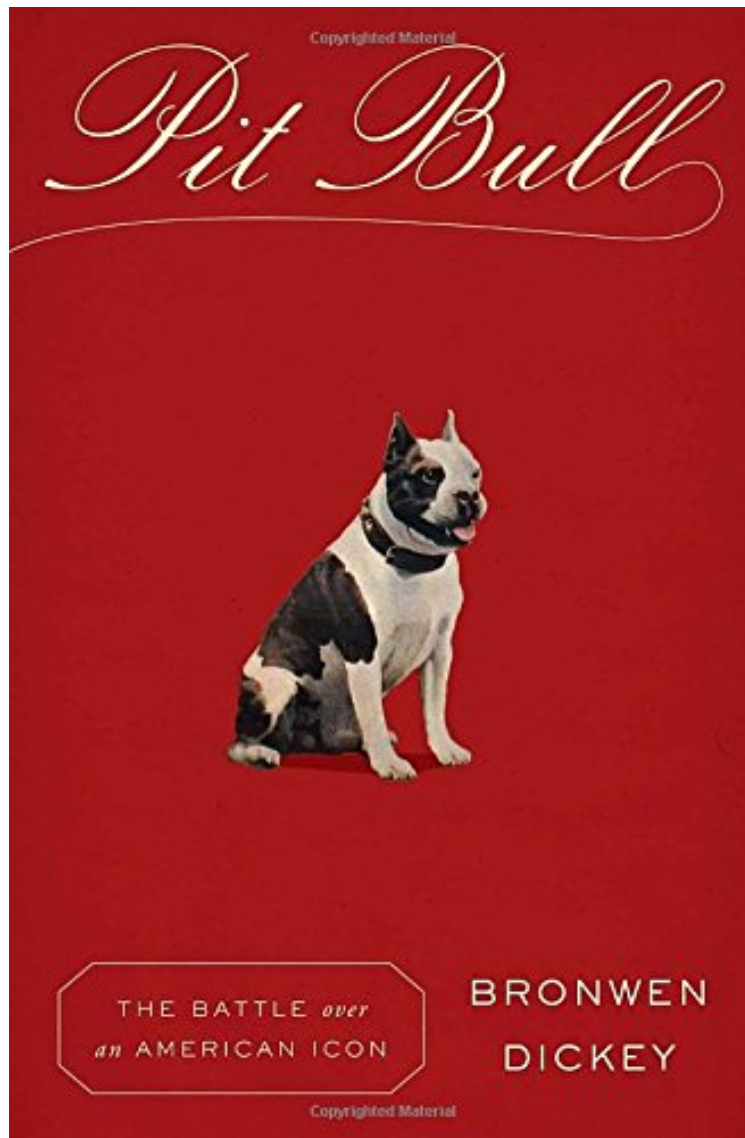


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Pit Bull: The Battle over an American Icon

Bronwen Dickey

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Bronwen Dickey : Pit Bull: The Battle over an American Icon before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Pit Bull: The Battle over an American Icon:

271 of 295 people found the following review helpful. Unlike the One-Star Reviewers, I **Have** Read This Book. I agree with the NY Times: Superb Science Writing.By DemocritusNote that a raft of one-star "reviews" showed up within hours of the book's publication. These people were sent over from an anti-pit-bull hate group on Facebook,

which is urging its members to "swarm". They have NOT read Bronwen Dickey's book. The Facebook page is explicit: "Here's the deal: We don't need to read it to understand the book's underlying theme." Well, here's the real deal: you DO have to read it. That's how books work. If you haven't actually read something -- carefully -- then no: you are not in a position to understand anything about it. Much less review it. I received an electronic galley a couple of weeks ago, and read it with joy. I assure you that it's by far the most careful and rigorous treatment of the subject to date; it's also an undeniable work of literature -- a gift to the genre -- and genuinely entertaining. I wonder whether any of the kindhearted people leaving fake reviews will ever get around to glancing at the book itself. Apart from everything else, they might be disappointed by how evenhanded the work is: Ms. Dickey spends a fair bit of time with voices on both sides of the pit-bull debate. Her own conclusions favor science -- she doesn't side with the extremists (who can be found, unfortunately, in both camps). It's a thorough, level-headed and intelligent treatment of a fraught topic; I expect it will remain the definitive work for some time.-----Note: the hate group has just changed its name -- they used to call themselves "Pit Bulls and Amputees." They're now hiding behind the innocuous title, "Pit Bull Public Safety Education and Advocacy." Their campaign of harassment against Ms. Dickey has been documented by the press, however, and it makes for ugly reading: do a search on "Pit bull authors critics are off the leash," by Josh Shaffer (The News Observer). Also note: I have nothing whatsoever to do with any sort of "right wing, pro-pit bull group" -- the libel posted below. This is the kind of tactic that Ms. Dickey is encountering: ad hominem lies, conjured from thin air. 18 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Bronwen Dickey's book was one of the best books I've read in a very long time. By Jeanie Schulz Bronwen Dickey's book was one of the best books I've read in a very long time....one of those books that I couldn't put down.. I ended up reading it cover to cover and then immediately started to read it again because there was so much in the writing. Whether or not you have an interest in pit bulls, rescue or animal welfare, the areas of the book which delve into the human aspect are so worth the read. Meticulously researched, beautiful, stunning and poignant. 17 of 18 people found the following review helpful. Not just these dogs but all dogs. By Jenifer A great and informative read. It sheds light on not only the prejudice that pit bulls face but other breeds. This book doesn't just pertain to pit bulls but all dogs and as dog owners is important that we don't forget.

The hugely illuminating story of how a popular breed of dog became the most demonized and supposedly the most dangerous of dogs and what role humans have played in the transformation. When Bronwen Dickey brought her new dog home, she saw no traces of the infamous viciousness in her affectionate, timid pit bull. Which made her wonder: How had the breed beloved by Teddy Roosevelt, Helen Keller, and Hollywood's Little Rascals come to be known as a brutal fighter? Her search for answers takes her from nineteenth-century New York City dogfighting pits to the cruelty of which drew the attention of the recently formed ASPCA to early twentieth-century movie sets, where pit bulls cavorted with Fatty Arbuckle and Buster Keaton; from the battlefields of Gettysburg and the Marne, where pit bulls earned presidential recognition, to desolate urban neighborhoods where the dogs were loved, prized and sometimes brutalized. Whether through love or fear, hatred or devotion, humans are bound to the history of the pit bull. With unflinching thoughtfulness, compassion, and a firm grasp of scientific fact, Dickey offers us a clear-eyed portrait of this extraordinary breed, and an insightful view of Americans' relationship with their dogs.

An NPR Best Book of 2016 A Boston Globe Best Book of 2016 This is a very good book Ms. Dickey has earned her reputation as a first-rate reporter. The Wall Street Journal "Terrific... [Dickey] does more than simply dispel the many myths around pit bulls; she strives to explore what those myths can tell us about ourselves. This beautifully written, heartbreaking book is not just for dog lovers it's for anyone interested in race, class, history and the complexity of media narratives." NPR "Ms. Dickey not only writes about the ebb and flow of public fear and loathing, she takes the reader on a thoroughly comprehensible tour of genetics and behavioral science to explain why breeding never guarantees an individual dog's personality, and shouldn't be used to condemn it.... Picking out one breed to blame is neither warranted nor effective, and a reader of her book will be hard put to disagree." The New York Times Brilliant A powerful and disturbing book that shows how the rise of the killer-pit bull narrative reflects many broader American anxieties and pathologies surrounding race, class, and poverty A remarkable study of our capacities for cruelty and compassion toward dogs and other humans, and an eloquent argument for abandoning the fears and prejudices that have made pit bulls in particular the victims of mistreatment. Christian Science Monitor Like the pit bull itself, this book is sturdy, complicated and resists easy categorization As Dickey exhaustively demonstrates, there is no aggression gene and no such thing as a dangerous breed. The New York Times Book "In covering a subject that evokes strong, deep-seated emotions, Dickey herself refrains from making sweeping judgments about the pit-bull temperament. She neither condemns nor exalts these dogs. The story of the pit bull is complex, and at times heartbreaking. Its fraught with cruelty and poverty, but also compassion, generosity, and, occasionally, clear-headed thinking. Somehow, Dickey manages to find hope for the future of this dog and its reputation." LA of Books "Assiduously researched... Dickey is relentless in exposing the brutal racism and classism at the heart of the pit bull scare. For that reason alone, her book is an invaluable resource for those who want and need a counter-narrative to

the usual stereotyping of animals. Pit Bull is an important study of how one animal and its context can reveal everything about the link between race, class, and 'animality'... Dickey is clearly a superb journalist." Current Affairs Sustained and heavily researched Pit Bull is very good at framing and contextualizing the swirl of fear and aversion these dogs induced Informative, keenly argued and engaging. San Francisco Chronicle "A tremendous contribution to our understanding not only of these dogs but also of our human relationships with them. There's been too much hysteria about pit bulls, and Dickey shows that we've let myth and stereotype run wild when it comes to our thinking about these dogs." Wayne Pacelle, CEO of the Humane Society of the United States "A tour de force; the most comprehensive, thoughtful, and dispassionate treatment of this topic ever undertaken... Dickey's book a combination of exhaustive research, the presentation of impartial facts, the perceptive sense of social and political context and the addition of a rich and detailed historical framework is an enormously valuable contribution." Rick Bernthal, board chairman, Humane Society of the United States "Fascinating." World Judiciously filled with data, anecdotes, illustrations and a self-deprecating, canny sense of humor, Pit Bull is a constantly surprising compendium of dog lore, human foible and social prejudice The much-maligned pit bull finds redemption in Bronwen Dickey's entertaining, thoughtful and well-researched study of this noble canine. Shelf Awareness This is more than a dog book. Dickey has written a book that is part sociology, part history; it is an exploration of our relationship with dogs and how we view them in context with our relationship with each other; it is a look at the media and social media and how they fan the flames and spread falsehoods (on all sides of an issue); and it is a scientific view of dogs, including genetics. Everyday eBook [Dickey] repeatedly draws parallels between treatment of poor and disenfranchised humans and their dogs, and its damning testimony With Dickey's thorough reporting on a provocative topic, Pit Bull shows how the human need for something to blame can put innocent victims in the crosshairs. BookPage As appealing to readers of history and social science as it is to dog enthusiasts With able writing, in tightly packed and thorough chapters, Dickey shares much food for thought Dickey's broad scope will leave readers affected and pondering. Booklist A thoughtful examination of pit bulls and an intense look at ourselves and society. Dickey adeptly scrutinizes the science used to condemn pit bulls to separate fact from fiction and thus weaves a narrative that artfully relays both the hard science and the emotion of the pit bull issue This exceptional, thoroughly researched, and expertly written work is a must. Library Journal (starred review) An appealing look at how our relationships with man's best friend provides a mirror of cultural mores. Kirkus s "[Dickey] illuminates many of the facts and exposes many of the myths surrounding pit bulls and dogs in general... Dickey's immersive and illuminating work deserves a wide audience." Publishers Weekly I can't stress enough how highly I recommend Pit Bull: The Battle over an American Icon. I believe it is easily among the three must read books for anyone in animal welfare or for anyone making policy decisions about animals. It is one of the most thoroughly researched books I've ever read about dogs, and presented in a very readable, entertaining fashion. And whether you are a newcomer to animal welfare, or a relative old-timer, or if you make policy decisions about animal welfare, this book will make you smarter, and make you question many of the things you think you know about dogs and the people who own them. Kansas City Dog Blog The pit bull is a legend, a fear, an exaggeration, a *bte noire*. Bronwen Dickey does this misunderstood animal the great service of looking beyond the myth. What she finds are dogs who deserve better than we've been giving them. Alexandra Horowitz, author, Inside of a Dog Bronwen Dickey set out to write about a single dog breed, but by investigating what happened to pit bulls she ended up writing about our whole crazy culture. Her quest began almost accidentally, when she acquired a pit bull that was nothing like its vicious stereotype. Curious, she discovered that the breed had once been an American favorite. Remember the RCA Victrola dog? It was a pit bull. So was the lovable mascot Pete the Pup in the immensely popular Our Gang movies in the 1930s. How had this symbol of friendliness and reliability become so feared that people fled when she walked her dog on the street? This beautifully assembled tale of how the pit bull was transformed into a demon perfectly captures a disquieting strain of hysteria in our national life. It's the rare dog story that tells us as much about people as about dogs. Charles C. Mann, author, 1491 Bronwen Dickey's book is a marvelously compelling read, both perfectly modulated and passionate without being strident, and completely eye-opening. She is a damn good writer, and the book is full of eloquent, sharp, clear, knowledge-bearing sentences that convinced me while they also broke down my easy and long-held assumptions. An impressive debut. Richard Bausch, author, Wives and Lovers Pit Bull tells how America's Dog morphed into America's nightmare. Ms. Dickey's scrupulous, encyclopedic research pretty well proves that harmless pets have been scapegoated to feed our fears. Pit Bull is a fascinating, complex story of canine genetics, media missteps and an appalling national willingness to kill poor peoples' dogs. Donald McCaig, author, Mr. and Mrs. Dog Bronwen Dickey writes so well, with such understated elegance. I spent a lifetime afraid of pit bulls, hating creatures that came to me through newspapers and the media, until I read this book. Pat Conroy, author, The Prince of Tides The pit bull is truly America's Dog, and few breeds are surrounded with as much mythology, fear and misinformation. Bronwen Dickey has written the first comprehensive explanation of how the bull terrier of the gentry transformed nearly overnight into the chained-up hellhound of the underclass. This book gets to the cultural roots of the 'demon dog' fantasy and helps us understand that the stories we tell about pit bulls are really stories about violence, class and repressed rage. Dickey is a consummate reporter and a brilliant incisive writer who has given us a book about far more than dogs. Tom Zoellner, author, Train: Riding the Rails that Created the Modern World "This is one of

the best dog books you will ever read. But, it is also about the big stuff the moral status of animals, the science of nature and nurture, the role of race in our culture. In *Pit Bull*, Bronwen Dickey weaves a tale in which the most divisive of animal issues becomes a metaphor for deep-seated conflicts in American society." Hal Herzog, author, *Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat* About the Author BRONWEN DICKEY is a contributing editor at the *Oxford American*. Her work has also appeared in *The New York Times*, *Slate*, *The Virginia Quarterly*, *The Best American Travel Writing 2009*, *Newsweek*, *Outside*, and *Popular Mechanics*, among other publications. In 2009 she received a first-place Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Award and a MacDowell Colony residency grant. She lives in North Carolina. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Pariah Dogs The animal has secrets which, unlike the secrets of caves, mountains, seas, are specifically addressed to man. John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* On a hot summer day a few years ago, my husband brought home a slightly underweight thirty-eight-pound pit bull with a caramel-and-white coat, a flesh-colored nose, and eyes the color of honey. Carved cheekbones and a cleft in the top of her head gave her face the shape of a small but eager heart. Sean and I nearly passed her by when we drove out to our local animal shelter to look around days before. Wait a minute, he said, pointing to the shy, trembling animal as I cooed over a flashier candidate. What about this one? We did not need another dog. We had been married less than a year and we still didn't know how best to shape our independent selves to the contours of a shared life. Sean worked long hours at a local hospital and I spent weeks at a time traveling on reporting assignments. Our imperious black pug named Oscar had finally gotten to the age where we no longer worried about leaving him alone in the house for more than an hour. Not worrying was a pastime I had come to enjoy. Any new addition, not to mention one twice Oscar's size, would upend our lives for a while. So, why did it we do it? I'm still not quite sure. I can't say that this little pit bull stared at me, but she never looked away, either. In his classic essay *Why Look at Animals?* the critic John Berger writes that the look between man and animal is a bridge between our species and theirs, one of the few that can be built between two creatures that do not share a common language. The animal scrutinises [man] across a narrow abyss of non-comprehension, he writes. When man looks back, however, there is an added layer: Man, says Berger, is always looking across ignorance and fear. I came to appreciate the profound truth of Berger's words when I told those closest to me that the new dog we had decided to bring home was a pit bull. Even if they hadn't encountered a pit bull, everyone knew (or thought they knew) the pit bull's story, which to them was one of human bloodlust, mysterious fighting genes, and uncontrollable canine rage. So many aspects of our culture from our metaphors (the terms top dog and underdog originated in the fighting pits), to our music, to our consumer goods, to our politics reinforce the stereotypes. When vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin joked during her 2008 acceptance speech that the only difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull was lipstick, the audience laughed knowingly. The great irony of the indelible mark the pit bull has left on our society is that even those who valorize the story who proudly call themselves pit bull politicians, pit bull lawyers, pit bull reporters in essence vilify the actual dog at the center of it. As for my pit bull, a dog-rescuer friend shook her head. I wouldn't do it, she said solemnly. I don't trust those dogs. They will turn on you. And once that switch is turned on, there's no turning it off. Like the media, which regularly trumpeted the sordid details of pit bull attacks on humans, my friends framed the issue in terms of strict dichotomies: Are pit bulls dangerous, or are they misunderstood? Are they born vicious, or is it all in how you raise them? Which is stronger: Nature or Nurture? Like the existence of God or the ethics of capital punishment, the truth about pit bulls makes for lively debates. But always, underneath my friends quailing, was a revealing division: Pit bulls weren't for people like us. Pit bulls belonged to them.

*For the better part of two hundred years, the history of bull-and-terrier dogs was illustrious, rather than infamous. Advertisers across the United States clamored to use pit bulls in their campaigns during the 1920s, not because the dogs were believed to be menacing, but because they were thought to be so friendly and appealing to the average Joe. They are the only dogs to have appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine three times, for example. The animals widespread popularity among people of all ages, races, and classes owed much to their reputations as plucky, unfussy sidekicks and hardy all-purpose workers. More than that, however, the dog with the patch over his eye was seen as quintessentially American: good-natured, brave, resilient, and dependable. By World War I, pit bulls were so beloved as national symbols that we literally and figuratively wrapped them in the flag. We even called them Yankee terriers. Haphazardly classified under almost twenty other names over the years, bull-and-terrier dogs marched onto the field at the Battle of Gettysburg and sniffed out snipers at Normandy. They peeked out of covered wagons bound for California and stumped for women's suffrage. One greeted visitors at New York City's first pizzeria in 1907, while another lived in Teddy Roosevelt's White House. They also accompanied us into the brave new world of modern technology, listening to his master's voice on the recently invented gramophone and riding shotgun in the first cross-country road trip by automobile. Cultural icons as diverse as Sir Walter Scott, William Buffalo Bill Cody, Anna Pavlova, Helen Keller, Jack Dempsey, Jack Johnson, Andy Devine, Roscoe Fatty Arbuckle, Gary Cooper, Douglas Fairbanks, James Thurber, Theodor Dr. Seuss Geisel, and Jimmy Carter proudly kept bull-and-terrier dogs as pets, and years before anyone heard of a German shepherd named Rin Tin Tin, pit bull actors ruled the silver screen. In fact, Rinty only appeared in 27 motion pictures, while a pit bull named Pal the Wonder Dog appeared in 224. Then, in the 1970s, like a bright light snapping off, everything went terribly wrong. The crime of dogfighting exploded in the headlines, and the well-intentioned, well-publicized crusade to stamp out a barbaric but moribund

form of animal torture unwittingly made it more popular. Once reporters and misinformed activists cast the dogs as willing participants in their own abuse, pit bulls were exiled to the most turbulent margins of society, where a cycle of poverty, violence, fear, and desperation had already created a booming market for aggressive dogs. Headlines about pit bull attacks on humans multiplied. Within a few short years, Americas century-old love for its former mascot gave way to the presumption that pit bulls were biologically hardwired to kill.