Twitter Thread by Thicky Watters.



Thicky Watters.
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We had a conversation on the podcast about the racialization of dog breeds, where we talked to @BronwenDickey, the author of Pitbull: The Battle Over an American Icon.

> Michael Tesler in @FiveThirtyEight bringing some data to bear on my tweets about @ReverendWarnock\u2019s dog ad. A piece worth reading, and a reminder: It\u2019s never \u201cjust a dog,\u201d y\u2019all.https://t.co/ijQvTDOdvj pic.twitter.com/sp05Bhueob
>
> — Hakeem Jefferson (@hakeemjefferson) December 15, 2020

In the 1930s, Pitbulls — which, as Bronwen pointed out to me over and over, don't constitute a dog breed but a shape — used to be seen as the trusty sidekick of the proletariat, the Honda Civic of canines. (Think of "the Little Rascals" dog.)
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That began changing in the postwar years and the rise of the suburbs. A pedigreed dog became a status symbol for the burgeoning white middle class. And pitbulls got left behind in the cities.

Aside: USians have flitted between different "dangerous" breeds and media-fueled panics around specific dogs. (anti-German xenophobia in the late 1800s fueled extermination programs of the spitz, a little German dog that newspapers said was vicious and spread disease.)

Some previously "dangerous" dogs get rebranded over the years — German shepherds, Dobermans, Rottweilers. But the thing their respective periods of contempt and concern had to do is that they were associated with some contemporarily undesirable group.

But as pitbulls became more associated with cities their image as "dangerous" has remained — antiblackness being far stickier than anti-German sentiment, obvs.

There are far more news stories about pitbull attacks, which has led to a belief that pitbulls are especially violent.

There are also myths like the idea that pitbulls have jaws that lock and once they bite into you they can't let go. (That's...not true.)

We actually don’t know which dogs attack most — Bronwen said that bites from larger dog types are more likely to be *reported* to authorities and obviously more likely to require treatment.

Pitbulls are also so ubiquitous that any big-headed mutt involved in an incident can be transmuted into a pit in the reporting/recollection.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but the stigma attached to pitbulls is all very “superpredator.” And that’s not coincidental.

(One thing that really threw me after i talked to Bronwen was the extent to which there is a whole anti-pitbull Twitter universe out there — and their tweets really, really do have that Thin Blue Line/“Immigrants are rapists” energy. They say she’s doing pitbull propaganda.)

The material consequences of this stuff for Black and Latino people are huge: plenty of apartment buildings ban “pitbull-type dogs,” and since pitbulls are a shape, not a breed, it leaves a lot of discretion to landlords and building managers.

You know where I’m going with this: #housingsegregationineverything

It’s not hard to find people talking about imposing pitbull bans on their communities because the dogs “bring the wrong element.”

Denver JUST repealed their ban after 3 decades.

https://t.co/fFcT6IgA58

> Denverites voted to repeal the city\u2019s 30-year-old ban on pit bulls. Passing the measure will allow the city to grant a provisional permit to pit bull owners as long as the owner microchips the animal & complies with add'l requirements set by @DASanimals: https://t.co/LRw2tSZwG7 pic.twitter.com/zyH8rd2KUZ
>
> — City and County of Denver (@CityofDenver) November 5, 2020

(What else was happening in US cities 3 decades ago?)

another guest we had on the episode studied people’s perceptions of dogs by breed.

The “whitest” dog — in terms of the level of goodwill shown by the white respondents to his survey?

Labrador retriever.

There’s a reason you see labs in ads and TV shows. And it’s not unrelated to race.

One last thing: that researcher also found that people were more likely to see a dog as a pitbull if that dog was with a Black person.