, and we are odd together!

What we think about dogs is shaped by culture, which in turn is shaped by economics, history, religion and even geography.

So, this love affair with dogs that we share is a bit strange to those that may come from a different culture and a different place, that have a different religious background, or who might be somewhere else on the economic ladder. Let's talk about a few other strange things a lot of folks thing about dogs.



Improving Dogs?



How about the notion that we are improving dogs?

Is this an improved German Shepherd with its roached back and collapsing ends?

And NO, this is not just a show pose – this is what the show-line German Shepherd looks like, and one reason the Secret Service no longer uses this breed – it moves without power and with a back end that too often wobbles on the verge of collapse.



Improving Dogs?



Is this an improved guard dog?

This is a dog that was on display as a top example of his breed at Crufts this year.

There is not a single police force or military facility in the world that uses this breed as a guard dog. No one with a lick of sense uses this dog for security. Many dogs of this breed can barely see, most are so heavy they can barely move. And, of course, I have not even gotten to health!



Improving Dogs?



Is this an improved Bulldog?

The modern English Bulldog cannot catch a bull – it cannot even catch its own breath!

And yet, we are supposed to believe that the show ring improves dogs.

QUESTION: Can we improve dogs by selecting for exaggeration and deformity of the kind you see here?



Improving Dogs?



How about work?

Can we improve bird dogs without ever hunting birds under them?



Improving Dogs?



Can we improve Border Collies without testing them on sheep or cattle, or at least ducks and geese?



Improving Dogs?



Can we improve running dogs without matching them on hare and rabbits?

QUESTION: Can we improve working dogs without actually working them? Real work, not fake work?



Improving Dogs?



How about health?

This is a Golden Retriever ... about 60 percent of American dogs from this breed will die from Cancer.

About 40 percent of British dogs from this breed will die from cancer.

● ● ● | Improving Dogs?



This is a Dogue de Bordeaux -- the average life span for this breed is just 5.5 years.

Does it make sense to invest the time to train a dog of this breed if it is likely to be dead or disabled in just a year or two?



Improving Dogs?



This is a Scottie -- a small breed whose life span is shrinking and which now stands at 10 years, as compared to a Jack Russell's at 15.

Show Scotties are *less* healthy than “backyard breeder” Scotties.

QUESTION: Can we improve the health of dogs by breeding them in a closed registry founded on a tiny pool of a dozen or two dozen dogs?

Can we make healthy dogs by doubling down on genes *ad infinitum*?



Improving Dogs?



And it's not just the dogs that are the problem is it?

This is a dog show judge. She is certified to judge more than 50 breeds, most of which she has not worked and most of which she has never owned or trained. She will judge dogs in a ring, based on less than 15 seconds of inspection.

Health will be afforded zero points.

Temperament will be afforded zero points.

Work will be afforded zero points.

Dog shows are about hiding faults, generally by putting up a very young dog and then using scissors, spray, chalk, dye, razors and even depilatory cream to hide faults.

QUESTION: Who thinks this person and this process will get us healthier dogs? Better working dogs? Better pets?



Man's Best Friend?



How about dog shelters?

Your tax dollars at work here!

This is the place we kill dogs in this country. We call it a shelter

Kill-shelter.

We have gone through the looking glass to the point that we do not even see the Orwellian nature of the juxtaposition of those two words.

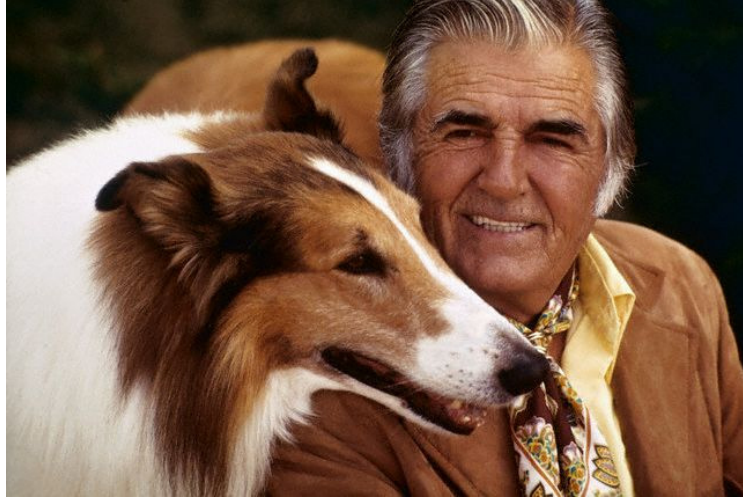
Kill Shelter.

We tell each other there are too many dogs, and we have to kill them, but even as we say this, the back of the newspaper is full of puppy ads (hold up newspaper).

QUESTION: Who thinks there might be a disconnect between the sales of puppies and the demand for what puppies actually grow up to be -- DOGS?



The Lassie Method?



How about dog training? This is Rudd Weatherwax, Lassie's owner and trainer. Rudd Weatherwax trained dogs for over 50 years.

Rudd's many dogs were trained with a wide variety of techniques, including verbal praise, repetition, food, and a choke chain (hold up choke chain).

Today we are told by people who have yet to bury their first dog that experienced trainers like Rudd Weather were inhumane, cruel, and ineffective ... that no one should ever read their books.

QUESTION: Who here thinks Rudd Weatherwax could not train a dog? Who here thinks reading a book about dog training written by someone like Rudd Weatherwax or Bill Koelher is some sort of "gate way drug" to animal cruelty?



How Did We Get Here?



These are some of the strange things... good people ... think about dogs.

We'll circle back to these points, but before we do, I want to ask WHY?

How did we get here? You see, what we think about dogs is NOT because we are stupid... or evilor even ignorant, as that term is normally used.

No, we think strange things about dogs simply because we are all the product of a history... a history shaped by geography and class.... economics and pride.... avarice and envy.

It is not our fault that we think this way.

It is only our fault if we *continue* to think this way.



Where to start?

I am going to start at the beginning.

(Hold up proto-dog skull)

This is the first dog. It is not a wolf.

This is where we started.... And this is what we ended up with (hold up skull of Bulldog).

This is an English Bulldog -- the symbol of Great Britain and the U.S. Marine Corps.

If Al Qaeda were to design a dog to mock either the United States or Great Britain, this is the dog they would come up with.



A Top Ten Breed?



This is a dog that cannot reliably mate on its own.

Breeders use rape racks or else vets do artificial insemination.

This is a dog that cannot reliably whelp on its own – it has to be cut open by a veterinarian because its head is too big, and its pelvis is too small.

This is a dog that cannot breathe very well on its own. It snores and often sleeps sitting up because it can choke on its own collapsing windpipe.

When you see this dog almost anywhere, its tongue is out because it has to breathe through its mouth, and its face is too short for its tongue.



A Top Ten Breed?



This is a dog with an intestinal system so jammed and twisted it farts constantly.

This is a breed famous for skin infections due to excessive skin around the head, and a twisted pig-like tail at the end.

This (hold up Bulldog skull) is what we did to this... the natural dog (hold up proto-dog skeleton).

And today, this (bulldog skull) is a top 10 breed in the American Kennel Club and it is a symbol of Great Britain and America's fighting forces.



A Top Ten Breed?



How did we go from this (pro-dog skull) to this (Bull Dog skull)?

The fact that one of the most wrecked dogs on the planet is a symbol of Britain is not an accident. Remember when I said what we think about dogs is a product of culture? True. It is, for the most part, a product of British culture.

Now, to stress again, no one started out with evil intent or malice in their heart.

Believe it or not, they started out to make things better.

Let's start at the beginning...



A Very Short History



It was not that long ago.

Dog breeds – as we know them today -- are not very old.

Oh sure, broad types of dogs are ancient – running dogs, lap dogs, guard dogs, herding dogs and sled dogs.

But NONE of these are breeds, but instead are more generalized types – a much more generalized classification.

Before 1700 or so, dogs were almost never housed in kennels, and as a consequence they tended to breed randomly, and to the extent types developed, they were land race dogs – a kind of natural dog produced by a combination of geography and common purpose related to that geography.



A Very Short History



This was the world of dogs for many thousand of years – quite unpredictable varieties in many urbane locations, and a certain unity of form-around-purpose in remote areas with distinct geographies, where specialized working dogs evolved with specific lands and specific functions.



Enclosure Movement



Along came the Enclosure Movement in Great Britain.

The Enclosure Movement began in the 12th Century with the enclosure of royal lands for deer parks, but it did not roar into prominence until the late 18th and early 19th centuries when much of rural England was swept clean of subsistence agriculture and human settlement.

This "rich man's land grab" pushed millions of poor tenant farmers and squatters off the land and into squalid cities and towns – the kind of scenes made famous by Charles Dickens.

The Enclosure Movement did not just clear the land for sheep. It also made possible the rapid improvement of farm stock.



Robert Bakewell

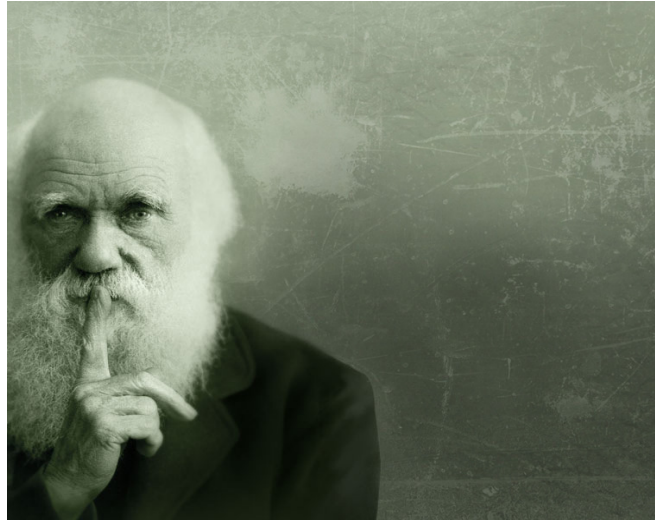


In the 18th Century, livestock was still breeding at random, but beginning in the late 1700s, a farmer by the name of Robert Bakewell realized that by separating males from females — made easy by the rising number of enclosed fields — a farmer could select sires and, by so doing, rapidly improve the quality of his animals.

By deliberately inbreeding livestock, and selecting for desirable traits, Bakewell rapidly "improved" sheep and cattle, and transformed modern agriculture forever.

Bakewell's experiments with sheep and cattle quickly spilled over to other farm stock, such as pigs and chickens, and eventually into the world of dogs.

● ● ● | The Origin of Breeds



One of the first people to first write about Bakewell's experiments with breeding was a gentleman by the name of Erasmus Darwin – Charles Darwin's grandfather.

It was Erasmus Darwin who first noted how quickly the morphology of animals could be changed by selection at the hand of man.

He wrote a book called *Zoonomia* which knocked on the door of evolutionary theory

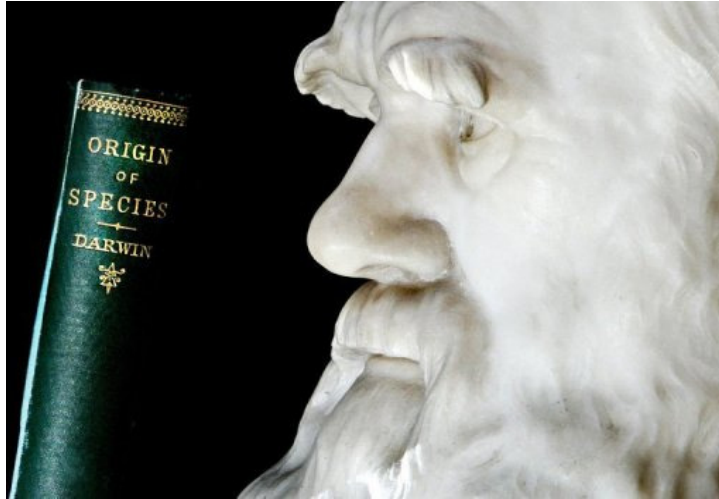


In 1859, the first formal dog show was held at Newcastle upon Tyne, sponsored by two shotgun makers, and featuring only Pointers and Setters.

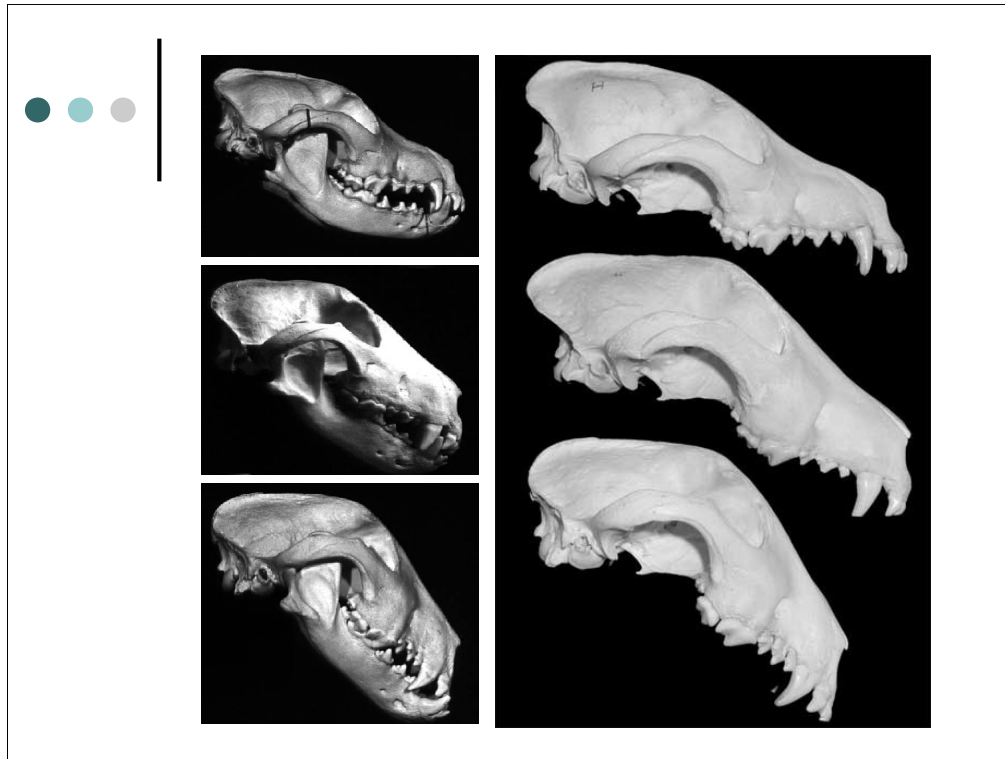
John Henry Walsh, the editor of *The Field* magazine, was one of the judges of this first dog show, and he later went on to found the Kennel Club following a formula that afforded dogs points based on a Platonic ideal as codified in a “standard.”



The Origin of Breeds



That same year, 1859, Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, which boldly suggested that the fast transformation of farm stock by intentional selection at the hand of man down on the farm, might have a parallel in the natural world where the hand of God did the picking.



And stock was being transformed very fast.

Here, for example, we find the rapid transformation of the head shape and skull linkage of the Bull Terrier over just 50 years of time.



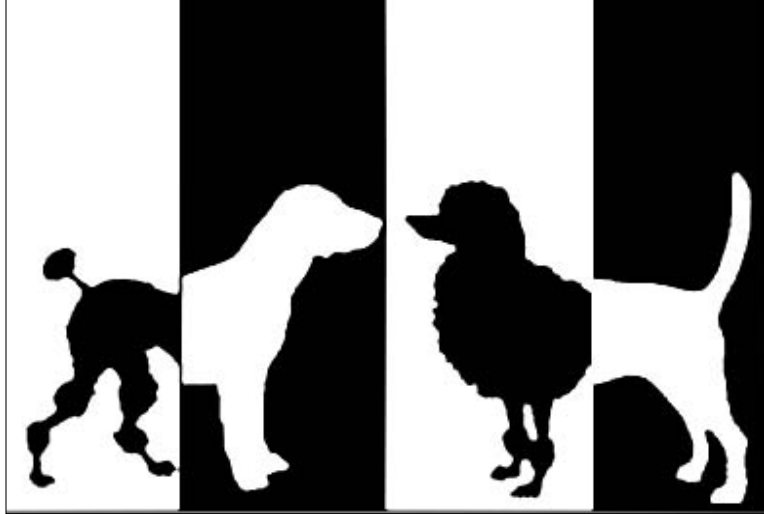
What man did quickly, Darwin suggested, Mother Nature and Father Time might do slowly, with each generation put up against the unforgiving axis of tooth and claw, famine and plenty, hot weather and cold.

Of course, in the world of pet dogs, there was no rough judge in the field was there?

And so instead of natural selection for function, we ended up with un-natural selection that was too often unfit for function.



The Rise of Breeds



With the start of dog shows, and the furor over Darwin's *Origin of Species*, everyone wanted to try their hand at backyard evolution.

In 1800, there were only 15 designated breeds of dogs, but by 1865 that number had grown to more than 50, and it exploded to triple digits soon after the Kennel Club was founded in 1873.



The Rise of Dog Shows



In the Kennel Club, broad types of dogs were no longer allowed. Setters, pointers, hounds, terriers, and collies now had to be sorted, segmented, catalogued, and segregated.

Get rich- and get-famous types created new breeds at the drop of a hat and tried to get them enrolled with the Kennel Club, complete with just-invented histories. Every breed was “ancient” and never mind if it was just invented yesterday by crossing a whippet with a Bassett!

Dog shows became social scenes, with middle class climbers purchasing “purebred” puppies to insinuate themselves up the social register.

As one Victorian periodical noted, “nobody now who is anybody can afford to be followed about by a mongrel dog.” People as common as a turnip top could now claim social provenance because they owned a pure-bred dog descended from famous kennels owned by Lords and Earls and Dukes, real and imagined.



The Rise of Dog Shows



By the turn of the 20th Century, Kennel Club terriers were no longer expected to go to ground and most Kennel Club retrievers fetched nothing bigger than a ball.

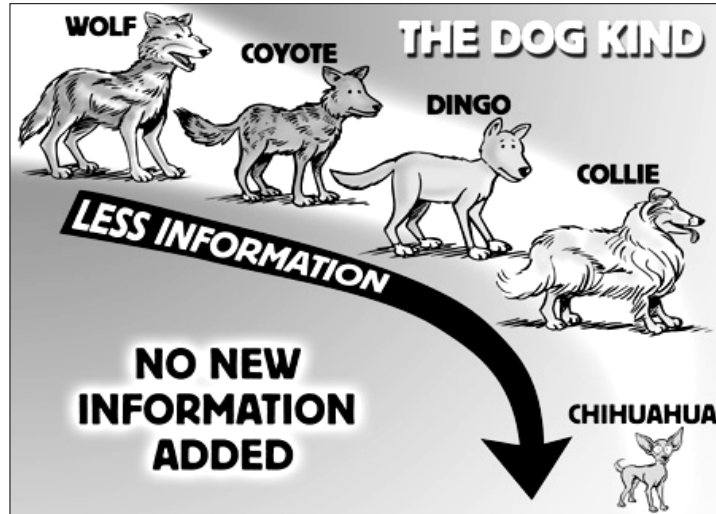
Owning a Kennel Club pointer or setter was more likely a fashion statement than the mark of a true sportsman.

At Westminster, that dog show's logo showed a pointer, but none of the show ring pointers were actually required to hunt. In fact, it was whispered, some could not find a chicken in a poultry shed!

Around 1900, the Kennel Club began to close its breed registries, in direct response to the writings of people like Francis Galton, who was Charles Darwin's cousin, the inventor of the dog whistle, and also the first person to propose the theory of eugenics – that what God had done slowly and blindly through natural selection, man could now do much faster and with greater good because we were all so terribly brilliant.



The Rise of Dog Shows



To be clear, no one knew anything about genetics in 1900. The idea of recessive genes and a doubling down of genetic load was not well understood. Sure, the Bible had admonitions against incest, and families had failed from too much inbreeding between first cousins. It is true that down on the farm, cattle men had stopped inbreeding their stock when they discovered it made for weaker and infecund stock if they kept it up for very long. But this kind of information was buried in the footnotes. Who really read those?

So far as could be seen in the show ring, where there was no production axis at all, doubling down by mating sire to daughter and brother to sister was the quick way to get a ribbon. Who imagined that selection at the hand of man would ever lead to rapid devolution, disease, and defect?

Now, to be clear, no one started down this path to harm dogs. They meant well.



Kill Shelters



Of course not everything that was happening in the world of dogs was happening in the show ring.

At the same time that the Kennel Clubs were slamming shut the registries around very small pools of foundation dogs – often just 20 or 30 animals -- a man by the name of Henry Bergh started the ASPCA in New York City, modeling it after the RSPCA in London.

In New York and in London, people were terrified of rabies. There was no cure, no vaccine. And so, to control rabies in both cities, a concerted program of rounding up stray dogs and killing them was instigated.

Children and professional dog catchers were paid a reward for bringing in dogs, and every day large numbers of dogs were killed, often by shoving them into a large iron cages and drowning them off the end of a pier.



Kill Shelters



Bergh thought this mass killing of dogs was horrible, and he protested.

After a while the City Council grew tired of this nattering and offered to turn over the keys to the pound and pay him if he would run it.

Bergh would have none of it. Bergh was an activist, and a gad-fly, and he had no interest in being a city-paid administrator of a canine slaughter house.

But things change.

When Henry Bergh died, the organization he founded – the ASPCA -- lost its moral light and its financial engine.



Kill Shelters



And so, when the City Council once again approached the ASPCA about running the city pound in exchange for city funding, that organization took up the job in order to keep its doors open.

And what harm was there in that? After all, they told themselves, the City would do it if they did not.

And so that's how the "humane" movement came to build their organizations on public tax dollars and the bones of millions of dead dogs and cats.

The Humane movement was now financially dependent on killing dogs and cats.

Now, along with direct mail mills, death mills were their bread and butter.



Rolling Forward 80 Years



Over at the Kennel Club, things rolled forward with more and more exaggeration in some breeds, and more inbreeding within a closed registry – a slow doubling down of negative recessive genes in breed after breed.



Rolling Forward 80 Years



By 1950, most of the Kennel Club “working” breeds no longer worked in the field, and alternative working dog clubs had been created, and were now associated with entities such as American Field or the United Kennel Club.

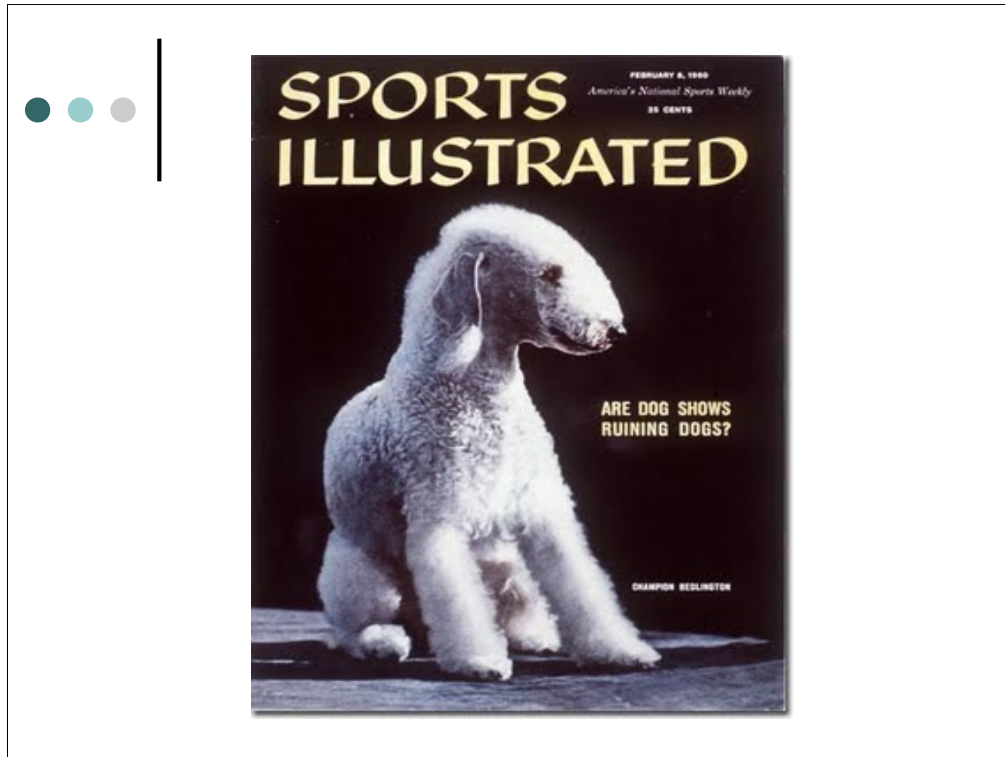


Rolling Forward 80 Years



On the edges of the dog world, concern was being voiced about the quality of the dogs.

It did not escape notice that more and more dogs were exaggerated, deformed, diseased, and dysfunctional.



In 1960, Sports Illustrated made the problem a cover story.

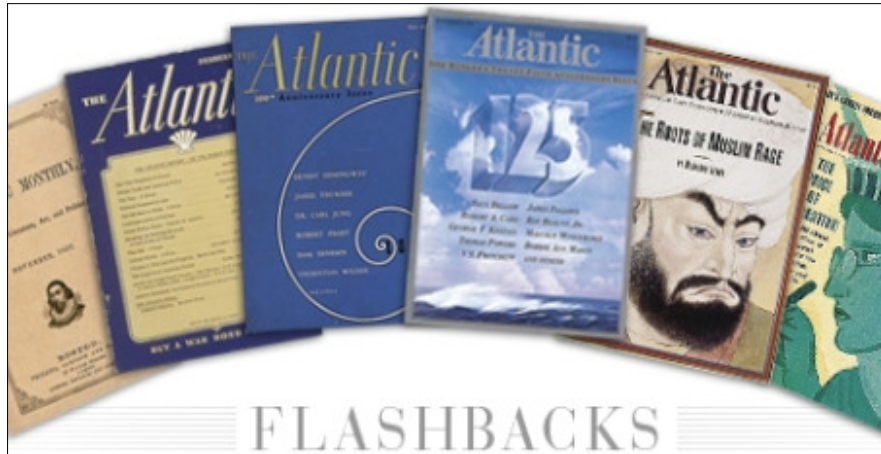
But of course no one paid too much attention. Last week's *Sports Illustrated* was next week's bird cage liner.

Next!

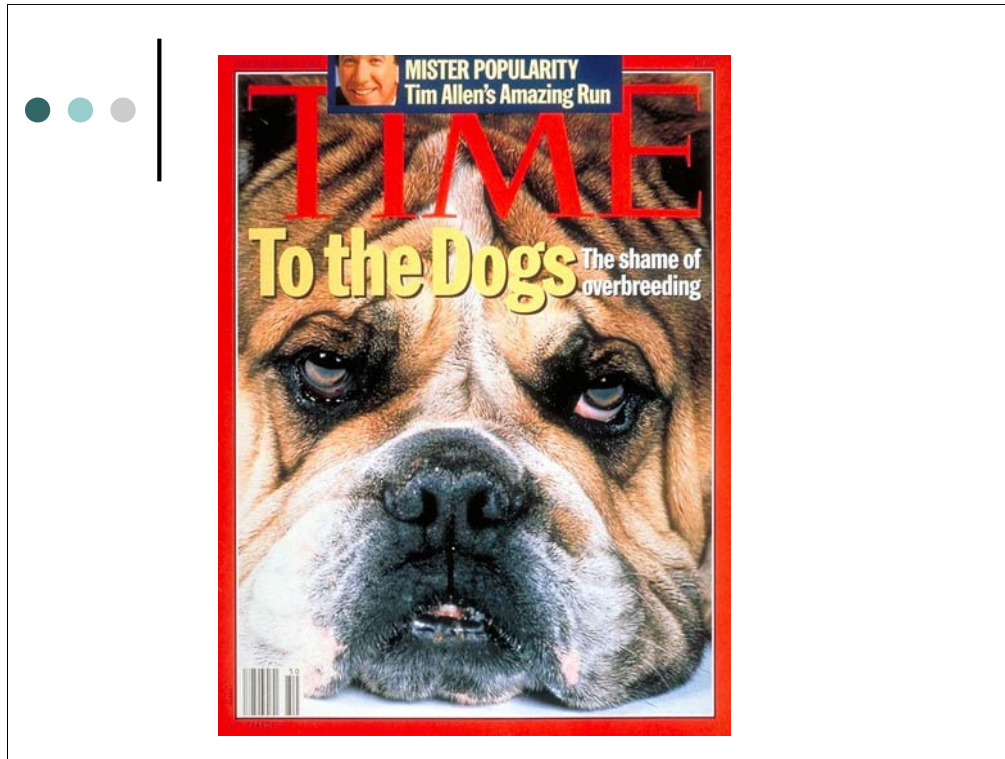
More efforts were made to turn things around, but before the Internet it was hard to find like-minded people scattered across the country, and not much caught and held the public's interest and attention for very long.



Rolling Forward 80 Years



In 1990, a cover story in *Atlantic* magazine by Marc Derr called “The Politics of Dogs” brought attention to the health of AKC dogs and the fact that the AKC was being kept financially afloat by puppy mill revenue.



In 2000, Michael Lemmonick did a very nice cover story in *Time* called "A Terrible Beauty," detailing the systematic abuse inherent to the way Kennel Club dogs were being produced.

● ● ● | Rolling Forward 80 Years



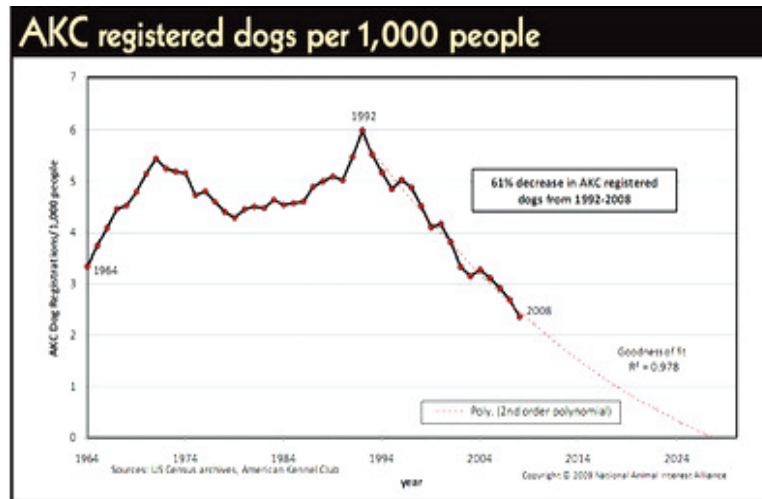
At about that same time, the Border Collie folks were engaged in a long fight to keep their dog a working dog, and out of the clutches of the AKC.

The Jack Russell Terrier Club of America was pushing on the same front on behalf of their breed.

The Border Collie was eventually pulled into the AKC under that name, but the Jack Russell Terrier Club managed to force the AKC to change the name of the dog it registered to "Parson Russell Terrier" in order to differentiate the over-large show dog from the honest small working dog not bred in a closed registry.



The AKC Takes A Dive



Now, to be clear, not everything that was happening with dogs was bad.

In fact, a lot of good things began to happen.

For example, the number of dogs registered by the AKC began to decline in 1985, and it has continued to decline to this day.

Over the last 17 years, AKC registrations have declined about 70 percent, and at the current rate of descent, the AKC will not have any dogs to register at all in another twelve years.

● ● ● | Slightly Used Dogs



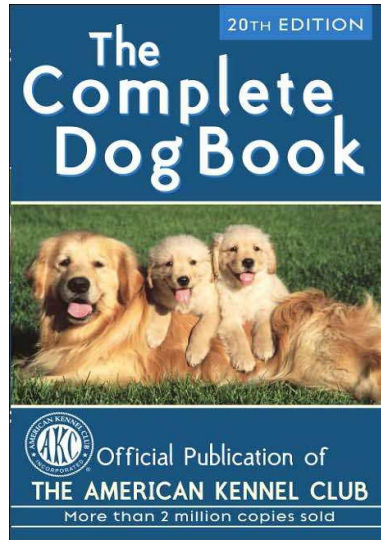
On the opposite side of the fence, more dogs than ever before are being adopted from shelters, and fewer unplanned pregnancies are occurring thanks to the success of spay-neuter programs.

In fact, the decline in the number of shelter dogs has been so precipitous that it has resulted in a very serious challenge to the notion that any and all dogs brought into shelters have to be killed because there are “too many” dogs.

Thus has been borne the “No Kill” movement.



The Beginning of Change



Of course, some things do not change.

We still have show dog breeders who believe incest is best, and who crank out dogs with pedigrees that are as back-crossed as a cable knit sweater, and which are susceptible to jaw-dropping rates of disease and infirmity as a result.

We still have dog breeders selecting for intentional defect.



The Beginning of Change

LAB PUPS/AKC—Yellow, microchip, hips/eyes guar., 30 yr. ch. Eng. bldn., \$600-\$700. 240-217-6479

LAB PUPS—Vet checked, 4 Fs, 1 M, black, one white, 8 wks. old \$250 nego. 301-568-4178

Labradoodles—F1, m/f, vet checked LAReg ckc reg. desexed fam.raised champ sire Cherry Cr. Farms 276 728 0787 /KLargen@gmail.com after 6 PM \$1500

MINIATURE PINSCHER —2 AKC reg Females, tan (Dilute Red) both parents small, ready to go shots & wormed, vet ck, 304-738-3545

PRESA CANARIO PUPS — Both parents on premises, \$800. 301-437-6825 or 240-305-9624

PUG PUPPIES-ADORABLE!—Shots/wormed, ready to go. ~~www.petpuppydog.com~~ 513-942-9594

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And, of course, most dog breeders post zero links to breed-specific rescues or even general canine rescues.

And while pet store puppy sales are on the decline, internet dog sales are a new beach head for the scurrilous.



The Internet and the Dog



Which brings me to today, and a challenge to all of you.

Most of you order books through the web, read blogs and bulletin boards, watch other dog trainers on Youtube, and are members of dog training list-servs.

If you want more information on some obscure point, you can get it by simply going to Google and posting a query.

What is particularly amazing is that this technology is not captive to a few rich people in a few well-placed countries, nor is it bound by borders or even language.



The Internet and the Dog



People from around the world who have similar interests can now find each other, and we can build social consciousness and (maybe) work to organize other people into action.

We can change social conventions and we can change cultural expectations.

As absurd as it sounds, the rise of the Internet has been very important to dogs.

● ● ● | The Internet and the Dog



Remember all that poisoned dog food from China?

When that poisoned dog food was sweeping the nation, it was the Internet that got the word out and started a conversation about pet food.

● ● ● | The Internet and the Dog



When the No-Kill Movement started, it was the Internet that educated people about the disinformation being pumped out by the “humane” movement which was a little too comfortable running direct mail mills even as the local shelters were running the equivalent of “kill mills” with 60, 70 and 80 percent mortality.



The Internet and the Dog



It was the Internet that revealed and underscored the AKC's cozy financial relationships with the puppy mill industry.

On my own blog, for example, I posted the manual for the secret computer program that the AKC developed to register puppy mill dogs through Petland stores.



The Internet and the Dog



Twelve years ago, these kinds of groundswells did not exist because the Internet, as we know it today, did not exist.

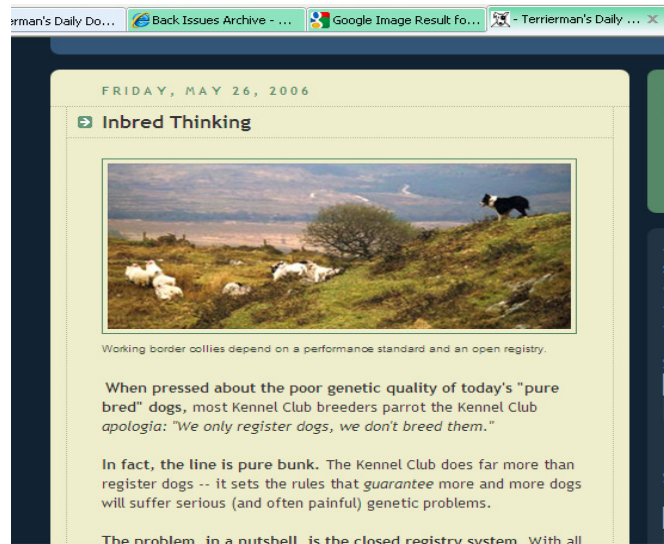
Today, the Internet is everywhere and if you want to find a dog like this on Pet Finder, he's as close as your phone.

This picture, video and vitals can be accessed from the comfort of your easy chair.

Wonderful.



Spark and Fire



Which brings me to a little story about a blog post I wrote back in 2005.

The post was called "Inbred Thinking," and in it I detailed much of what I have detailed here... . . . How canine registries came to be. . . . how the rise of dog shows that gave zero points for health, and zero points work and zero points for temperament coupled with eugenic theories and freak-show exaggeration... came to ruin so many breeds of dogs.



Spark and Fire

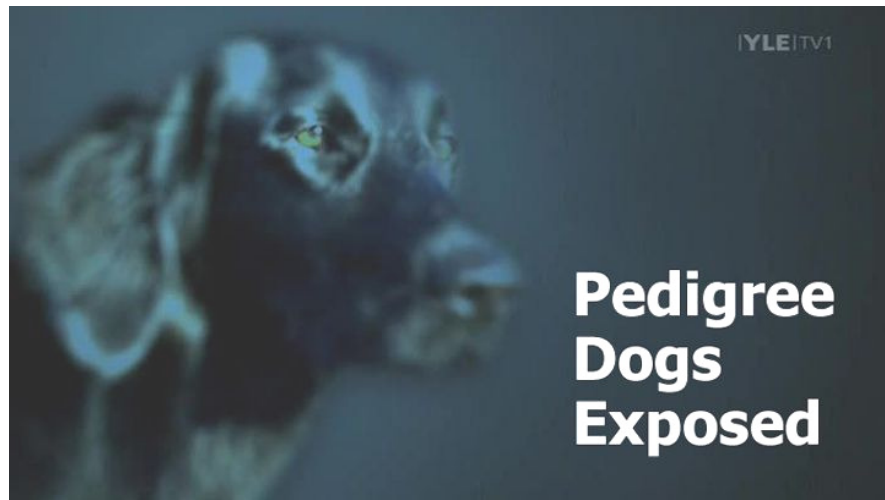


About a year after writing that post, I got an email from a woman by the name of Jemima Harrison.

She was a producer for an independent film crew, she owned flat-coated retrievers, and she said she was a bit amazed by what I had written. *Could she give me a call?*

She did, we talked a few times, and then she went off to make a documentary.

● ● ● | Spark and Fire



Two years later, *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* was shown on BBC1 at prime time.

To say this one-hour documentary knocked the wheels off the bus of pedigree dogs would be an understatement.

As a consequence of that documentary, Pedigree dog food decided to stop sponsoring Crufts, the largest dog show in the world.



Spark and Fire



The U.K. Kennel Club – the Mother Church of all pedigree dogs – almost simultaneously announced that while most breeds were healthy, they would also be reviewing all breed standards.

The Kennel Club changed some breed standards, but only slightly.

It was nothing more than a bit of window-dressing, really. No one saluted.



Spark and Fire



Then, the Kennel Club spun in another direction and announced the creation of an Accredited Breeder's Scheme.

More window dressing. A marketing ploy with no standard and no enforcement legs.

No one saluted, and the jungle drums kept pounding.

By now, of course, the *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* documentary was on Youtube, and it was circulating rapidly on list serves, and it was serving as fodder for blogs and Facebook commentary.

Who were you doing to believe, the Kennel Club asked, *us or your lying eyes?*



Spark and Fire



Three studies were produced – one by APGAW – the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare, and another by the RSPCA, and a third commissioned by the Kennel Club itself, and chaired by Sir Patrick Bateson.

Each report was more damning than the last.

The Bateson report called for a new dog advisory council, noting that “ the time has surely come for society as a whole to take a firm grip on the welfare issues that evidently arise in dog breeding. This will require co-operation and action at many different levels and by many different people: research scientists, the specialist dog breeders and the clubs to which they belong, the veterinary profession, the dog protection and rehoming charities, members of the public who buy dogs, local authorities, central government and devolved administration...”

More research came out from the pet insurance industry which proved, in numbing detail, and on a dollars-and-cents axis, that pedigree dogs were, on the whole, less healthy than their cross-bred or mixed-breed cousins.

The Swedes generated a list of 54 troubled breeds, of which 15 were in serious trouble.

● ● ● | Spark and Fire



The U.K. Kennel Club, unable to find a new sponsor for Crufts after Pedigree dog food walked away, ended up going to a discount furniture chain that demanded – and I could not make this up – that a couch be included in the Crufts logo.

It says a lot about the desperate nature of the Kennel Club's finances that they added the couch!



Spark and Fire



Last year, under continuing pressure from Netizens and the press, the Kennel Club decided more reform was necessary.

Who wanted to go down the road to oblivion that the American Kennel Club was on? No one!

The list of 15 breeds of particular concern that had been chosen by the Swedes was now to be put up for special veterinary inspection at Crufts – the largest dog show on Earth.

The push for healthier dogs was to be Center Stage at Ground Zero in the Mother Church of all dogs.

● ● ● | Spark and Fire



Only the best of breed winners were to be examined, of course – only the best of the best – and the exam would be only visual, and it would last only minutes per dog.

But, guess what?

Last month, the first veterinary inspection occurred, and of those 15 Best of Breed Winners SIX failed their veterinary inspection.

Six. These are the six best dogs in the WORLD of their breeds.

And they failed a simple visual veterinary inspection that lasted only a few minutes each.



Spark and Fire



The outrage from the breeders was immense and intense, and traveled clear across the Atlantic.

How DARE anyone disqualify a best in breed dog for failing a cursory and only visual veterinary inspection?

How DARE anyone put health first!

This was outrageous! Think of the shame of the breeders. Think of the humiliation! Think of the ruined reputations!

Not once did I hear or read a breeder express a moment's concern for the health and welfare of the dogs in question.



Quo Vadis?



So where are we now?

I am pleased to say that the U.K. Kennel Club has not backed down, and they are pressing back against outraged breeders.

I think they realize that the way forward is not to wait for leadership from the breed clubs of the most damaged breeds.

These folks are often in deep denial, because if the dogs really ARE damaged and unhealthy and cannot work, then the voyage of their lives is now meaningless.

And I understand that. I have sympathy. I really do.

After all, no one drove 10,000 miles to dog shows to intentionally harm dogs.

They were just breed blind. Show blind. Money blind. Culture blind. Rosette blind.

No one started off to do harm.



Smell the Coffee



Now, to be fair, some breed clubs have picked up the spirit of reform. The scales are falling from their eyes.

For example, while six breeds failed the vet check at Crufts last month, a top contender in a seventh at-risk breed – the Dogue de Bordeaux – walked out of the ring and fell over dead.

Dead. At ring side. Not a “best of breed” dog that one.... but a wake up call for the Dogue de Bordeaux none-the-less.

This is a breed the average dog is dead at age 5.5 years due to diseases and defects caused by inbreeding within a bad gene pool and selection for defect.

I am happy to report that in the last month, the Dogue Club in the U.K. has made real and detailed health checks a requirement for their top breed club award. Full applause here.

I am still not sure what a Dogue de Bordeaux is supposed to do that a rescue Pit Bulls cannot do better, but I am still applauding a focus on health.



The UKC Wakes Up



Here in the U.S., the United Kennel Club – the UKC -- the second largest canine registry in the U.S. -- has smelled a marketing opportunity and just announced that it will be revamping some breed standards, and putting new language into every standard advising against exaggeration and noting that health has to be Job One.

Is this just window dressing? Maybe. But symbolism matters when you are trying to get the wheels of reform moving. The UKC, at least, is paying attention and... as they say in Egypt... the hard part is getting the Sphinx to move those first few inches!

Click and treat. Let us work to shape any movement toward right behavior.



The AKC Clams Up



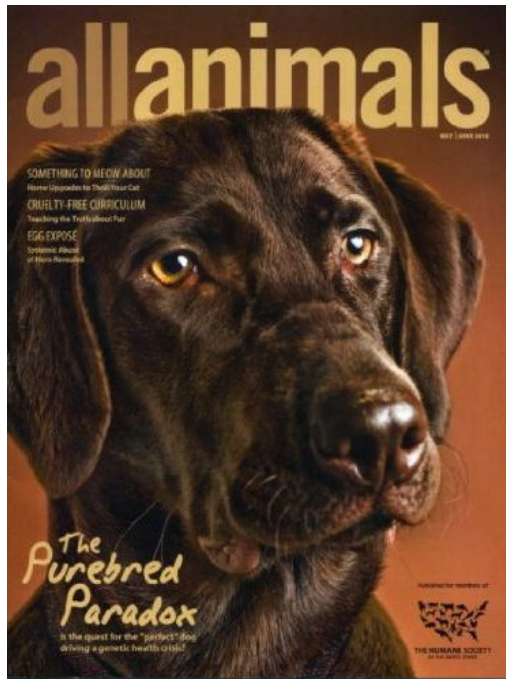
And what of the American Kennel Club?

After *Pedigree Dogs Exposed* came out in the UK, ABC television decided to do their own truncated version of the show.

The piece they produced was good, but it was much shorter, and only appeared on Nightline, which is shown at midnight.

When called for commentary, the AKC did what I predicted it would do -- they bunkered and let it blow over.

And it did.



But, of course, the debate did not disappear.

The Humane Society of the U.S. cranked out a long cover story for their magazine, and they launched a poorly-attended conference packed with foreigners as well.

I am no supporter of HSUS – it is little more than a direct mail mill – but the magazine article was good, and the conference was useful, if for no other reason than to underscore the complete lack of credibility that HSUS has in the world of dogs.

Whatever happens going forward, it will not happen if HSUS is in the lead.



AKC Bunkers



DUCK AND COVER

The AKC, of course, has continued to bunker down.

But that's for dogs OK because registration numbers have continued to swirl away down the bowl.

You do not need to kill an organization this hell-bent on suicide!



What's Next?



So what's next?

I'm not sure. I do not think the AKC can survive going forward the way it is, and I see no movement towards changing the way they do business.

Will dog shows simply go away in a world of falling membership and rising gas prices?

Will this dog show culture – this dog culture based on Aristocracy rather than Meritocracy – wither on the vine?

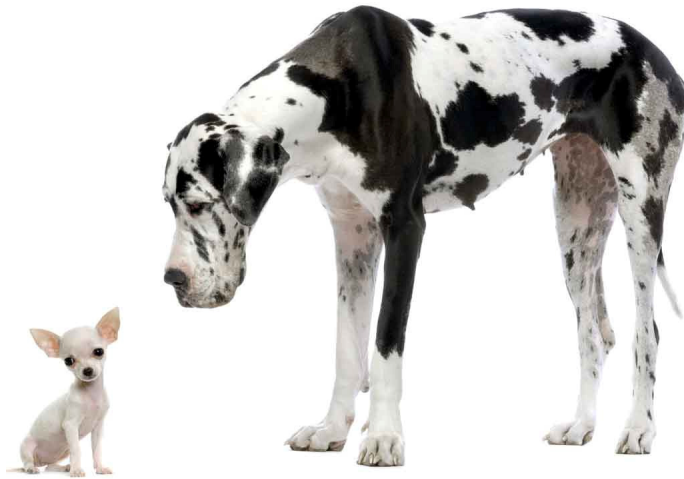
● ● ● | A Dog First Culture?



Are we ALREADY replacing it with a new American dog culture that is Dog First?

Which is based on performance and activity rather than looks and grooming?

● ● ● | A Dog First Culture?



Will a new American dog culture stand against extremes and exaggeration?



A Dog First Culture?



Will a new American dog culture stand against selection for exaggeration that leads to predictable levels of pain and disabilities in dogs?

● ● ● | Focus on the Dog?



Or will the world of dogs continue to stand for green cash and blue ribbons in the Twenty-first Century... as it did in the Nineteenth Century... and the Twentieth?

● ● ● | **Focus on the Dog?**



Time will tell.

And YOU will tell. You are the people who will frame America's dog culture into the 21st Century. And because of that, you are very important.

If we in America are going to develop and grow a new SENSIBLE dog culture in this country, it is going to come from you.

Where you lead, the dog will surely follow.



Questions?



And with that I'm going to stop talking and take questions.

Feel free to ask about anything – including any strange idea that you notice people have about dogs.

Whether that is about dog origins... Or dog food.... Or dog histories.... Or dog training hysterias.

What strikes you as ODD in the world of dogs?



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