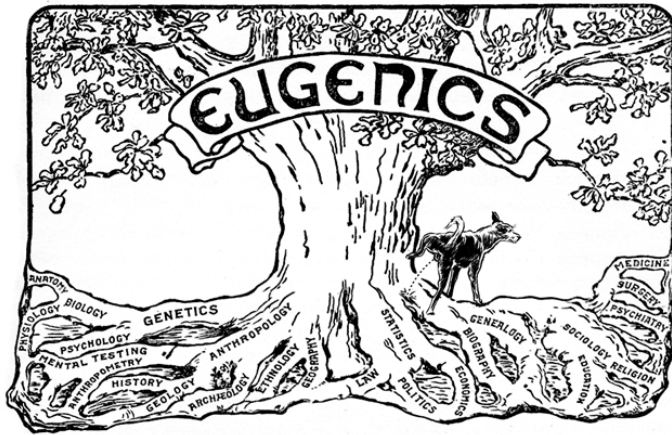


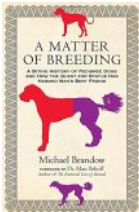
Why Breeding Pedigree Dogs Is Just Eugenics By Another Name



Eugenics is the now-defunct (and creepy!) practice of breeding supposedly superior humans to achieve genetic improvements while sterilizing undesirables. Sound familiar? It's the exact same thing we now do to dogs and it's responsible for a range of health and behavioral issues in them.

— Ed.

This chapter is excerpted from "A Matter of Breeding: A Biting History of Pedigree Dogs and How the Quest for Status Has Harmed Man's Best Friend" by Michael Brandow (Beacon Press, 2015). Reprinted with permission from Beacon Press.



A Matter of Breeding: A Biting History of Pedigree Dogs and How...

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Does a dog need to have a certain look to behave in a certain way? Seeking some explanation for our present-day obsession with predictability, many are surprised to find the trail leads back to eugenics, that dirty word recalled with fear and loathing but a set of assumptions that have as much to

do with pets as they once did with people. Few know that many of our core beliefs about bloodlines, appearance, and skill retain more than a tinge of those ugly theories that have made some people and pets seem superior for their complexion or ancestral profiles, and others inferior for having substandard markings or a checkered past.

Most upright citizens have officially sworn off applying eugenics to humans these days, but for some strange reason, they continue to breed and buy their dogs along old eugenic lines. Anderson Cooper was shocked and appalled on his show in May 2012 to report that forced sterilizations of "undesirables" were conducted by the tens of thousands in the United States until as recently as the 1970s. [1] But at home, he had a Welsh springer spaniel, a breed born to what AKC writer Freeman Lloyd once called "a doggie family that has existed in its approximately pure state for many hundreds of generations." [2] Despite its illustrious past, Cooper's brand of choice is now prone to a number of serious health issues and has an average inbreeding coefficient higher than that of first cousins. [3] Blood "purity" has worked against the springer, which has been subjected, like many breeds, to the same outdated theories of "better breeding" that get pups culled for having the wrong coat color, make "good" families feel superior to not-so-good ones—and get millions of innocent people killed for their ethnic or racial background. Sterilization, euthanasia, segregation, holocausts, and judgments at Westminster all have a common heritage in eugenics, and despite the fact that English isn't among the many languages that still use

"race" and "breed" interchangeably, we have no excuse for not knowing or caring about this history.

Terrible but true: who among us, at one time or another, hasn't been guilty of stereotyping? And who among us has never let looks determine likability? Old biases aren't easy to shed. Perhaps the most obvious crime against progressive thinking can be found in our own backyards, where it's still socially acceptable to say, "I have a chocolate Lab at home," but not, "I only hire Latino/black/Asian/fill-in-the-blank maids because they clean better." Why is "We grew up with two goldens" in fashion, but "We've adopted a pair of Orientals" is not? What's wrong with "I have a *dog*" or "Two *dogs* are better than one?" I myself have no degree in statistics but question the myth that all pedigree German shepherds are loyal, smart, and trainable because one in a million qualifies for service work. Not all golden retrievers are heroes because one was depicted with a fireman at Ground Zero in a painting that hangs in the AKC's art collection, no more than all Americans are champion athletes because Michael Phelps won some gold medals.

The "science" of eugenics was founded in the mid-nineteenth century as a tool for keeping people in their proper places. "It is, too, a strange fact," wrote Gordon Stables, a firm believer in head shape as an indicator of character, "that the more highly civilised a nation is, the greater its care and culture of the canine race." [4] Based on a similar observation that fair-skinned folk with certain anatomical features were supposedly more attractive and intelligent than "darkies" (too repugnant, many thought, even to serve food on First-Class dining cars), eugenics devised an elaborate and complex system of color coding and measurement, an apparatus that grew more elaborate and complex with time. Focusing on a somewhat selective

selection of mostly random and coincidental characteristics that conquerors and ruling classes had haphazardly amassed along their uphill climbs, traits certain groups just happened to share, such as blond hair, blue eyes, a taste for classical music, or a fondness for fox hunting—by-products of generations of inbreeding and upbringing only with their own kind—eugenic investigators compiled an exhaustive catalog of hair-splitting nuances to prove that races were, indeed, separate and unique. Some races, they felt, were essentially better than others, and mixing races—or "mongrelization"—was unhealthy and probably dangerous to all races involved.

The eugenic inventory of racial indicators grew so encompassing and complex that experts managed to convince many that their observations simply had to be true, if only because, it was thought, no sane person would have observed them if they weren't. The subtleties of human skin tone, the way the eyes were set into the head, the precise angle at which the jaw protruded, neck length, hair texture, nose curvature—the convolution of spirals in brain matter, the spaces between the toes, the distance between the navel and the penis—every detail was carefully gauged and painstakingly documented, then compared and contrasted in ways that somehow always seemed the most flattering to white, Northern Europeans and their white, Northern European descendants across the Atlantic (or people who looked like them). Superficial distinctions were exaggerated to the point that different racial or ethnic groups were said to have descended from separate prehistoric ancestors, a theory only recently disproved by DNA, not unlike the freshly debunked myth that not all dogs evolved from wolves. Embellished bloodlines based on outward appearance, and

a rudimentary understanding of genetics that made heredity seem as simple as pigmentation in guinea pigs, were used to explain deeper character traits like morality, criminality, intelligence, and "feeble-mindedness." Before long, eugenics had just about every aspect of human diversity neatly mapped, categorized, and evaluated based on looks or social ties. Anatomical and behavioral traits, even personal quirks, were correlated to family, class, race, and ethnic background, or to whether a person ended up working as a banker, baker, soldier, stenographer, poet, or piano tuner. Eugenics explained it all: infertility, spelling, dancing, neatness, insanity, gambling, gout, disobedience, double-jointedness, punctuality, "pug" noses on ill-born Irish, even ball playing. [5]

Among the many errors of eugenics were to misinterpret outward appearance, behavior, and culturally biased test results as indicators of other qualities; to confuse heredity with environment; to overestimate the role of individual genes in the inheritance of complex behaviors; to focus on human pedigrees instead of individuals; and to cling to an archaic belief in inbreeding for blood "purity," already proven as detrimental to half-mad, hemophiliac royal families as it would prove to be for fancy, "scientifically" bred dogs in the century to come.

Like so many attempts at improvement in the nineteenth century, eugenics dressed old habits in new garb. Ancient, quasi-mystical arts of physiognomy and phrenology, and a more recent discipline called craniometry, went into these dazzling demonstrations of mental gymnastics. What eugenics brought to the table was a protective layer of statistics and documents, modern additions of the nineteenth century that lent authenticity to the usual slants on race,

class, and any other basis for bias. The arcane assumption that head shape indicated personality or intelligence was now provable with an extensive set of precise measurements. Skulls could finally be placed side-by-side in glass display cases at natural history museums as updated reliquaries to be interpreted as eugenic high priests saw fit. Primitive, gut reactions against outsiders and oddballs because of the way they looked, acted, or dressed now had the blessing of observations showing darker-skinned people did, in fact, tend to be dishonest—because they didn't blush, which they couldn't, at least not visibly, being darker-skinned—incontrovertible proof that they were born with something to hide. In the same vein, the medieval notion of "blue blood," based on the fact that bloodlines tended to be more visible on fair-skinned aristocrats than on darker-skinned workers, Africans, Jews, or Arabs—whose own blue veins were, indeed, less visible because they had darker skin—now had the blessing of a host of new parameters for defining race and inevitably showing fair-skinned testers in the fairest light. National types, patriots declared confidently, could now be clearly defined and separated from outsiders—"race," until quite recently, meaning national origin—giving them *carte blanche* to discriminate at home and dominate abroad through conquest and colonialism. [6]

The Third International Eugenics Conference, one of many events such as "Fitter Family" and "Better Baby" contests held around the country, was organized by the American Museum of Natural History in 1932. The exhibit sought to prove that talents were inherited traits. Featured was a lineup of rectangular fur samples from various animals, not unlike color swatches in clothing catalogs, or allowable coat

colors in breed books today. Visitors were invited to step up and feel each sample to test their "sense of elegance in fur feeling" — perhaps to recruit those with promising careers as Westminster judges? [7] The most unsettling part about an unflinching history of eugenics is how socially acceptable this brand of "science" was, and remains, in mainstream opinion. The History Channel—which a friend of mine calls "The Hitler Channel" — has spent decades pounding into our heads the same stories of the Third Reich's ruthless campaign for racial purity and shaming this barbaric tribe for its crimes against humanity. Viewers could have learned more by hearing that it wasn't a son of the Fatherland but Darwin's social-climbing cousin, Sir Francis Galton, who first gave this sort of behavior the respectable name of "eugenics" in 1883. Not only was Galton not chastised for finding a new defense for Britain's traditional ruling class and imperial rule—and inspiring racial purges in the century to come—he was knighted for his mental gymnastics. Wherever it caught on, eugenics seemed to make respectable society more respected and the powerful more powerful. Across the Atlantic, it was the Rockefeller Foundation, not the Ku Klux Klan, that financed Germany's early racial "research." The caricature of the right-wing eugenicist is a tad racist because Americans of all political persuasions developed eugenics far beyond the wildest dreams of the cash-poor English. Involuntary sterilization laws were enacted by Indiana Hoosiers and hoity-toity Connecticuters three decades before Hitler thought to take our example and modeled his own final solution on ours. Systematic "purification" was widespread, institutionalized, and enforced by legislation from coast to coast by the time the world caught on, and America's eugenic mission would extend deep into the twentieth century. Basing a person's

value on appearance, pedigree, and some narrow definition of intelligence was very much the norm, and disseminators of racial bias weren't marginal or war criminals but upstanding members of society, often the best and brightest leaders of our most venerable institutions. Promoters of profiling were doctors, lawyers, legislators, politicians, literati, Nobel Prize-winning scientists, and even a few Jews who figured among the major proponents. Courses in eugenics were standard fare at the top Ivy League schools attended by America's finest families, who funded the fight against "racial degeneration" and campaigned for "social improvement," lowering birthrates among "defective classes," and restricting immigration to white, Northern Europeans (or people who looked like them). Like the Rockefellers, the illustrious Harriman clan was a major benefactor of eugenic research, inspired by the father's Anglophile hobby of breeding race horses. Thoroughbreds born to the House of Harriman were also among the earliest importers of those Labrador retrievers we can't seem to imagine in more than three pre-approved shades today. How did eugenics finally lose its mass appeal and cede its social standing? As the late historian of science Stephen Jay Gould remarked, it wasn't any of the blatant inconsistencies, obtusely unscientific methods, or strong notes of self-serving prophecy that finally did in eugenics among people of good breeding and taste. It was those unavoidable horrors of World War II, still dramatically reenacted on the Hitler Channel, that showed where these ideas led when taken to their logical conclusions. This sudden unveiling inspired Americans and English to open their eyes and publicly disavow all ties with the movement they'd only recently raced to embrace. [8] Still the question remains: How could morally upright bipeds have gone along with eugenics for as long as

they did?

While concerned scientists and watchdog groups are on constant guard against returning to bad habits of the not-so-distant past and treat the growing field of behavioral genetics with suspicion, little effort has been made in the dog fancy, a creation of the eugenics movement and heir to its misguided principles, to purge dog breeding of pseudoscience, to make it more a science than an art, or to bring beliefs current with knowledge and the values we profess to hold dear. The 1828 edition of Webster's dictionary defined "cur" or mongrel as "a degenerate dog; and in reproach, a worthless man." [9] Rather than apply the lessons learned and redefine what "better breeding" might mean in this day and age, the dog fancy behaves as though nothing has changed since the nineteenth century, and that nonhuman animals aren't subject to the same laws of biology as humans. Parties entrusted with the welfare and improvement of our best friends—kennel clubs and the scientists on their payrolls, breed clubs and their memberships, puppy mills and "good" breeders alike, a colossal dog industry invested in business as usual, and the local vet who keeps politely silent about everything—many experts continue to support unethical and counterproductive breeding practices by misdirecting our attention, not to how sick, stupid, or aggressive golden retrievers are becoming, but to how pretty they've managed to keep the coats.

Despite major strides made in universal suffrage, desegregation, affirmative action, and human rights, little has changed in the realm of dogdom, where random features like skin, coat, or eye color, skull shape, nose length, and social background are routinely linked to deeper character traits.

"Breediness" carries weight not only in the selection of show dogs and house pets but also in more important choices of candidates for useful, no-nonsense tasks such as therapy, assistance, and search-and-rescue work. Behind casual claims to breed superiority—loyalty, intelligence, trainability, beauty—is the kind of talk that's illegal in some places if the subjects are human but a sobering reminder that breedism, the barefaced promotion of eugenic stereotypes, is pure racism.

A passing glance at the sacred scrolls called breed standards, those elaborately detailed guidelines used to select which pups to breed and which to bucket, and the everyday expressions used in the ring, shows just how deeply entrenched eugenics still is. Preserved are retrograde terms like degenerate [10] (as in "degenerate coat color" for washed-out mutts, or "degenerate races" of half-breed humans), undesirable (esthetic features not "allowable" in the ring, or individuals whose lifestyles don't "conform" to classist notions of normality), expression (used by judges to describe that *je ne sais quoi* they see in champion material and lifted directly from physiognomy, and essential (any random trait believed to be a sign of blood "purity").

Traditional terms for mixing races—"mongrelization" and "debasement"—have been applied to humans and dogs alike. Such offensive language continues to obscure judgment and misguide selection of show ring champions, house pets, and seeing-eye dogs, and hardly anyone seems to notice or care. Parallels between eugenics and dog breeding abound, not just in the carefully controlled phraseology of official standards upheld by the AKC, but in the dog fancy's tools of measurement, and in the cockeyed results handed down as lessons to unsuspecting children. The "wicket," an adjustable device used for gauging a dog's

height in the show ring, is frighteningly reminiscent of contraptions used to measure skulls and noses of "the Negro type" or "the Jewish type." The idea of a "tramp," or stray mutt, sounded cute enough in Disney's *Lady and the Tramp* but was, in fact, a legal term used by eugenicists to describe one category of "undesirable" forced to undergo involuntary sterilizations.

The division of dogs into easily identifiable types was far more calculated than human cataloging. The beasts we can't seem to imagine in any other shapes, sizes, or coat colors were deliberately invented for commercial and competitive purposes. Standardized breeds were designed to look unique and indispensable by giving contestants more ways to win prizes in the ring, and consumers more opportunities to show their own breeding, taste, distinction, and spending power on pavements. Once the pantheon of prizewinning material was put on display in show rings, pet shop windows, front parlors, and public parks, fanciers soon forgot it was as contrived as a Sears Roebuck catalog, that the diversity was as artificial as Heinz 57 varieties. "Show" golden retrievers were little more than Irish setters in a different coat color, but like eugenicists with their racial indicators, the dog fancy first stopped breeding for function in favor of form, then backtracked and assigned unique personalities and skills to their creations!

The confusing array of standardized, branded, recognized terriers currently available for purchase and the source of so much family pride provide an excellent example of how inventive the dog fancy has been. Contrary to popular lore and breeders' advertising claims, "improved" breeds of the terrier type were invented for the stage and sidewalk. Any that aren't purely fictional works are, often and sadly,

working dogs made physically and mentally incapable of performing their traditional tasks. Ancient types were reshaped into cartoon replicas of their useful ancestors, and soon everyone but farmers and hunters without the luxury of gullibility forgot the whole operation was a theatrical hoax. [11] Whether any of these repackaged terriers ever had practical uses—none of them ever did in their "improved" forms—is immaterial to fashion hounds trying to display something special at both ends of their leashes. Those rare eccentrics who still use dogs for more than posing in a heel position, on the other hand, such as seasoned hunter and hound historian David Hancock, who was interviewed in the BBC documentary *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*, are struck by the absurdity of believing the tilt of an animal's ears or coat color are indicators of any one individual dog's essence, much less the owner's. "And then there are those who swear by this breed of terrier or that," Hancock writes with disbelief, "as if every single human from Devon or Durham had similar qualities." [12]

Not only has the sort of thinking that makes tolerance of yellow, brown, and black Labs seem like a sign of diversity not been helping dogs, this catalog selection has worked against the genetic diversity needed to keep populations healthy, smart, and functional. Selecting dogs, often from the same litter, for distinctive but irrelevant features like fur texture or ear style has led to many of the health problems we're seeing. "Some have suggested that there are too many breeds," writes Kevin Stafford of the Institute of Veterinary Animal and Biomedical Sciences at Massey University in New Zealand, "and that breeds, such as terriers . . . with similar functions and type should be crossbred to produce fewer breeds with much greater genetic variation." [13] At the same time, it should be added, dogs are routinely neutered,

killed, or in some way disfavored for having heads or coat colors not "typical" of their races, but their very lack of uniformity is often a sign of the diverse heritage that purists try to cover up.

Broad categories of hunting, sporting, guarding, fighting, farm dogs, and so on—animals whose traditional uses over hundreds and thousands of years have left them with tendencies toward certain pronounced temperaments and talents—have been dissected and color-coded for the stage, then given catchy brand names like golden retriever, yellow Lab, and fox terrier. The modern fancy isn't entirely to blame for this unnatural drive to differentiate within strictly defined parameters. Before dogs were sorted and segregated for a mass market into easily identifiable molds, general types skilled in tracking, retrieving, or flushing out game were used in ritual hunting exploits of upper-class sportsmen. For centuries, finer families swore by the superiority of their own private labels of greyhound or foxhound, not breeds by today's standards but strains that often had distinct coloring that identified them as belonging to noteworthy kennels. Legends of their exploits were handed down at arm's length from one earl to the next and kept alive in small social circles. Opinions went unchallenged within the league of gentlemen because no one else was in a position to contradict, not the hired help or local tenantry, who were only too flattered to tag along. It went without saying, but was frequently said, that lower-class mongrels and their Cockney owners could never, even if given a chance, outperform highbred hounds and their highbred humans. As for "foreign" types, many English continue to resent the invasion of Continental pointing breeds that are, as Hancock notes,

"accused of lacking style." [14]

Americans saw themselves as rightful inheritors of English-style eugenics. No less of their identity was invested at the other end of the leash where they could distinguish themselves from anyone without the means to be seen with pets that might as well have had price tags tied to their collars. Dog shows and breed registries were slower to thrive in the United States than in the UK, owing to the brief interruption of a civil war, but no time was lost in catching up, and by the twentieth century, the AKC and Westminster were purveying widespread snootiness almost as well as the Kennel Club or Crufts. Having no royalty for sponsors, the closest to the genuine item was Freeman Lloyd, that imported English image consultant who helped Americans forge their alliances with "pure" blood through pet ownership. Lloyd presented the fancy's eugenic mission unflinchingly in an essay on "correct conformation" for the *American Kennel Club Gazette and Stud Book* in 1943. "As a matter of fact," he instructed, "the head and face of a dog, like those of human beings, are usually an accurate gauge of character, and the art and science of phrenology may be applied to the former as well as to the latter." [15] A similar *Gazette* article penned by another established expert appeared in 1947, despite the grim lesson the world had just learned on which way this eugenic madness led. "What is important is the creation through competition of a better breed," the article commented, explaining the importance of breed standards in dog shows—and sounding like a manifesto for Social Darwinism. [16]



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"But in the parlance of the Old Virginia Gentleman, he must be treated like a white man," was the dog advice to sportsmen in a self-help manual called *The Gentleman's Dog: His Rearing, Training, and Treatment*. For author C. A. Bryce, MD, this meant "something more than crusts and kicks and sleeping on the ash-pile," treatment more befitting a man of color, we can safely assume. "You cannot expect to raise a decent self-respecting dog unless you think enough of him to give him comfortable, clean, and well attended sleeping quarters." [17] Like many dog authors wearing two hats, this doctor doubling as a canine aficionado helped impress upon Americans the resemblance between well-bred pooches and well-bred people. Like Dr. Stables and others, Dr. Bryce clearly believed that better addresses, good marriages, and segregation were ways to prevent mongrelization or miscegenation in *both* species. And yet breeding within a gene pool restricted to members of certain preapproved colors, combined with environmental input from the right people, even the most devout eugenicist knew, were no guarantees of superiority. Freeman Lloyd, a hunter, hound historian, show ring judge, and canine art collector, stressed the role of an expert eye in handing down final judgments after inbreeding "the best to get the best." Determining the *very* best required the seasoned taste and knowledge of a proper white gentleman with discriminating taste, a man like Lloyd himself. The English arbiter, whose writings introduced aristocratic Labrador retrievers to

Americans, explained the need for balance between inner and outer dog that could only be determined by men who knew better than they, especially in his own personal breed of choice. There were springer spaniels, Lloyd cautioned, and there were "'springers' whose 'long' pedigrees appear well on paper, but whose appearances proclaim 'a nigger in a woodpile.'" [18]

In hindsight, golden retrievers, yellow Labs, and Anderson Cooper's brown-and-white blue blood begin to look like blond-haired Hitler Youth to unseasoned neophytes lacking Lloyd's expertise. Until very recently, the fancy has held the reins on canines, enjoying virtually unchallenged authority and absolute power in matters dog-related. The show culture and its priorities have dominated breeding, not only determining how champions and house pets should look but also influencing in subtle ways the choices of candidates to lead the blind and sniff out bombs. For generations, kennel clubs and their associates have made up, like eugenicists of old, a powerful circle that enjoys society's utmost respect and operates free from meddlesome outsiders.

But nonmembers have been bolder of late. At the risk of seeming impertinent—or being called an animal rights extremist—a fun exercise for simple spectators with a fondness for dogs might be to step back and consider the dogs themselves, or at least wonder what's been done to improve them as our servants. After a century and a half of tinkering with former hunters, herders, guarders, and multitaskers, is it really so unreasonable to ask the experts for a progress report?

Looking for signs of improvement, the first item to strike an untrained eye might be the utter lack of resemblance

between modern-day show breeds and their ancestors who performed specialized tasks that helped humans survive and flourish for thousands of years—jobs they stopped doing the moment they stepped into show rings. A standardized springer spaniel looks nothing like its said ancestor, a general type of dog bred, not to conform to any specific look or to win prizes, but to help hunt birds. Downton Abbey, the series about an aristocratic family that debuted in 2010, features a yellow Lab that looks little like the breed did as recently as the early twentieth century. [19] Show people defend as their *raison d'être* the careful preservation of "traditional" types, "correct" form, "pure" blood, and "ancestral" lines. They claim to protect the sacred union of "form and function," but the two were only ever related in very general, commonsensical ways, and not decided by a long list of demanding rules like breed standards, which are constantly subjected to new interpretation by judges. Show champions, and their offspring we keep as pets, haven't done any real work in ages, and their looks show it, say those rare eccentrics who refuse to breed nonfunctional dogs with chests too barreled to fit into fox holes, or absurdly plush coats and theatrical drapes of skin that impede movement and hinder vision. Yet kennel clubs, breed clubs, conformation judges, breeders, and assorted fanciers—the ones *supposed* to have all the taste and knowledge about dogs—seem to have a poor faculty even for pure esthetics. As for function at this end of the leash, it has been known for some time that show ring judges typically have no practical experience whatsoever with the former herders, hunters, guarders, and sentries they're evaluating. They do not hunt. They are not shepherds. They don't tend to be policemen or soldiers.

"Both the appearance and behavior of modern breeds would be deeply strange to our ancestors who lived just a few hundred years ago," says evolutionary biologist Greger Larson. [20] Meanwhile, mere amateurs with an eye for artifice are struck not only by the extreme differences in appearance between the old and "improved," but by the radical break from breeding practices considered sound for centuries before this sudden attraction to "scientific" breeding in the nineteenth. Traits traditionally along for the ride became essential. In fact, the less dogs have been needed to perform useful work in recent years, the more intensely they've been scrutinized for formal perfection and blood "purity." For eons up to the eve of dog shows, contenders for real jobs were continually outcrossed, not chronically inbred, to various degrees depending on their tasks. Prior to commercial repackaging and the cult of novelty, dogs weren't sold as promising puppies (or put down as instant failures) based on their markings or relations. They were selected much later, as adult individuals with observable skills and temperaments. [21] Humble farmers and idle upper-class sportsmen alike knew that utility, whether this was the master's survival or his pleasure, depended on a proven ability to perform.



IndefinitelyWild editor Wes's mutt, Wiley.

Critics of the fancy say measuring our companion species against beauty-pageant ideals can, at best, distract from more vital concerns like health and ability. At worst, they say, eugenic breeding standards can overtake and ruin entire populations of traditional types. A Dog Health Workshop was sponsored in 2012 by the Swedish Kennel Club, which has historically focused more on health and utility in dogs than show ring conformation. Included was a series on "Selection for Behavioral Traits." According to speaker Per Arvelius of the Department of Animal Breeding and Genetics at the Swedish University of Agricultural Studies, "If nothing else, more focus on one thing when selecting animals (for example, 'beauty') by definition means less focus on something else (for example, health, temperament)." [22] Animal rights extremism, or common sense?

Erik Wilsson, of the Swedish Armed Forces, which employs dogs for no-nonsense military uses, was also on the panel for behavior and breeding. Though Wilsson considers breeds (or preferably, "populations" of distantly related dogs) more reliable than random mixes for his purposes, he adds that breeds as defined by kennel clubs are no guarantee of quality. Outcrossing—mating dogs to those not listed in official stud books, closed for years to new blood by the AKC and England's Kennel Club—is vital to health and utility. Combined with reliable temperament testing and selection of individual dogs regardless of ancestry or appearance, breeding can sometimes produce better workers. But strict inbreeding for superficial uniformity? "I think exhibitions have only added bad things to dogs. Selecting for efficiency will get a functional anatomy although they may differ in size, color, etc., details not relevant for their work," Wilsson concludes.

[23]

"Give any show ring enough time," writes Patrick

Burns, traditional Jack Russell man, hunter, scholar, and vocal critic of kennel club practices, "and it will ruin any breed of working dog—it always has and it always will." [24] This would explain why farm dogs, police dogs, war dogs, racing dogs, sled dogs, and many other useful types are not typically even AKC-registered. This is why some breeders who, because of a kennel club's vast influence or for whatever reasons want its support, are said to outcross on the sly to keep their stock healthy and functional. [25]

Employers of traditional border collies, Jack Russells, and many breeds eventually split into "working," "field," "show," and "pet" versions, have kept their dogs bred in separate lines, out of show rings, and safe from a judge's gaze. But irrelevant concerns have influenced even the most useful dogs. Executive director of the US

Police Canine Association Russell Hess recalls a time before looks and pedigree had infiltrated police work. "Most of our dogs are imported and not bred in the USA," he comments sadly on the unfortunate results forty years later. Originally "departments used dogs received by donations and never purchased animals. Many dogs looked like a German shepherd but never came with registration papers and frankly these would outperform registered dogs costing several hundred dollars." [26]

Even in choices of appearance that may or may not be along for the ride, outside critics say that dog shows reward precisely the opposite of what they should. David Hancock mourns the loss of traits he has found helpful in dogs, and all because of some inexperienced judge's idea of "expression." Current preferences in color-coding and shape in eyes, he feels, are unfounded. "Dark eyes are considered highly desirable in nearly all pedigree breeds of dog and yet the keenest-eyed working dogs I come across are invariably light-

eyed." Eye shape, too, is subject to dispute among hunters on the field and poseurs on the stage. "I always find that perfect oval eyes are the healthiest, yet round eyes are actually desired in some pedigree breeds." As for ear essentials: "I suspect that prick ears are the natural shape for all dogs and that in pursuit of breed conformity we may have impaired one of dog's most important senses." [27]

Some hunting preferences, like service dog prejudices, may well be based on personal tastes, but many outsiders to the fancy agree that "expression" can work against utility. "The behavior exhibited in the show ring is standing," writes Janis Bradley, founder of the San Francisco SPCA Academy for Dog Trainers. Breeding "true" for behavior, Bradley cautions, has always been a difficult task, with a wide margin of error. Success

becomes all the more unlikely when it's not even a priority. [28]
Unfortunately for the dogs, show ring performance doesn't stop at standing. In as much as behaviors have ever been heritable, or remain as "superficial reminders of the ancestral working dogs," according to renowned biologist and dog-sled racer Raymond Coppinger, the tendencies displayed on stage might possibly work against pets and working dogs alike. [29]



Adventure: California's Lost Coast

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"Animal rights extremists" concur on this. "Dogs that carry their heads and tails erect catch the attention of judges, and thus tend to win shows," writes Stephen Budiansky, author and science contributor to the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*. "Those are also the marks of a dominant, hence aggressive dog." [30] The reverse may also be true. A study conducted by Kenth Svartberg at Stockholm University in 2005 concludes that the very traits

desirable in pets such as playfulness and nonsocial fearfulness, are undesirable in the show ring where many of the breeding dogs are chosen. [31] Either way, aggression has become a serious problem in the cocker spaniel (cocker rage syndrome), the springer spaniel (springer rage syndrome), and the golden retriever. First stripped of their original functions, some breeds have been made so sickly and disturbed by inbreeding for looks alone that their usefulness, even as decorative household items and symbols of family pride, is in jeopardy. So severe are their problems that behavioral geneticists hope to find in these sad but beautified beasts the genetic component to aggression that continues to elude them. [32]

Could it be that any improvement in dogs has been made in *spite* of shows and *without* the breed standards that champions manage to meet and somehow survive? According to Kevin Stafford, the extreme anatomical features awarded prizes—and very much inherited through extreme inbreeding—prevent normal mobility, communication, and socialization, leading to a host of behavioral problems and affecting a dog's performance in any capacity. [33] None of this is news to observers outside the show culture, and the obsession with breeding true for looks but not behavior has even led a few insiders to risk the fancy's wrath. "Personally," wrote Roger Caras, former Westminster host and judge and president of the ASPCA, "I consider it a terrible lack of responsibility for a breed standard not to include standards for behavior and temperament." [34] That was 1982. "Rightly or wrongly," wrote canine geneticist, breeder, and dog show judge Malcolm Willis in 1995, "it is a fact that dog breeding in most countries is dominated by the

show-ring," where he hoped that breeding would one day favor sound health, temperament, and utility "regardless of physical beauty." Willis was writing from a university located, ironically enough, at Newcastle upon Tyne, site of the legendary first canine beauty pageant of the nineteenth century. [35]

The year 1995 was also when the American border collie, descendant of a highly specialized, tightly wound, single-minded, energetic but extremely useful type of dog never meant for show rings, homes, or any environment but the wide open country, was recognized by the AKC. After a long and bitter fight with the US Border Collie Club—"dedicated to preserving the Border Collie as a working stock dog" and "opposing the showing, judging, and breeding of Border Collies based on their appearance" [36]—the AKC gave up on trying to seduce with prospects of blue ribbons, silver cups, and sidewalk glory. Following a familiar strategy after failing to induct resisters into the fancy's hall of fame and failure, the AKC redirected its patronage to a new and separate club composed of fanciers inexperienced with working dogs and more receptive to the dubious honor of approval.

Back in England, where this traditional farm dog had evolved over centuries as a roughly similar "collie" type, Willis still yearned for some sign of improvement in 1995. "Although it was decided that a working test would remain for KC registered dogs before they could become full champions," Willis remarked, worried like a flock facing that herder's inescapable stare, "the sad truth is that few Border collies have taken this test and still fewer have passed it. With such failure to attend to essential features, it will be only a matter

of time before the ill-named *Show* Border collie will have lost its ability to work." [37] More than a decade later in 2008, the year of the BBC's boycott of Crufts, England's Kennel Club felt compelled to backtrack and assign usefulness to dogs bred for looks from the time they were standardized. As though to show the world their refashioned version of the border collie was still "fit for function" despite generations of favoring form, officials set out to reform field trials with "some alterations that will make the test more relevant to what it aims to assess—a dog's herding ability." [38] Prior to that, not a single sheep had been sighted on those virtual fields as green as AstroTurf, and not many border collies have been seen since sheep were added to the equation. During the first three years of improved English trials, only nine dogs qualified to take even this limited test of ability. [39]

Meanwhile, in average homes on both sides of the pond, pet owners swayed by romantic tales of a pastoral figure now deprived of pastures either end up abandoning their silken two-tone replicas for being too difficult to manage, or pride themselves on cramming what remains of their uniqueness into completely inappropriate environments. It's not uncommon to find these hardwired misfits staring blankly at walls, or trembling and drooling with pupils dilated. "Noise phobia" is said to affect at least 50 percent of pet border collies. Many are prescribed Xanax. Ten percent suffer severely, and the breed has become a subject of study—again, on the genetic basis of mental illness. [40]

Not all purebreds are overactive or brimming with enthusiasm. Others, according to outside agitators and extremists, have swung to the opposite extreme. Many replicas bred for the stage and sofa, it is said, have had their senses dulled and spirits broken to the point of lethargy. Fancy dogs seem uninterested, and uninteresting to all but

the judges who praise them, the scientists who study them, and the hobbyists who buy them. Some breeds appear to be sort of stupid, leading critics to that political hot potato called "intelligence."

"The dumbing of America has gone far enough," the *Washington Post* wrote in 1994 in defense of the more traditional border collie, whose patrons were fighting *against* AKC recognition. "Yes, we have gotten used to falling SAT scores. . . . But we must draw the line somewhere. I say we draw it at dogs." [41] The concern goes beyond border collies, according to a study of thirteen thousand dogs conducted by Kenth Svartberg in 2006. *The Telegraph* reported that "the mental and physical agility of many breeds is being eroded." Defining "intelligence" by a number of characteristics, including sociability and curiosity, testers concluded that dogs bred for looks, especially show dogs, were succumbing to "introversion" and "boring personality" in just a few generations. Pedigree favorites were "less responsive and not as alert or attentive," more a source of concern among scientists than judges or hobbyists. Was this an example of form following function? "Perhaps the genes behind attractive looks could also be closely linked to those that cause fearfulness," said Svartberg. [42]

Golden retrievers and yellow Labs could be the new dumb blonds, not due to pigmentation but because they've been inbred for coat color. Holding off on the sort of overblown generalizations that legitimized eugenics, another study, at Aberdeen University in Scotland (birthplace to goldens, Labs, and other sporting dogs turned couch potatoes), defines "intelligence" in terms of spatial awareness and problem-solving abilities. Distinct differences between

breeds and mutts were observed. "With a pedigree as long as his tail, you might expect the pure-bred pooch to trounce his mongrel cousin in an IQ test," reports the *Daily Mail*. "But it seems all that breeding may be for nothing. For when it comes to intelligence, scientists say the crossbred wins, paws down." Researchers found that mixes were far better "on the ball" than pedigree dogs. Mutts were also cleverer at locating the proverbial bone, cloaked with a tin can before their eyes, than many pedigree dogs that didn't "even realize it still existed." These and other tests led the Aberdeen team to predict mongrel talents could easily translate into not only equal but *superior* performance for police, seeing eye, herding, and house pet work, if only these disadvantaged curs would be given a chance. Reverse prejudice? Seven out of the ten best problem solvers at Aberdeen were crossbreeds. The top dog wasn't a border collie, or a springer spaniel for that matter, but an eyesore of a "collie-spaniel cross called Jet, which scored full marks." [43]

Translating the dog's traditional skills (or what remains of them) into contemporary uses, recent trends for service animals have been no less revealing. The retrieving tendency, for example, is needed for assistance work where the drive to happily pick up fallen objects comes in handy to persons wheelchair-bound. Sufficient size is also important for bracing the disabled or pulling vehicles. Golden and Labrador retrievers often fit the bill, but so do Labradoodles and Goldendoodles, says Jenny Barlos of Assistance Dogs of America. [44] An individual dog's intelligence and temperament, she says, not breed as defined by kennel clubs, ultimately determine who gets the job. "About 50 percent of the dogs that pass our initial evaluation do not make it to final training and I think that's about average," says Barlos. "The dogs that make it through initial evaluation

are very few also." In the greater scheme of things, it might seem that the heroic qualities attributed to goldens and Labs across the board are overextended. The minuscule number of high-profile individuals that even qualify to qualify are exceptional, perhaps negligible. A keen and lifelong desire to learn and work are essential, says Barlos, though admittedly some breeds with familiar faces in the standard shades are disproportionately represented. "AKC registration is not important to us," Barlos continues. So why are so many goldens and yellow Labs seen visiting hospitals, nursing homes, restaurants, and cruise ships? "They have a friendly public perception while having full access with their owners," Barlos remarks. Perhaps it's time for some affirmative action in the dog world. Animal Farm Foundation in upstate New York has not only been placing "pit bulls" ("We keep this in quotes," it says) as family pets but also training and placing them for assistance work. At least one has become a search-and-rescue dog. [45]

While tasks like assistance, drug sniffing, and finding land mines demand exceptional skills and temperaments that maybe found in certain breeds and non-breeds alike, no-brainer therapy jobs are also subject to profiling. I've come across boastful owners of many a purebred prouder in recent years to add the title of "certified therapy dog" to the list of honors used as evidence of blood superiority. Everyone these days seems to be sporting a therapy dog on the sidewalk runway, and I myself am considering growing whiskers and applying. But according to Kelly Gould at Karma Dogs, which specializes in using rescued animals to help children with emotional problems, if species matters, "the breed has nothing to do with it." [46]

Karma has had success with purebreds and mutts of all

varieties. Certain breeds do tend to be smarter than others, says Gould, but that isn't key to therapy work. "It's the unconditional attention and bond that kids make with the dog that matters." As the wisdom of the ages has always taught without the glamour of show rings and rigors of beauty standards, success comes down to the individual dog's disposition and ability to leave the past behind for a second chance. Not only do dog shows tend not to improve dogs in this capacity, no matter how cute they look on television, perhaps they spoil them for other careers. A group of ten retired show champions, chosen by judges as best representing their breeds and prodigiously bred for consumers addicted to the scent of blue blood—applying for therapy work because what else could they do now that they'd lost their looks?—failed their training and evaluations across the board at Karma. Veterans of the stage had been rewarded all their lives for a very different sort of performance, leading spectators to believe formal perfection automatically fit them for any function. But standing and posing had left them too set in their ways, or perhaps their careers as therapy dogs had been sabotaged at birth. Many dogs are being "overbred," Gould explains, careful to add that it was a nice gesture to try and give these former champions a break but sorry it didn't work out for them. Regardless of breed, only "one out of ten dogs pass our test the first time," says Gould. Pedigree and standardized appearance, it seems, have not been relevant, except perhaps in negative ways. One of Karma's best success stories, a six-month-old chow mix with behavior issues, was turned around and made into a model canine citizen. "When his vest is on, he knows it's work time," says Gould. Golden Retrievers and Labs, based on her experience, are "kind of dumb" and not always the best "breed ambassadors." [47]

So maybe breed is relevant, after all, if only to know which dogs, as a rule of thumb, to *avoid*? There may be no solid-gold 100 percent guaranteed way to improve dogs, a thought guaranteed to strike terror into the hearts of purists everywhere. But like it or not, one likely route to making dogs a bit smarter, healthier, more emotionally balanced and useful could be to ignore breed standards and pedigrees—and *mix the races!*

Overbreeding for either form or function, it turns out, can result in losing both. Many purebreds are getting too "pure" for their own good (and ours). A tragic example is the German shepherd, one of the top working breeds throughout the twentieth century. When not being deformed for show rings and homes, many German shepherds have been made soft and unreliable in the field. As we've seen, police departments in the United States are dropping these dogs, but so are departments around the world. Attempts are being made to cross them with other breeds or to replace them altogether with a Belgian Malinois, even in their land of birth, Germany, where they've been a source of national pride. [48] Useful traits in overbred golden and Labrador retrievers are also being salvaged, and an unapologetically *mixed* heritage may spare them the sad fate of the German shepherd, with its vanishing skills and declining health. US and UK fanciers haven't been keen on discussing recent developments, but for a variety of demanding services including assistance and seeing-eye work, the hybrid golden Labrador retriever has been found, by growing numbers of experts beyond the show ring, to be more reliable than either side of its family tree.

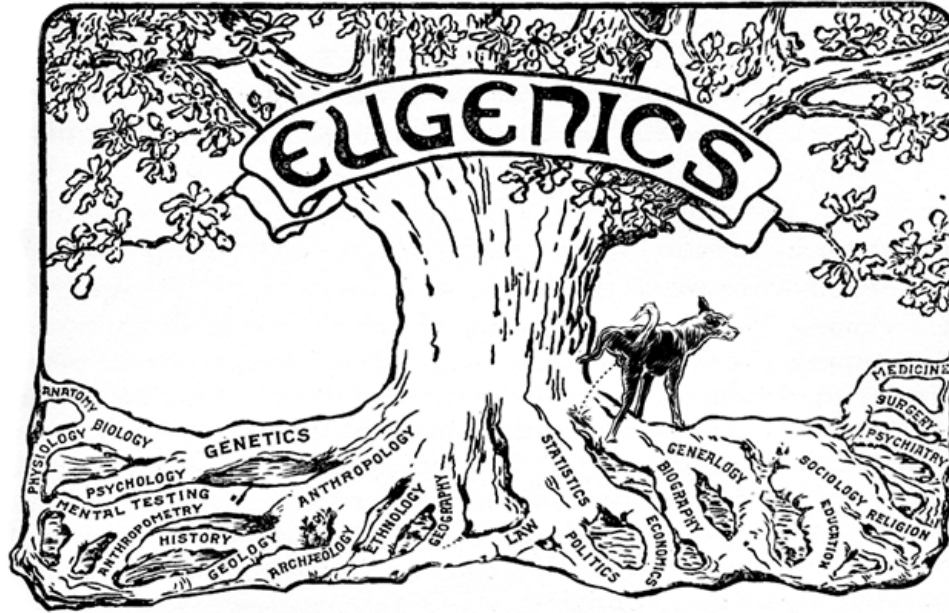
"Golden Lab" shouldn't be confused with the latest yuppie

affectation on Manhattan sidewalks, where the yellow Lab is made to sound more expensive. Not even the Queen of England calls her yellow Labs "golden." In fact, golden retrievers weren't even called "golden" until the twentieth century, when the fancy decided to up the ante and make "yellow" dogs sound fancier. If people are going to be pretentious, they could at least get their facts straight. The golden Lab proper is a true hybrid that goes against the rules of pedigree breeding, a rough type selected for ability, not looks, a dog that would go unrecognized by name droppers but for the colored vest. A practical solution to excessive clinginess in goldens and excess enthusiasm in "nice but dim" [49] Labs, the new and improved version is no freak exception but a growing trend. Guide Dogs, a major provider of working animals to the UK, reported in 2010 that 47 percent of their success stories were golden-Lab crosses. At last count, in 2011, 55 percent of all the dogs they used were either golden-Lab or Lab-German shepherd crosses (and only 30 percent and 9 percent, respectively, were "pure" Lab and golden). [50] Similarly, but on a smaller scale, Guide Dogs of America reports that in 2011, among graduates successfully placed in jobs, 25 percent have been golden Labs, an increase of 23 percent in just one year from 2010. [51]

Final proof that best friends can break their molds, and a sign of dog days to come: search and rescue dogs, themselves rescued from death row in shelters, and many of these mixed breeds, are heroically overcoming every disadvantage life has dealt them. "When it comes to selectivity, Harvard has nothing on these pooches," says a 2013 article on dogs trained by the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation. [52] Federal Emergency Management

Agency–certified graduates, animals once abandoned as useless, are rising to challenge every cliché on desirable appearance, family history, and environmental influence. Yet despite the marvelous talents and personalities of these and other exceptionally smart, temperamentally balanced, trainable, and *useful* animals, fans aren't holding their breath for an appearance at Westminster or Crufts anytime soon. Golden Labs and less calculated crosses aren't likely to be "accepted," "approved," or "recognized" because they don't conform to the eugenic standards of any one breed. As hybrids, they aren't bred from eugenically "pure" bloodlines. It may be possible to breed a better dog, however narrowly or broadly that is defined, but this isn't likely to be accomplished within the dog fancy's eugenic tradition where practical concerns are compromised by conformation. In any event, and whether they're black, white, or parti-colored, the needs of truly useful, working dogs can be too much for the average dog owner to handle, and the golden rule for finding the perfect pet may be simpler than imagined.

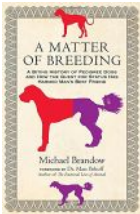
For the vast majority of canine consumers hoping to live out virtually those legends of heroic ancestral deeds, who believe that pedigree papers give them possession of unrivaled talents hidden behind coats of arms borne by noble beings whose forebears supposedly lived in palaces, who crave convenient formulas and precise measurements for "predictability" —when all they really need is a nice companion who won't bite the kids —there's that one-size-fits-all advice said to come from the ASPCA, though its origins have been lost with the wisdom of the ages: If you can't decide between a shepherd, a setter, or a poodle, get them all . . . adopt a mutt.



Eugenics is the now-defunct (and creepy!) practice of breeding supposedly superior humans to achieve genetic improvements while sterilizing undesirables. Sound familiar? It's the exact same thing we now do to dogs and it's responsible for a range of health and behavioral issues in them.
— Ed.

This chapter is excerpted from "A Matter of Breeding: A Biting History of

Pedigree Dogs and How the Quest for Status Has Harmed Man's Best Friend" by Michael Brandow (Beacon Press, 2015). Reprinted with permission from Beacon Press.



A Matter of Breeding: A Biting History of Pedigree Dogs and How...

From amazon

Does a dog need to have a certain look to behave in a certain way? Seeking some explanation for our present-day obsession with predictability, many are surprised to find the trail leads back to eugenics, that dirty word recalled with fear and loathing but a set of assumptions that have as much to do with pets as they once did with people. Few know that many of our core beliefs about bloodlines, appearance, and skill retain more than a tinge of those ugly theories that have made some people and pets seem superior for their complexion or ancestral profiles, and others inferior for having substandard markings or a checkered past.

Most upright citizens have officially sworn off applying eugenics to humans these days, but for some strange reason, they continue to breed and buy their dogs along old eugenic lines. Anderson Cooper was shocked and appalled on his show in May 2012 to report that forced sterilizations of "undesirables" were conducted by the tens of thousands in the United States until as recently as the 1970s. [1] But at home, he had a Welsh springer spaniel, a breed born to what AKC writer Freeman Lloyd once called "a doggie family that has existed in its approximately pure state for many hundreds of generations." [2] Despite its illustrious past, Cooper's brand of choice is now prone to a number of serious health issues and has an average inbreeding coefficient higher than that of first cousins. [3] Blood "purity" has worked against the springer, which has been subjected, like many breeds, to the same outdated theories of "better breeding" that get pups culled for having the wrong coat color, make "good" families feel superior to not-so-good ones—and get millions of innocent people killed for their ethnic or racial background. Sterilization, euthanasia, segregation, holocausts, and judgments at Westminster all have a common heritage in eugenics, and despite the fact that English isn't among the many languages that still use "race" and "breed" interchangeably, we have no excuse for not knowing or caring about this history.

Terrible but true: who among us, at one time or another, hasn't been guilty of stereotyping? And who among us has never let looks determine likability? Old biases aren't easy to shed. Perhaps the most obvious crime against progressive thinking can be found in our own backyards, where it's still socially acceptable to say, "I have a chocolate Lab at home," but not, "I only hire Latino/black/Asian/fill-in-the-blank maids because they clean better." Why is "We grew up with two

goldens" in fashion, but "We've adopted a pair of Orientals" is not? What's wrong with "I have a *dog*" or "Two *dogs* are better than one?" I myself have no degree in statistics but question the myth that all pedigree German shepherds are loyal, smart, and trainable because one in a million qualifies for service work. Not all golden retrievers are heroes because one was depicted with a fireman at Ground Zero in a painting that hangs in the AKC's art collection, no more than all Americans are champion athletes because Michael Phelps won some gold medals.

The "science" of eugenics was founded in the mid-nineteenth century as a tool for keeping people in their proper places. "It is, too, a strange fact," wrote Gordon Stables, a firm believer in head shape as an indicator of character, "that the more highly civilised a nation is, the greater its care and culture of the canine race." [4] Based on a similar observation that fair-skinned folk with certain anatomical features were supposedly more attractive and intelligent than "darkies" (too repugnant, many thought, even to serve food on First-Class dining cars), eugenics devised an elaborate and complex system of color coding and measurement, an apparatus that grew more elaborate and complex with time. Focusing on a somewhat selective selection of mostly random and coincidental characteristics that conquerors and ruling classes had haphazardly amassed along their uphill climbs, traits certain groups just happened to share, such as blond hair, blue eyes, a taste for classical music, or a fondness for fox hunting—by-products of generations of inbreeding and upbringing only with their own kind—eugenic investigators compiled an exhaustive catalog of hair-splitting nuances to prove that races were, indeed, separate and unique. Some races, they felt, were essentially better than others, and mixing races—or

"mongrelization"—was unhealthy and probably dangerous to all races involved.

The eugenic inventory of racial indicators grew so encompassing and complex that experts managed to convince many that their observations simply had to be true, if only because, it was thought, no sane person would have observed them if they weren't. The subtleties of human skin tone, the way the eyes were set into the head, the precise angle at which the jaw protruded, neck length, hair texture, nose curvature—the convolution of spirals in brain matter, the spaces between the toes, the distance between the navel and the penis—every detail was carefully gauged and painstakingly documented, then compared and contrasted in ways that somehow always seemed the most flattering to white, Northern Europeans and their white, Northern European descendants across the Atlantic (or people who looked like them). Superficial distinctions were exaggerated to the point that different racial or ethnic groups were said to have descended from separate prehistoric ancestors, a theory only recently disproved by DNA, not unlike the freshly debunked myth that not all dogs evolved from wolves. Embellished bloodlines based on outward appearance, and a rudimentary understanding of genetics that made heredity seem as simple as pigmentation in guinea pigs, were used to explain deeper character traits like morality, criminality, intelligence, and "feeblemindedness." Before long, eugenics had just about every aspect of human diversity neatly mapped, categorized, and evaluated based on looks or social ties. Anatomical and behavioral traits, even personal quirks, were correlated to family, class, race, and ethnic background, or to whether a person ended up working as a banker, baker, soldier, stenographer, poet, or piano tuner.

Eugenics explained it all: infertility, spelling, dancing, neatness, insanity, gambling, gout, disobedience, double-jointedness, punctuality, "pug" noses on ill-born Irish, even ball playing. [5]

Among the many errors of eugenics were to misinterpret outward appearance, behavior, and culturally biased test results as indicators of other qualities; to confuse heredity with environment; to overestimate the role of individual genes in the inheritance of complex behaviors; to focus on human pedigrees instead of individuals; and to cling to an archaic belief in inbreeding for blood "purity," already proven as detrimental to half-mad, hemophiliac royal families as it would prove to be for fancy, "scientifically" bred dogs in the century to come.

Like so many attempts at improvement in the nineteenth century, eugenics dressed old habits in new garb. Ancient, quasi-mystical arts of physiognomy and phrenology, and a more recent discipline called craniometry, went into these dazzling demonstrations of mental gymnastics. What eugenics brought to the table was a protective layer of statistics and documents, modern additions of the nineteenth century that lent authenticity to the usual slants on race, class, and any other basis for bias. The arcane assumption that head shape indicated personality or intelligence was now provable with an extensive set of precise measurements. Skulls could finally be placed side-by-side in glass display cases at natural history museums as updated reliquaries to be interpreted as eugenic high priests saw fit. Primitive, gut reactions against outsiders and oddballs because of the way they looked, acted, or dressed now had the blessing of observations showing darker-skinned people did, in fact, tend to be dishonest—because they didn't blush,

which they couldn't, at least not visibly, being darker-skinned—incontrovertible proof that they were born with something to hide. In the same vein, the medieval notion of "blue blood," based on the fact that bloodlines tended to be more visible on fair-skinned aristocrats than on darker-skinned workers, Africans, Jews, or Arabs—whose own blue veins were, indeed, less visible because they had darker skin—now had the blessing of a host of new parameters for defining race and inevitably showing fair-skinned testers in the fairest light. National types, patriots declared confidently, could now be clearly defined and separated from outsiders—"race," until quite recently, meaning national origin—giving them *carte blanche* to discriminate at home and dominate abroad through conquest and colonialism. [6]

The Third International Eugenics Conference, one of many events such as "Fitter Family" and "Better Baby" contests held around the country, was organized by the American Museum of Natural History in 1932. The exhibit sought to prove that talents were inherited traits. Featured was a lineup of rectangular fur samples from various animals, not unlike color swatches in clothing catalogs, or allowable coat colors in breed books today. Visitors were invited to step up and feel each sample to test their "sense of elegance in fur feeling"—perhaps to recruit those with promising careers as Westminster judges? [7] The most unsettling part about an unflinching history of eugenics is how socially acceptable this brand of "science" was, and remains, in mainstream opinion. The History Channel—which a friend of mine calls "The Hitler Channel"—has spent decades pounding into our heads the same stories of the Third Reich's ruthless campaign for racial purity and shaming this barbaric tribe for

its crimes against humanity. Viewers could have learned more by hearing that it wasn't a son of the Fatherland but Darwin's social-climbing cousin, Sir Francis Galton, who first gave this sort of behavior the respectable name of "eugenics" in 1883. Not only was Galton not chastised for finding a new defense for Britain's traditional ruling class and imperial rule—and inspiring racial purges in the century to come—he was knighted for his mental gymnastics. Wherever it caught on, eugenics seemed to make respectable society more respected and the powerful more powerful. Across the Atlantic, it was the Rockefeller Foundation, not the Ku Klux Klan, that financed Germany's early racial "research." The caricature of the right-wing eugenicist is a tad racist because Americans of all political persuasions developed eugenics far beyond the wildest dreams of the cash-poor English. Involuntary sterilization laws were enacted by Indiana Hoosiers and hoity-toity Connecticuters three decades before Hitler thought to take our example and modeled his own final solution on ours. Systematic "purification" was widespread, institutionalized, and enforced by legislation from coast to coast by the time the world caught on, and America's eugenic mission would extend deep into the twentieth century. Basing a person's value on appearance, pedigree, and some narrow definition of intelligence was very much the norm, and disseminators of racial bias weren't marginal or war criminals but upstanding members of society, often the best and brightest leaders of our most venerable institutions. Promoters of profiling were doctors, lawyers, legislators, politicians, literati, Nobel Prize–winning scientists, and even a few Jews who figured among the major proponents. Courses in eugenics were standard fare at the top Ivy League schools attended by America's finest families, who funded the fight against

"racial degeneration" and campaigned for "social improvement," lowering birthrates among "defective classes," and restricting immigration to white, Northern Europeans (or people who looked like them). Like the Rockefellers, the illustrious Harriman clan was a major benefactor of eugenic research, inspired by the father's Anglophile hobby of breeding race horses. Thoroughbreds born to the House of Harriman were also among the earliest importers of those Labrador retrievers we can't seem to imagine in more than three pre-approved shades today. How did eugenics finally lose its mass appeal and cede its social standing? As the late historian of science Stephen Jay Gould remarked, it wasn't any of the blatant inconsistencies, obtusely unscientific methods, or strong notes of self-serving prophecy that finally did in eugenics among people of good breeding and taste. It was those unavoidable horrors of World War II, still dramatically reenacted on the Hitler Channel, that showed where these ideas led when taken to their logical conclusions. This sudden unveiling inspired Americans and English to open their eyes and publicly disavow all ties with the movement they'd only recently raced to embrace. [8] Still the question remains: How could morally upright bipeds have gone along with eugenics for as long as they did?

While concerned scientists and watchdog groups are on constant guard against returning to bad habits of the not-so-distant past and treat the growing field of behavioral genetics with suspicion, little effort has been made in the dog fancy, a creation of the eugenics movement and heir to its misguided principles, to purge dog breeding of pseudoscience, to make it more a science than an art, or to bring beliefs current with knowledge and the values we profess to hold dear. The 1828

edition of Webster's dictionary defined "cur" or mongrel as "a degenerate dog; and in reproach, a worthless man." [9] Rather than apply the lessons learned and redefine what "better breeding" might mean in this day and age, the dog fancy behaves as though nothing has changed since the nineteenth century, and that nonhuman animals aren't subject to the same laws of biology as humans. Parties entrusted with the welfare and improvement of our best friends—kennel clubs and the scientists on their payrolls, breed clubs and their memberships, puppy mills and "good" breeders alike, a colossal dog industry invested in business as usual, and the local vet who keeps politely silent about everything—many experts continue to support unethical and counterproductive breeding practices by misdirecting our attention, not to how sick, stupid, or aggressive golden retrievers are becoming, but to how pretty they've managed to keep the coats.

Despite major strides made in universal suffrage, desegregation, affirmative action, and human rights, little has changed in the realm of dogdom, where random features like skin, coat, or eye color, skull shape, nose length, and social background are routinely linked to deeper character traits. "Breediness" carries weight not only in the selection of show dogs and house pets but also in more important choices of candidates for useful, no-nonsense tasks such as therapy, assistance, and search-and-rescue work. Behind casual claims to breed superiority—loyalty, intelligence, trainability, beauty—is the kind of talk that's illegal in some places if the subjects are human but a sobering reminder that breedism, the barefaced promotion of eugenic stereotypes, is pure racism.

A passing glance at the sacred scrolls called breed

standards, those elaborately detailed guidelines used to select which pups to breed and which to bucket, and the everyday expressions used in the ring, shows just how deeply entrenched eugenics still is. Preserved are retrograde terms like degenerate [10] (as in "degenerate coat color" for washed-out mutts, or "degenerate races" of half-breed humans), undesirable (esthetic features not "allowable" in the ring, or individuals whose lifestyles don't "conform" to classist notions of normality), expression (used by judges to describe that *je ne sais quoi* they see in champion material and lifted directly from physiognomy, and essential (any random trait believed to be a sign of blood "purity"). Traditional terms for mixing races — "mongrelization" and "debasement" — have been applied to humans and dogs alike. Such offensive language continues to obscure judgment and misguide selection of show ring champions, house pets, and seeing-eye dogs, and hardly anyone seems to notice or care. Parallels between eugenics and dog breeding abound, not just in the carefully controlled phraseology of official standards upheld by the AKC, but in the dog fancy's tools of measurement, and in the cockeyed results handed down as lessons to unsuspecting children. The "wicket," an adjustable device used for gauging a dog's height in the show ring, is frighteningly reminiscent of contraptions used to measure skulls and noses of "the Negro type" or "the Jewish type." The idea of a "tramp," or stray mutt, sounded cute enough in Disney's *Lady and the Tramp* but was, in fact, a legal term used by eugenicists to describe one category of "undesirable" forced to undergo involuntary sterilizations.

The division of dogs into easily identifiable types was far more calculated than human cataloging. The beasts we can't

seem to imagine in any other shapes, sizes, or coat colors were deliberately invented for commercial and competitive purposes. Standardized breeds were designed to look unique and indispensable by giving contestants more ways to win prizes in the ring, and consumers more opportunities to show their own breeding, taste, distinction, and spending power on pavements. Once the pantheon of prizewinning material was put on display in show rings, pet shop windows, front parlors, and public parks, fanciers soon forgot it was as contrived as a Sears Roebuck catalog, that the diversity was as artificial as Heinz 57 varieties. "Show" golden retrievers were little more than Irish setters in a different coat color, but like eugenicists with their racial indicators, the dog fancy first stopped breeding for function in favor of form, then backtracked and assigned unique personalities and skills to their creations!

The confusing array of standardized, branded, recognized terriers currently available for purchase and the source of so much family pride provide an excellent example of how inventive the dog fancy has been. Contrary to popular lore and breeders' advertising claims, "improved" breeds of the terrier type were invented for the stage and sidewalk. Any that aren't purely fictional works are, often and sadly, working dogs made physically and mentally incapable of performing their traditional tasks. Ancient types were reshaped into cartoon replicas of their useful ancestors, and soon everyone but farmers and hunters without the luxury of gullibility forgot the whole operation was a theatrical hoax. [11] Whether any of these repackaged terriers ever had practical uses—none of them ever did in their "improved" forms—is immaterial to fashion hounds trying to display something special at both ends of their leashes. Those rare eccentrics who still use dogs for more than posing in a heel

position, on the other hand, such as seasoned hunter and hound historian David Hancock, who was interviewed in the BBC documentary *Pedigree Dogs Exposed*, are struck by the absurdity of believing the tilt of an animal's ears or coat color are indicators of any one individual dog's essence, much less the owner's. "And then there are those who swear by this breed of terrier or that," Hancock writes with disbelief, "as if every single human from Devon or Durham had similar qualities." [12]

Not only has the sort of thinking that makes tolerance of yellow, brown, and black Labs seem like a sign of diversity not been helping dogs, this catalog selection has worked against the genetic diversity needed to keep populations healthy, smart, and functional. Selecting dogs, often from the same litter, for distinctive but irrelevant features like fur texture or ear style has led to many of the health problems we're seeing. "Some have suggested that there are too many breeds," writes Kevin Stafford of the Institute of Veterinary Animal and Biomedical Sciences at Massey University in New Zealand, "and that breeds, such as terriers . . . with similar functions and type should be crossbred to produce fewer breeds with much greater genetic variation." [13] At the same time, it should be added, dogs are routinely neutered, killed, or in some way disfavored for having heads or coat colors not "typical" of their races, but their very lack of uniformity is often a sign of the diverse heritage that purists try to cover up.

Broad categories of hunting, sporting, guarding, fighting, farm dogs, and so on—animals whose traditional uses over hundreds and thousands of years have left them with tendencies toward certain pronounced temperaments and

talents—have been dissected and color-coded for the stage, then given catchy brand names like golden retriever, yellow Lab, and fox terrier. The modern fancy isn't entirely to blame for this unnatural drive to differentiate within strictly defined parameters. Before dogs were sorted and segregated for a mass market into easily identifiable molds, general types skilled in tracking, retrieving, or flushing out game were used in ritual hunting exploits of upper-class sportsmen. For centuries, finer families swore by the superiority of their own private labels of greyhound or foxhound, not breeds by today's standards but strains that often had distinct coloring that identified them as belonging to noteworthy kennels. Legends of their exploits were handed down at arm's length from one earl to the next and kept alive in small social circles. Opinions went unchallenged within the league of gentlemen because no one else was in a position to contradict, not the hired help or local tenantry, who were only too flattered to tag along. It went without saying, but was frequently said, that lower-class mongrels and their Cockney owners could never, even if given a chance, outperform highbred hounds and their highbred humans. As for "foreign" types, many English continue to resent the invasion of Continental pointing breeds that are, as Hancock notes, "accused of lacking style." [14]

Americans saw themselves as rightful inheritors of English-style eugenics. No less of their identity was invested at the other end of the leash where they could distinguish themselves from anyone without the means to be seen with pets that might as well have had price tags tied to their collars. Dog shows and breed registries were slower to thrive in the United States than in the UK, owing to the brief interruption of a civil war, but no time was lost in catching up, and by the twentieth century, the AKC and Westminster were

purveying widespread snootiness almost as well as the Kennel Club or Crufts. Having no royalty for sponsors, the closest to the genuine item was Freeman Lloyd, that imported English image consultant who helped Americans forge their alliances with "pure" blood through pet ownership. Lloyd presented the fancy's eugenic mission unflinchingly in an essay on "correct conformation" for the *American Kennel Club Gazette and Stud Book* in 1943. "As a matter of fact," he instructed, "the head and face of a dog, like those of human beings, are usually an accurate gauge of character, and the art and science of phrenology may be applied to the former as well as to the latter." [15] A similar *Gazette* article penned by another established expert appeared in 1947, despite the grim lesson the world had just learned on which way this eugenic madness led. "What is important is the creation through competition of a better breed," the article commented, explaining the importance of breed standards in dog shows—and sounding like a manifesto for Social Darwinism. [16]

"But in the parlance of the Old Virginia Gentleman, he must be treated like a white man," was the dog advice to sportsmen in a self-help manual called *The Gentleman's Dog: His Rearing, Training, and Treatment*. For author C. A. Bryce, MD, this meant "something more than crusts and kicks and sleeping on the ash-pile," treatment more befitting a man of color, we can safely assume. "You cannot expect to raise a decent self-respecting dog unless you think enough of him to give him comfortable, clean, and well attended sleeping quarters." [17] Like many dog authors wearing two hats, this doctor doubling as a canine aficionado helped impress upon Americans the resemblance between well-bred pooches and well-bred people. Like Dr. Stables and others, Dr. Bryce clearly believed that better addresses,

good marriages, and segregation were ways to prevent mongrelization or miscegenation in *both* species. And yet breeding within a gene pool restricted to members of certain preapproved colors, combined with environmental input from the right people, even the most devout eugenicist knew, were no guarantees of superiority. Freeman Lloyd, a hunter, hound historian, show ring judge, and canine art collector, stressed the role of an expert eye in handing down final judgments after inbreeding "the best to get the best." Determining the *very* best required the seasoned taste and knowledge of a proper white gentleman with discriminating taste, a man like Lloyd himself. The English arbiter, whose writings introduced aristocratic Labrador retrievers to Americans, explained the need for balance between inner and outer dog that could only be determined by men who knew better than they, especially in his own personal breed of choice. There were springer spaniels, Lloyd cautioned, and there were "'springers' whose 'long' pedigrees appear well on paper, but whose appearances proclaim 'a nigger in a woodpile.'" [18]

In hindsight, golden retrievers, yellow Labs, and Anderson Cooper's brown-and-white blue blood begin to look like blond-haired Hitler Youth to unseasoned neophytes lacking Lloyd's expertise. Until very recently, the fancy has held the reins on canines, enjoying virtually unchallenged authority and absolute power in matters dog-related. The show culture and its priorities have dominated breeding, not only determining how champions and house pets should look but also influencing in subtle ways the choices of candidates to lead the blind and sniff out bombs. For generations, kennel clubs and their associates have made up, like eugenicists of old, a powerful circle that enjoys society's utmost respect

and operates free from meddling outsiders.

But nonmembers have been bolder of late. At the risk of seeming impertinent—or being called an animal rights extremist—a fun exercise for simple spectators with a fondness for dogs might be to step back and consider the dogs themselves, or at least wonder what's been done to improve them as our servants. After a century and a half of tinkering with former hunters, herders, guarders, and multitaskers, is it really so unreasonable to ask the experts for a progress report?

Looking for signs of improvement, the first item to strike an untrained eye might be the utter lack of resemblance between modern-day show breeds and their ancestors who performed specialized tasks that helped humans survive and flourish for thousands of years—jobs they stopped doing the moment they stepped into show rings. A standardized springer spaniel looks nothing like its said ancestor, a general type of dog bred, not to conform to any specific look or to win prizes, but to help hunt birds. *Downton Abbey*, the series about an aristocratic family that debuted in 2010, features a yellow Lab that looks little like the breed did as recently as the early twentieth century. [19] Show people defend as their *raison d'être* the careful preservation of "traditional" types, "correct" form, "pure" blood, and "ancestral" lines. They claim to protect the sacred union of "form and function," but the two were only ever related in very general, commonsensical ways, and not decided by a long list of demanding rules like breed standards, which are constantly subjected to new interpretation by judges. Show champions, and their offspring we keep as pets, haven't done any real work in ages, and their looks show it, say those rare eccentrics who refuse to breed nonfunctional

dogs with chests too barreled to fit into fox holes, or absurdly plush coats and theatrical drapes of skin that impede movement and hinder vision. Yet kennel clubs, breed clubs, conformation judges, breeders, and assorted fanciers—the ones *supposed* to have all the taste and knowledge about dogs—seem to have a poor faculty even for pure esthetics. As for function at this end of the leash, it has been known for some time that show ring judges typically have no practical experience whatsoever with the former herders, hunters, guarders, and sentries they're evaluating. They do not hunt. They are not shepherds. They don't tend to be policemen or soldiers.

"Both the appearance and behavior of modern breeds would be deeply strange to our ancestors who lived just a few hundred years ago," says evolutionary biologist Greger Larson. [20] Meanwhile, mere amateurs with an eye for artifice are struck not only by the extreme differences in appearance between the old and "improved," but by the radical break from breeding practices considered sound for centuries before this sudden attraction to "scientific" breeding in the nineteenth. Traits traditionally along for the ride became essential. In fact, the less dogs have been needed to perform useful work in recent years, the more intensely they've been scrutinized for formal perfection and blood "purity." For eons up to the eve of dog shows, contenders for real jobs were continually outcrossed, not chronically inbred, to various degrees depending on their tasks. Prior to commercial repackaging and the cult of novelty, dogs weren't sold as promising puppies (or put down as instant failures) based on their markings or relations. They were selected much later, as adult individuals with observable skills and temperaments. [21]

Humble farmers and idle upper-class sportsmen alike knew that utility, whether this was the master's survival or his pleasure, depended on a proven ability to perform.



IndefinitelyWild editor Wes's mutt, Wiley.

Critics of the fancy say measuring our companion species against beauty-pageant ideals can, at best, distract from more vital concerns like health and ability. At worst, they say, eugenic breeding standards can overtake and ruin entire populations of traditional types. A Dog Health Workshop was sponsored in 2012 by the Swedish Kennel Club, which has historically focused more on health and utility in dogs than show ring

conformation. Included was a series on "Selection for Behavioral Traits." According to speaker Per Arvelius of the Department of Animal Breeding and Genetics at the Swedish University of Agricultural Studies, "If nothing else, more focus on one thing when selecting animals (for example, 'beauty') by definition means less focus on something else (for example, health, temperament)." [22] Animal rights extremism, or common sense?

Erik Wilsson, of the Swedish Armed Forces, which employs dogs for no-nonsense military uses, was also on the panel for behavior and breeding. Though Wilsson considers breeds (or preferably, "populations" of distantly related dogs) more reliable than random mixes for his purposes, he adds that breeds as defined by kennel clubs are no guarantee of quality. Outcrossing—mating dogs to those not listed in official stud books, closed for years to new blood by the AKC and England's Kennel Club—is vital to health and utility. Combined with reliable temperament testing and

selection of individual dogs regardless of ancestry or appearance, breeding can sometimes produce better workers. But strict inbreeding for superficial uniformity? "I think exhibitions have only added bad things to dogs. Selecting for efficiency will get a functional anatomy although they may differ in size, color, etc., details not relevant for their work," Wilsson concludes. [23]

"Give any show ring enough time," writes Patrick Burns, traditional Jack Russell man, hunter, scholar, and vocal critic of kennel club practices, "and it will ruin any breed of working dog—it always has and it always will." [24] This would explain why farm dogs, police dogs, war dogs, racing dogs, sled dogs, and many other useful types are not typically even AKC-registered. This is why some breeders who, because of a kennel club's vast influence or for whatever reasons want its support, are said to outcross on the sly to keep their stock healthy and functional. [25]

Employers of traditional border collies, Jack Russells, and many breeds eventually split into "working," "field," "show," and "pet" versions, have kept their dogs bred in separate lines, out of show rings, and safe from a judge's gaze. But irrelevant concerns have influenced even the most useful dogs. Executive director of the US Police Canine Association Russell Hess recalls a time before looks and pedigree had infiltrated police work. "Most of our dogs are imported and not bred in the USA," he comments sadly on the unfortunate results forty years later. Originally "departments used dogs received by donations and never purchased animals. Many dogs looked like a German shepherd but never came with registration papers and frankly these would outperform registered dogs costing several hundred dollars." [26]

Even in choices of appearance that may or may

not be along for the ride, outside critics say that dog shows reward precisely the opposite of what they should. David Hancock mourns the loss of traits he has found helpful in dogs, and all because of some inexperienced judge's idea of "expression." Current preferences in color-coding and shape in eyes, he feels, are unfounded. "Dark eyes are considered highly desirable in nearly all pedigree breeds of dog and yet the keenest-eyed working dogs I come across are invariably light-eyed." Eye shape, too, is subject to dispute among hunters on the field and poseurs on the stage. "I always find that perfect oval eyes are the healthiest, yet round eyes are actually desired in some pedigree breeds." As for ear essentials: "I suspect that prick ears are the natural shape for all dogs and that in pursuit of breed conformity we may have impaired one of dog's most important senses." [27]

Some hunting preferences, like service dog prejudices, may well be based on personal tastes, but many outsiders to the fancy agree that "expression" can work against utility. "The behavior exhibited in the show ring is standing," writes Janis Bradley, founder of the San Francisco SPCA Academy for Dog Trainers. Breeding "true" for behavior, Bradley cautions, has always been a difficult task, with a wide margin of error. Success becomes all the more unlikely when it's not even a priority. [28]

Unfortunately for the dogs, show ring performance doesn't stop at standing. In as much as behaviors have ever been heritable, or remain as "superficial reminders of the ancestral working dogs," according to renowned biologist and dog-sled racer Raymond Coppinger, the tendencies displayed on stage might possibly work against pets and working dogs alike. [29]



Adventure: California's Lost Coast

Way up at the top of Northern California is a little piece of wilderness called The Lost Coast....

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"Animal rights extremists" concur on this. "Dogs that carry their heads and tails erect catch the attention of judges, and thus tend to win shows," writes Stephen Budiansky, author and science contributor to the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*. "Those are also the marks of a dominant, hence aggressive dog." [30] The reverse may also be true. A study conducted by Kenth Svartberg at Stockholm University in 2005 concludes that the very traits desirable in pets such as playfulness and nonsocial fearfulness, are undesirable in the show ring where many of the breeding dogs are chosen. [31] Either way, aggression has become a serious problem in the cocker spaniel (cocker rage syndrome), the springer spaniel (springer rage syndrome), and the gold standard of eugenic perfection, the golden retriever. First stripped of their original functions, some breeds have been made so sickly and disturbed by inbreeding for looks alone that their usefulness, even as decorative household items and symbols of family pride, is in jeopardy. So severe are their problems that behavioral geneticists hope to find in these sad but beautified beasts the genetic component to aggression that continues to elude them. [32]

Could it be that any improvement in dogs has been made in *spite* of shows and *without* the breed standards that champions manage to meet and somehow survive? According to Kevin Stafford, the extreme anatomical features awarded prizes—and very much inherited through extreme inbreeding—prevent normal mobility, communication, and

socialization, leading to a host of behavioral problems and affecting a dog's performance in any capacity. [33]

None of this is news to observers outside the show culture, and the obsession with breeding true for looks but not behavior has even led a few insiders to risk the fancy's wrath. "Personally," wrote Roger Caras, former Westminster host and judge and president of the ASPCA, "I consider it a terrible lack of responsibility for a breed standard not to include standards for behavior and temperament." [34] That was 1982. "Rightly or wrongly," wrote canine geneticist, breeder, and dog show judge Malcolm Willis in 1995, "it is a fact that dog breeding in most countries is dominated by the show-ring," where he hoped that breeding would one day favor sound health, temperament, and utility "regardless of physical beauty." Willis was writing from a university located, ironically enough, at Newcastle upon Tyne, site of the legendary first canine beauty pageant of the nineteenth century. [35]

The year 1995 was also when the American border collie, descendant of a highly specialized, tightly wound, single-minded, energetic but extremely useful type of dog never meant for show rings, homes, or any environment but the wide open country, was recognized by the AKC. After a long and bitter fight with the US Border Collie Club—"dedicated to preserving the Border Collie as a working stock dog" and "opposing the showing, judging, and breeding of Border Collies based on their appearance" [36]—the AKC gave up on trying to seduce with prospects of blue ribbons, silver cups, and sidewalk glory. Following a familiar strategy after failing to induct resisters into the fancy's hall of fame and failure, the AKC redirected its patronage to a new and separate club composed of fanciers inexperienced with

working dogs and more receptive to the dubious honor of approval.

Back in England, where this traditional farm dog had evolved over centuries as a roughly similar "collie" type, Willis still yearned for some sign of improvement in 1995. "Although it was decided that a working test would remain for KC registered dogs before they could become full champions," Willis remarked, worried like a flock facing that herder's inescapable stare, "the sad truth is that few Border collies have taken this test and still fewer have passed it. With such failure to attend to essential features, it will be only a matter of time before the ill-named *Show* Border collie will have lost its ability to work." [37] More than a decade later in 2008, the year of the BBC's boycott of Crufts, England's Kennel Club felt compelled to backtrack and assign usefulness to dogs bred for looks from the time they were standardized. As though to show the world their refashioned version of the border collie was still "fit for function" despite generations of favoring form, officials set out to reform field trials with "some alterations that will make the test more relevant to what it aims to assess—a dog's herding ability." [38] Prior to that, not a single sheep had been sighted on those virtual fields as green as AstroTurf, and not many border collies have been seen since sheep were added to the equation. During the first three years of improved English trials, only nine dogs qualified to take even this limited test of ability. [39] Meanwhile, in average homes on both sides of the pond, pet owners swayed by romantic tales of a pastoral figure now deprived of pastures either end up abandoning their silken two-tone replicas for being too difficult to manage, or pride themselves on cramming what remains of their uniqueness into completely inappropriate environments. It's not

uncommon to find these hardwired misfits staring blankly at walls, or trembling and drooling with pupils dilated. "Noise phobia" is said to affect at least 50 percent of pet border collies. Many are prescribed Xanax. Ten percent suffer severely, and the breed has become a subject of study—again, on the genetic basis of mental illness. [40] Not all purebreds are overactive or brimming with enthusiasm. Others, according to outside agitators and extremists, have swung to the opposite extreme. Many replicas bred for the stage and sofa, it is said, have had their senses dulled and spirits broken to the point of lethargy. Fancy dogs seem uninterested, and uninteresting to all but the judges who praise them, the scientists who study them, and the hobbyists who buy them. Some breeds appear to be sort of stupid, leading critics to that political hot potato called "intelligence."

"The dumbing of America has gone far enough," the *Washington Post* wrote in 1994 in defense of the more traditional border collie, whose patrons were fighting *against* AKC recognition. "Yes, we have gotten used to falling SAT scores. . . . But we must draw the line somewhere. I say we draw it at dogs." [41] The concern goes beyond border collies, according to a study of thirteen thousand dogs conducted by Kenth Svartberg in 2006. *The Telegraph* reported that "the mental and physical agility of many breeds is being eroded." Defining "intelligence" by a number of characteristics, including sociability and curiosity, testers concluded that dogs bred for looks, especially show dogs, were succumbing to "introversion" and "boring personality" in just a few generations. Pedigree favorites were "less responsive and not as alert or attentive," more a source of concern among scientists than judges or hobbyists. Was this

an example of form following function? "Perhaps the genes behind attractive looks could also be closely linked to those that cause fearfulness," said Svartberg. [42]

Golden retrievers and yellow Labs could be the new dumb blonds, not due to pigmentation but because they've been inbred for coat color. Holding off on the sort of overblown generalizations that legitimized eugenics, another study, at Aberdeen University in Scotland (birthplace to goldens, Labs, and other sporting dogs turned couch potatoes), defines "intelligence" in terms of spatial awareness and problem-solving abilities. Distinct differences between breeds and mutts were observed. "With a pedigree as long as his tail, you might expect the pure-bred pooch to trounce his mongrel cousin in an IQ test," reports the *Daily Mail*. "But it seems all that breeding may be for nothing. For when it comes to intelligence, scientists say the crossbred wins, paws down." Researchers found that mixes were far better "on the ball" than pedigree dogs. Mutts were also cleverer at locating the proverbial bone, cloaked with a tin can before their eyes, than many pedigree dogs that didn't "even realize it still existed." These and other tests led the Aberdeen team to predict mongrel talents could easily translate into not only equal but *superior* performance for police, seeing eye, herding, and house pet work, if only these disadvantaged curs would be given a chance. Reverse prejudice? Seven out of the ten best problem solvers at Aberdeen were crossbreeds. The top dog wasn't a border collie, or a springer spaniel for that matter, but an eyesore of a "collie-spaniel cross called Jet, which scored full marks." [43] Translating the dog's traditional skills (or what remains of them) into contemporary uses, recent trends for service animals have been no less revealing. The retrieving

tendency, for example, is needed for assistance work where the drive to happily pick up fallen objects comes in handy to persons wheelchair-bound. Sufficient size is also important for bracing the disabled or pulling vehicles. Golden and Labrador retrievers often fit the bill, but so do Labradoodles and Goldendoodles, says Jenny Barlos of Assistance Dogs of America. [44] An individual dog's intelligence and temperament, she says, not breed as defined by kennel clubs, ultimately determine who gets the job. "About 50 percent of the dogs that pass our initial evaluation do not make it to final training and I think that's about average," says Barlos. "The dogs that make it through initial evaluation are very few also." In the greater scheme of things, it might seem that the heroic qualities attributed to goldens and Labs across the board are overextended. The minuscule number of high-profile individuals that even qualify to qualify are exceptional, perhaps negligible. A keen and lifelong desire to learn and work are essential, says Barlos, though admittedly some breeds with familiar faces in the standard shades are disproportionately represented. "AKC registration is not important to us," Barlos continues. So why are so many goldens and yellow Labs seen visiting hospitals, nursing homes, restaurants, and cruise ships? "They have a friendly public perception while having full access with their owners," Barlos remarks. Perhaps it's time for some affirmative action in the dog world. Animal Farm Foundation in upstate New York has not only been placing "pit bulls" ("We keep this in quotes," it says) as family pets but also training and placing them for assistance work. At least one has become a search-and-rescue dog. [45]

While tasks like assistance, drug sniffing, and finding land mines demand exceptional skills and temperaments that

maybe found in certain breeds and non-breeds alike, no-brainer therapy jobs are also subject to profiling. I've come across boastful owners of many a purebred prouder in recent years to add the title of "certified therapy dog" to the list of honors used as evidence of blood superiority. Everyone these days seems to be sporting a therapy dog on the sidewalk runway, and I myself am considering growing whiskers and applying. But according to Kelly Gould at Karma Dogs, which specializes in using rescued animals to help children with emotional problems, if species matters, "the breed has nothing to do with it." [46]

Karma has had success with purebreds and mutts of all varieties. Certain breeds do tend to be smarter than others, says Gould, but that isn't key to therapy work. "It's the unconditional attention and bond that kids make with the dog that matters." As the wisdom of the ages has always taught without the glamour of show rings and rigors of beauty standards, success comes down to the individual dog's disposition and ability to leave the past behind for a second chance. Not only do dog shows tend not to improve dogs in this capacity, no matter how cute they look on television, perhaps they spoil them for other careers. A group of ten retired show champions, chosen by judges as best representing their breeds and prodigiously bred for consumers addicted to the scent of blue blood—applying for therapy work because what else could they do now that they'd lost their looks?—failed their training and evaluations across the board at Karma. Veterans of the stage had been rewarded all their lives for a very different sort of performance, leading spectators to believe formal perfection automatically fit them for any function. But standing and posing had left them too set in their ways, or perhaps their careers as therapy dogs had been sabotaged at birth. Many

dogs are being "overbred," Gould explains, careful to add that it was a nice gesture to try and give these former champions a break but sorry it didn't work out for them. Regardless of breed, only "one out of ten dogs pass our test the first time," says Gould. Pedigree and standardized appearance, it seems, have not been relevant, except perhaps in negative ways. One of Karma's best success stories, a six-month-old chow mix with behavior issues, was turned around and made into a model canine citizen. "When his vest is on, he knows it's work time," says Gould. Golden Retrievers and Labs, based on her experience, are "kind of dumb" and not always the best "breed ambassadors." [47]

So maybe breed is relevant, after all, if only to know which dogs, as a rule of thumb, to *avoid*? There may be no solid-gold 100 percent guaranteed way to improve dogs, a thought guaranteed to strike terror into the hearts of purists everywhere. But like it or not, one likely route to making dogs a bit smarter, healthier, more emotionally balanced and useful could be to ignore breed standards and pedigrees — and *mix the races!*

Overbreeding for either form or function, it turns out, can result in losing both. Many purebreds are getting too "pure" for their own good (and ours). A tragic example is the German shepherd, one of the top working breeds throughout the twentieth century. When not being deformed for show rings and homes, many German shepherds have been made soft and unreliable in the field. As we've seen, police departments in the United States are dropping these dogs, but so are departments around the world. Attempts are being made to cross them with other breeds or to replace them altogether with a Belgian Malinois, even in their land of birth,

Germany, where they've been a source of national pride. [48] Useful traits in overbred golden and Labrador retrievers are also being salvaged, and an unapologetically *mixed* heritage may spare them the sad fate of the German shepherd, with its vanishing skills and declining health. US and UK fanciers haven't been keen on discussing recent developments, but for a variety of demanding services including assistance and seeing-eye work, the hybrid golden Labrador retriever has been found, by growing numbers of experts beyond the show ring, to be more reliable than either side of its family tree.

"Golden Lab" shouldn't be confused with the latest yuppie affectation on Manhattan sidewalks, where the yellow Lab is made to sound more expensive. Not even the Queen of England calls her yellow Labs "golden." In fact, golden retrievers weren't even called "golden" until the twentieth century, when the fancy decided to up the ante and make "yellow" dogs sound fancier. If people are going to be pretentious, they could at least get their facts straight. The golden Lab proper is a true hybrid that goes against the rules of pedigree breeding, a rough type selected for ability, not looks, a dog that would go unrecognized by name droppers but for the colored vest. A practical solution to excessive clinginess in goldens and excess enthusiasm in "nice but dim" [49] Labs, the new and improved version is no freak exception but a growing trend. Guide Dogs, a major provider of working animals to the UK, reported in 2010 that 47 percent of their success stories were golden-Lab crosses. At last count, in 2011, 55 percent of all the dogs they used were either golden-Lab or Lab-German shepherd crosses (and only 30 percent and 9 percent, respectively, were "pure" Lab and golden). [50] Similarly, but on a smaller scale, Guide Dogs of America reports that in 2011, among graduates

successfully placed in jobs, 25 percent have been golden Labs, an increase of 23 percent in just one year from 2010. [51]

Final proof that best friends can break their molds, and a sign of dog days to come: search and rescue dogs, themselves rescued from death row in shelters, and many of these mixed breeds, are heroically overcoming every disadvantage life has dealt them. "When it comes to selectivity, Harvard has nothing on these pooches," says a 2013 article on dogs trained by the National Disaster Search Dog Foundation. [52] Federal Emergency Management Agency–certified graduates, animals once abandoned as useless, are rising to challenge every cliché on desirable appearance, family history, and environmental influence. Yet despite the marvelous talents and personalities of these and other exceptionally smart, temperamentally balanced, trainable, and *useful* animals, fans aren't holding their breath for an appearance at Westminster or Crufts anytime soon. Golden Labs and less calculated crosses aren't likely to be "accepted," "approved," or "recognized" because they don't conform to the eugenic standards of any one breed. As hybrids, they aren't bred from eugenically "pure" bloodlines. It may be possible to breed a better dog, however narrowly or broadly that is defined, but this isn't likely to be accomplished within the dog fancy's eugenic tradition where practical concerns are compromised by conformation. In any event, and whether they're black, white, or parti-colored, the needs of truly useful, working dogs can be too much for the average dog owner to handle, and the golden rule for finding the perfect pet may be simpler than imagined.

For the vast majority of canine consumers hoping to live out virtually those legends of heroic ancestral deeds, who believe that pedigree papers give them possession of unrivaled talents hidden behind coats of arms borne by noble beings whose forebears supposedly lived in palaces, who crave convenient formulas and precise measurements for "predictability"—when all they really need is a nice companion who won't bite the kids—there's that one-size-fits-all advice said to come from the ASPCA, though its origins have been lost with the wisdom of the ages: If you can't decide between a shepherd, a setter, or a poodle, get them all . . . adopt a mutt.