CONTENTS

List of Illustrations vii
Preface and Acknowledgments ix
List of Abbreviations xv

Introduction: Rover or Racer? 1
1 Chasing Rabbits 21
2 Boom or Bust 44
3 Horses, Hounds, and Hustlers 71
4 Halcyon Days and Florida Nights 95
5 Doggone Mad 130
6 The Fall 166

Appendix: List of Greyhound Tracks 191
Notes 199
Bibliography 271
Index 287
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

“Coursing Jack-Rabbits at Great Bend, Kansas” 5
Owen Patrick Smith, Inventor of the Mechanical Lure 7
New Orleans Kennel Club Track 8
New Kensington Derby Night 9
White Racing Greyhound, Locomotion Study 16–17
Racing Greyhound in Motion 19
“Coursing with Grayhounds” 23
“A Day’s Coursing on the Downs at Plumpton” 26
National Coursing Meet, Wichita, Kansas 28–29
Irish Cup Coursing Competition 31
“A Jackrabbit Drive in California” 40
Kansas Courser with Trophy and Greyhounds 42
Greyhound Track in Emeryville, California 46–47
“People at the Greyhound Racing Track,” Hialeah, Florida 52
“Only Registered Greyhounds Are Worth Keeping” 55
International Greyhound Racing Association Banner 57
Dogman Forbe Spencer 60
Derby Lane Kennels, St. Petersburg, Florida 61
Dogman George Alder 62
Greyhound Racing Trophy Presentation 67
Postcard of Mission Boy 69
“Kings of the Turf” 74
Political Cartoon of Greyhound as Trojan Horse 81
“Derby Night” Program 85
Babe Ruth and Winning Greyhound 101
Derby Lane Marching Band 105
Monkey Jockey Astride Racing Greyhound 107
“A Dog’s Life Can Be Great” 118
Miss Universe with War Penny 120
Parade Float Promoting Florida Greyhound Racing 121
Frank Sinatra and Greyhound 123
Lady Greyhound, Greyhound Bus Mascot 126
Political Cartoon of Greyhound Racing 149
Aerial View of Racing Greyhound Farm 158
Greyhound Transport Truck 162
Kennels for Racing Greyhounds 189
I am often asked why I decided to write a book on the history of greyhound racing.

The answer is simple: I adopted an ex-racing greyhound in 2004 after the heartbreaking, premature loss of my beloved mutt, Tafi.

Guiding my search for the companionship of another dog was the thought that I should find one with a story of its own. I soon inquired within the greyhound adoption community about the history of greyhound racing in the United States, but I was troubled by the lack of historical information available. I wanted to know more about the men and women who worked in the industry: Who were they? What was their relationship to their greyhounds? When was the sport’s heyday in this country? Why were so many tracks closing? I also wanted to know about the lives of the racing dogs. How were they raised? How were they treated at the tracks? Was greyhound racing cruel, as I had so often heard?

Everyone seemed to have a different opinion about the sport, and I was increasingly dissatisfied with the answers I was getting. Furthermore, I was looking for a book topic, and it looked like the perfect subject had just fallen into my lap.

Paired with my new greyhound, I set out on a path of discovery. It was no small irony that my greyhound’s name from puppyhood was Zachary More Curious.

This book is the final product of the years of research that followed, which, much to my delight, took me to all corners of the United States. It represents my work and ideas alone, and accordingly, I am responsible for any errors. However, I could not have completed this monumental task without the help and support of others. Most important, this book would not have been possible without the cooperation of two groups of individuals: those in the business of greyhound racing and those who hope to end it. I have tried to be fair and honest during this entire process, and I have readily admitted and acknowledged (to both parties) that I must consult extensively with those who love greyhound racing as well as those who abhor it. It has admittedly been an uncomfortable tightrope to walk upon, but I have done my best to follow an ethic of integrity throughout the process.

For those in the business of greyhound racing, I am deeply indebted to Louise Weaver, assistant vice president, archivist, and historian at the University Press of Kansas. All rights reserved. Reproduction and distribution prohibited without permission of the Press.
Derby Lane Kennel Club, who supported my research efforts and was helpful in countless ways. I would especially like to thank Gary Guccione, executive director of the National Greyhound Association in Abilene, Kansas. Gary answered hundreds of my questions, whether by phone call, e-mail, or personal interview. Kathy Lounsbury at the Greyhound Hall of Fame was a tremendous resource, and along with the resident greyhounds, helped me find countless archival treasures during my many visits to Abilene. This book would simply not have been possible to complete without the help and support of Louise, Gary, and Kathy.

Paul Hartwell, of the Hartwell family racing dynasty, was always enthusiastic and helpful when I challenged him to dig into the past and remember the early years of greyhound racing and to recount his father’s stories. I am grateful to Mr. Hartwell and his family for allowing me to visit him in Carlsbad, California, in 2010 to conduct an oral history interview. Not long before his death, Keith Dillon graciously invited me into his home in Olathe, Kansas, for an oral history interview, now archived at the Kansas State Historical Society. Jim Frey also agreed to an oral history interview that is now housed at Baylor University. Both showed me great kindness as I asked questions about their many years of work in the industry. Mr. Frey even shared records with me from his personal files about the Florida strikes.

I must also thank all of the individuals involved in the greyhound racing business with whom I corresponded or spoke to personally, including Tim Leuschner, Wayne Strong, Janet Strong, John Hartwell, Edward Trow, Robert Trow, Craig Randle, Arden Hartman, Bill Lee, Bill Bell, Karen Keelan, Arthur Agganis, Francie Field, Chuck Marriott, Jack Sherck, Dennis Bicsak, Henry Cashen, Teddy Palmer, Becky Brannon, Leslie Wootten, Marsha Kelly, Jeff Prince, Hoye Perry, Vera Rasnake, Theresa J. Hume, Myra Sullivan, Jesse Sullivan, Dawn Stressman, Gary Temple, Ron Wohlen, Tracy Wildey, and the entire staff at the Flying Eagles Kennel in Abilene, Kansas. Some individuals asked not to be identified, but I’d like to extend my thanks to them as well. Veterinarians that I spoke with regarding various aspects of canine health or the greyhound racing industry include Dr. Scott Schwarting, Dr. Roberta Lillich, Dr. William Dugger, Dr. Jon F. Dee, Dr. Kent Law, Dr. Linda Blythe, Dr. Brad Fenwick, Dr. Jill Hopfenbeck, and Dr. Gail Golab.

During the course of my research I was able to visit the following dog tracks with live racing, although some have since closed: the Palm Beach Kennel Club; Derby Lane (St. Petersburg, Florida); Southland Park Gaming & Racing (West Memphis, Arkansas); Birmingham (Alabama) Race Course;
Wonderland Greyhound Park (Revere, Massachusetts); and Raynham-Taunton (Massachusetts) Greyhound Park.

Gaming industry analyst Will Cummings was extremely helpful and shared important industry data with me; he also reviewed the final chapter and offered insights that only a seasoned industry analyst could provide. Tim O’Brien, the great-grandson of Owen Patrick Smith, the inventor of the mechanical lure, was a delight to speak with as well. Late in my research I came upon the work of Brian Duggan, with whom it was a pleasure to correspond and discuss the history of sight hounds. Steven Crist, who began his career at the dog tracks in Boston before he turned to the horses, kindly granted me an interview; he is presently the editor of the *Daily Racing Form*. Geoff Pesek kindly shared information about his grandfather John Pesek, who was a champion wrestler and a Nebraska greyhound breeder. Others who were of great help include Bill Nack, Sir Mark Prescott, Douglas Reed, Dr. David Schwartz, Dr. Chris Wetzel, Wes Singletary, Eugene Martin Christiansen, Mike Huggins, Emma Griffin, Perky Beisel, Steven A. Riess, and Donald Hausler.

For those involved in the animal protection movement or in greyhound adoption, I would like to thank Susan Netboy, Joan Eidinger, Robert Baker, Gail Eisinitz, Wayne Pacelle, Dr. Bernard Unti, Christine Dorchak, Mrs. Frantz Dantzler, Louise Coleman, Mardy Fones, Ray Wong, and Ruth Hemphill. Susan Netboy shared her extensive video news archive with me as well as all issues of the *Greyhound Network News*. In addition to serving as a reviewer, Dr. Unti kindly consulted with me on a number of animal advocacy issues and shared some important documents pertaining to the history of greyhound racing. Robert Baker and Gail Eisinitz shared their personal files of their past investigations into greyhound racing. My gratitude is extended to numerous animal protection organizations that either opened their archival holdings to me or cooperated in my research efforts in some way, including the Humane Society of the United States, the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Animal Welfare Institute, GREY2K USA, and the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Dr. Dale Schwindaman, one of the architects of the Animal Welfare Act, kindly offered his recollections as well.

As an archivist I am also acutely aware of the critical role of archivists, librarians, and their assistants for all researchers and writers. I personally visited the following repositories during my research and benefited from the expertise of the staff: the Kansas State Historical Society; the National
Agricultural Library at the U.S. Department of Agriculture; the Kentucky State Archives; the California State Archives; the State Archives of Florida and the State Library of Florida; the Massachusetts Historical Society; the Boston Public Library; the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Lied Library; the Huntington Library (California); the National Sporting Library (Virginia); the Library of Congress; the University of Memphis; the Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas at Lawrence; the Texas State Library and Archives; the UCLA Film and Television Archive; the UCLA Library Department of Special Collections; the Fort Lauderdale History Center; the Wolfsonian-Florida International University; the Historical Museum of Southern Florida; the Hollywood Historical Society; the Vanderbilt University Law Library; the Barton County (Kansas) Historical Society; North Carolina State University Libraries; the National Library of Medicine at the National Institute of Health; Stanford University Special Collections; the University of Southern California Doheny Memorial Library; the Nashville Public Library; the Multnomah County Public Library (Oregon); the Los Angeles Public Library; the Walker Library at Middle Tennessee State University; the Keeneland Library (Kentucky); and the Miami-Dade County Public Library.

In addition, I utilized the unique resources of the following institutions, even though I did not visit them personally: the Oregon Historical Society Research Library; the Oregon State Archives; the University of Oregon libraries; the George Meany Memorial Archives at the National Labor College; the New York State Library; the Ohio Historical Society; the Salmon Brook Historical Society (Connecticut); the Boston University Libraries; the University of Maryland Libraries; the South Dakota State Archives/South Dakota State Historical Society; the San Joaquin County (California) Historical Society and Museum; the Southern California Library; the Emeryville (California) Historical Society; the Oakland History Room at the Oakland Library (California); the University of Montana K. Ross Toole Archives at the Mansfield Library; the Montana Historical Society; Washington State University Library Special Collections; University of California Santa Barbara; the Nevada State Museum in Las Vegas; the University of Nevada at Reno Special Collections Department at the Getchell Library; the Oklahoma Historical Society; the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research at the Wisconsin Historical Society; the Writers Guild Foundation Shavelson-Webb Library; and the Arizona State University Libraries.

Closer to home, I must thank my dear friends who put up with my absences, both emotional and physical, as I worked on this project, which was
several years in the making. They include Jami Awalt, Greg and Margaret Kyser, Ginger Tessier, and Dr. Anita Agarwal. All of these individuals have taken on the task of keeping me happy and in good health—and they deserve a huge amount of credit for standing by my side in good and in bad times.

Other friends and family helped in an equally important way: providing much-needed accommodations during my many research trips across the country. They include my brother, Dr. Alex Thayer; my cousin, Dr. Michael Weiss; and my friends, Marcea, Paul, Hugh, and Hope Barringer; Laura Merrill; and Felicia Anchor. I would also like to thank Dr. Lindsey Murray, Dr. Phil Chanin, and Becky Kantz for their support. Additionally, Eli J. Bortz helped me navigate the process of finding the best publisher for my book. I would also like to extend my thanks to my canine support team, especially Vickie Brown and the other staff members at The Farm at Natchez Trace. Without these individuals looking after my own greyhound, I would not dare to travel.

Within my former place of employment in Nashville, Tennessee, the Tennessee State Library and Archives, there were numerous colleagues who helped me locate hard-to-find materials, such as government documents and obscure databases. Others who offered much-needed support include Vince McGrath, Stephanie Sutton, Chaddra Moore, Greg Yates, Kathy Lauder, Felicia Lott, Anne Whitver, Charlotte Reichley, Cathi Carmack, Trent Hanner, Stewart Southard, Gibb Baxter, Kimberly Wires, Misty Bach, and the amazing Susan Gordon.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my special “advisory team” of friends with expertise in diverse disciplines. Carrie Daughtrey, from the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Nashville, helped me decipher early case law and legal language. FBI Special Agent Clifford Scott Goodman, with his fiercely disciplined legal mind, forced me to rethink some of my assumptions about greyhound racing. Janet Goodman, an environmental scientist, eagerly read drafts of my book and offered insightful comments. Both Clifford and Janet were assisted in their efforts by the very special (and always adorable) Carl Goodman, who brought a smile to my face on countless occasions. Vanderbilt University economist Jacob Sagi also offered important insights for which I am grateful.

I would like to thank the MTSU history department for funding much of my travel research early on in this book project, as well as the College of Graduate Studies and the Association of Graduate Students in History. Above all, I would like to thank Dr. Jan Leone, Dr. Susan Myers-Shirk, Dr.
Wayne C. Moore, and Dr. Rebecca Conard. Rebecca has been tremendously supportive throughout my entire career as a historian; she is a fabulous mentor and deserves great credit for helping me see this book to its completion.

I must especially thank my parents. My mother always had a commonsense approach to my book, and as a historian in her own right, knows when my writing is at its best. My father, a master editor and retired university professor, took time to read the final manuscript with a careful eye. I am lucky to have such a supportive family who can also engage with my work on a critical level.

In addition to my reviewers and the entire staff of the University Press of Kansas, especially Fred Woodward, Erika Doss, Susan Schott, and Kelly Chrisman Jacques, and freelance copyeditor Lori Rider, a very special thank you goes to my former editor, Ranjit Arab. I could not have asked for a better editor; this book would simply not have been possible without his help. I am tremendously lucky that he expressed interest in my work and remained supportive to the end.

I want to thank one very special dog: my very own ex-racing greyhound, the appropriately named Zachary More Curious, for inspiring me to write this book, a history of his people.

And last in this long list, but always first in my heart, I dedicate this book to the memory of my beloved mutt, Tafi.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Organizations, Industry Terminology, and Legislation
AFL: American Federation of Labor
AGC: American Greyhound Council
AGTOA: American Greyhound Track Operators Association
AKC: American Kennel Club
APPMA: American Pet Products Manufacturers Association
ARCI: Association of Racing Commissioners International
ASPCA: American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
AVMA: American Veterinary Medical Association
AWA: Animal Welfare Act
AWI: Animal Welfare Institute
GHF: Greyhound Hall of Fame
GOBA: Greyhound Owners Benevolent Association
GPA: Greyhound Pets of America
GPL: Greyhound Protection League
HSUS: Humane Society of the United States
IGRA: Indian Gaming Regulatory Act
IHRA: Interstate Horse Racing Act
INGRA: International Greyhound Racing Association
MBKC: Miami Beach Kennel Club
MSPCA: Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
NCA: National Coursing Association
NGA: National Greyhound Association
OTB: offtrack betting
PETA: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
REGAP: Retired Greyhounds as Pets
SFSPCA: San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SPCA: Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
USDA: United States Department of Agriculture
WCTU: Women’s Christian Temperance Union
YMCA: Young Men’s Christian Association
INTRODUCTION

ROVER OR RACER?

Americans simply cannot agree on the role of the dog. The greyhound is no exception. Perhaps no breed has sparked greater controversy in the United States than the racing greyhound. Its unique and complex position in present-day American society as a dog specifically bred for racing continues to spark bitter controversy.

The hue and cry is certainly not new. The greyhound racing industry found itself under intense media scrutiny during the last several decades of the twentieth century, but the nature and image of the sport has in fact long been debated in various forums within American popular culture. The main characters in an ABC television sitcom derived from the Neil Simon Broadway play The Odd Couple grappled with the question of dog racing in a 1971 episode. The show stars Tony Randall as Felix Unger and Jack Klugman as Oscar Madison, two men forced by circumstance to live together in a New York apartment. This unlikely pair features a fussy, protohomosexual character (Felix) in perpetual domestic (but comedic) conflict with his fellow divorcé, the curmudgeonly Oscar. The latter acquires a racing greyhound after winning a bet, but the two men’s attitudes toward the dog in question reflect the growing divide in perceptions regarding the institution of greyhound racing. The men in fact hold widely divergent views on the subject. The show presents pro- and anti-greyhound racing ideologies, anticipating a vigorous public debate by several decades.

Although Felix’s views change once he enjoys the fruits of a gambling windfall, he is initially horrified that Golden Earrings, Oscar’s greyhound, is, in his view, being exploited for profit. Oscar, on the other hand, believes that the greyhound is a racing animal, not a pet. Their dialogue perfectly captures the central disagreement that soon faced American greyhound racing fans and animal lovers:

Oscar: Felix, racing dogs aren’t like regular dogs. You put ’em in a kennel and you race them.
Felix: It’s inhuman.
Oscar: We’re not dealing with humans.
When Oscar continues to insist that greyhounds are treated well and given good food, plenty of exercise, and a comfortable kennel, Felix protests, “What about somebody to love them?” Oscar retorts bitterly, “How many people have that?”

When the conversation later resumes, Felix is still bemoaning the fate of the love-starved animal, declaring the sport “barbaric” and Golden Earrings’s past as exploitative. Oscar declares that greyhounds are “professional” dogs, different from other canines in that “they love to do it [race]; that’s what they were born to do.”

Felix tartly responds, “How do you know? Were you there in a box seat of creation in the beginning of greyhounds?”!

Felix’s statement is meant to be comical, but it encapsulates the central disagreement driving the debate over dog racing. Broadly speaking, traditionalists viewed the role of dogs both as predetermined and as limited to duties beneficial to humans. In contrast, some Americans were beginning to embrace a modified perspective toward all dogs, one that characterized animals as deserving lives free of toil. Proponents espousing this view believed that certain animals, including dogs, should even be given an opportunity to attain something close to “personhood,” or at least the right to have their physical and emotional needs met.

Even long before Felix and Oscar’s fictional debate was broadcast on ABC, American popular culture had already captured a broad range of perspectives on dog racing. When greyhound racing first emerged in the United States, its public image was defined by a mix of positive and negative views. The sport was occasionally linked with organized crime and other social ills, but also with modernity, tourism, and glamour. Al Capone’s involvement in dog racing was long suspected, but the absence of proof that he and his cohorts had their hands specifically in greyhound racing operations did not keep various journalists and Hollywood writers from linking the sport to organized crime. *Dark Hazard*, a film released in 1934 based on W. R. Burnett’s 1933 novel of the same name, chronicles the downfall of a Midwestern family man who turns to gambling on the dogs. In the 1942 film *Johnny Eager*, starring Robert Taylor and Lana Turner, the back rooms of the (fictional) Algonquin Park dog track in Chicago serve as the center of operations for Eager’s organized crime network. Frank Capra’s 1959 film *Hole in the Head*, starring Frank Sinatra, portrays the dog tracks as not only a meeting place of glamour and excitement but also a venue where shady moneymakers like to congregate.²

Still, a more positive portrayal managed to secure a hold on American
airwaves. Hearst Metrotone news clips from the early 1930s and various Warner Brothers Vitaphone broadcasts from the 1930s and 1940s (such as Sport Slants or Tropical Sportland features) played up the sport’s dramatic, modern feel. The skill of the canine athletes was often highlighted through slow-motion footage of leaping greyhound racers and exuberant commentary about their racing prowess. The programs championed the sport’s draw for tourists and emphasized the frequency with which vacationers from the north traveled to Florida so that they could enjoy the “southern novelty of canine competition.”

Comparisons to horse racing were common, with announcers breathlessly promoting “hot puppies instead of ponies”—dogs that rivaled Kentucky’s best thoroughbred horses in their appeal. The unbridled enthusiasm for the sport conveyed on the screen lasted for decades. In 1956 racing greyhounds from the West Flagler Kennel Club in Miami provided 45 million television viewers of the Steve Allen Show with a special treat: the novelty of a pack of muzzled greyhounds leaping out of a Greyhound bus in the opening shot of the October 7 broadcast.

Only in subsequent years did some television programs begin to examine, albeit tentatively, the possibility that greyhound racing might have a darker side for the dogs that were integral to the industry. “Greta, the Misfit Greyhound,” released in 1963 as a part of Walt Disney’s Wonderful World of Color series, features a perky, fawn greyhound bitch burdened by her knowledge that there is more to life than chasing an artificial bunny on a racetrack. Coldly abandoned by her owner—referred to by the narrator as a “fringe operator”—as if she were a “beer can,” Greta strikes out on her own. This dog clearly differs from her fellow racers, however. The story emphasizes that even though most greyhounds love to run and compete, Greta is through with feeling like a “mindless automatic number” who lives day to day without love or affection.

By the closing decades of the twentieth century American television audiences were encountering an altogether more negative view of the sport. In the premiere broadcast of The Simpsons in December 1989, even Homer Simpson, a caricature of the working-class family man, looks down on greyhound racing. When he finds himself unexpectedly short of money for Christmas gifts after his son Bart has wasted the family savings on a tattoo, Homer is desperate for options, but he declares, “I may be a total washout as a father, but I’m not going to take my kid to a sleazy dog track on Christmas Eve.” Although he initially resists the idea of gambling at (the fictional) Springfield Downs, he ends up “winning” a racing dog that jumps into his arms after being abandoned by his cruel owner. The new pet, subsequently
named Santa’s Little Helper, becomes a part of the family and is featured in a later episode, “Two Dozen and One Greyhounds.”

The debate continues into the twenty-first century. During the 2012 Super Bowl broadcast on NBC, an advertisement filmed at the Tucson dog track reached an estimated one hundred million American viewers. Equipped with his bright red Skechers shoes, Mr. Quiggly—a pudgy bulldog and unlikely racing star—is able to outrun a pack of racing greyhounds. Curiously, even though the Arizona desert is visible in the background, the announcer and thus ostensibly the venue are British. Evidently company executives felt that the best way to present the sport—and use it to sell shoes—was to give the track an air of European sophistication. The commercial was a hit with most viewers, but it sparked outrage among anti-racing activists who felt that the advertisement painted a false picture of the dog-racing industry and glorified the conditions at the Tucson track, a facility that they claimed was one of the worst in the business. One critic (and greyhound adopter) stated that the commercial “makes racing look like an acceptable thing—that it’s a good thing, that it’s fun, when these dogs are literally running for their lives.” Such a claim was built upon America’s contradictory feelings toward greyhound racing, a tangled history with roots that began in the nineteenth century, and in some ways even long before that.

Taken together, the varied portrayals of greyhound racing reviewed above, combined with countless published and televised exposés on the cruelty of the sport, likely helped shift the American consciousness in an altogether new direction: a growing sense that greyhound racing was unequivocally wrong and needed to be eliminated entirely. This book explores this gradual transition in American culture and offers an explanation of the diverse factors that fueled it.

Modern greyhound racing in the United States evolved from the ancient sport of coursing, which was popular in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England. Coursing was eventually introduced in the United States during the late nineteenth century, likely by recreational hunting groups (many of which were led by military officers stationed in the American West), greyhound fanciers, and various European immigrants. The English tradition of coursing carried elite associations but gradually lost this connection as it was absorbed into American culture. Although oral traditions attribute the importation of greyhounds to the need to control jackrabbit infestations in the western United States, organized coursing largely emerged as a sport practiced for pleasure, apart from agricultural purposes.
Coursing contests were popular in pockets of the American West (especially California) well past the turn of the nineteenth century. Broadly defined, coursing involves a competition between two greyhounds as they chase the same prey, usually jackrabbits or other small but fleet-footed quarry. The contest begins when a “slipper” releases the two dogs simultaneously. A judge, following a set of standard rules, determines which greyhound displays superior agility and speed. Traditionally, the demonstration of the dogs’ athletic skills rather than the death of the quarry was the chief aim of the competition. Objections to the large-scale killing of rabbits in coursing meets were raised occasionally, but Victorian sentimentality had very little currency in western regions where the ethos of “the survival of the fittest” dominated human-animal relations. The sport was largely subsumed by organized greyhound racing after the first decades of the twentieth century.10

Greyhound racing on an oval track emerged in the United States as a consequence of Owen Patrick Smith’s development of the mechanical lure in the decade before World War I. Smith, a savvy small-town promoter from
South Dakota, was uncomfortable with the act of killing and perhaps suspected that he could profit from a modified version of coursing that eliminated it. His gradual refinement of the “electric rabbit” ended up laying the groundwork for commercialized dog racing. He designed a mechanical lure to replace live quarry, the lure now fashioned as an artificial rabbit mounted on a moveable, electric device positioned on the exterior rail of the racetrack. The lure operator could send the mechanism around the track at high speed with the push of a button. Because they are sight hounds, greyhounds instinctively chase anything that moves; the fact that a live rabbit is no longer part of the equation is of little consequence to the greyhound. The mechanical lure has been modified to some degree over the past century, but its creation was the critical milestone in the development and evolution of greyhound racing.

Through the promotional efforts of Smith and his associates, the “Sport of Queens” was gradually transformed into a spectator sport featuring eight greyhounds simultaneously chasing a mechanical lure around an oval track. Smith and other promoters were thus able to showcase dog racing in a manner that was perfectly suited for large and diverse audiences. Of equal note, racing enthusiasts and gamblers could wager a little money on a dog at a track as they watched a race. Greyhound racing began to take root in parts of the United States during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Crowds of eager followers emerged in places such as St. Louis, Missouri; Cincinnati, Ohio; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Butte, Montana. After a period of fits and starts in which tracks would open one day and be closed down by the local sheriff the next—known as racing “on the fix”—dog racing slowly gained a grassroots fan base. Even though coursing had flourished mostly in the Great Plains and California, greyhound racing achieved its first broad popularity in Florida and Massachusetts, as well as in a few western states such as Arizona and Oregon.

Many communities were decidedly unenthusiastic about the local introduction of greyhound racing and fought each incursion of the dogmen (those who bred, trained, and raced the greyhounds) and their hounds with vigor. During the 1920s, dog racing alienated many Americans simply because of the sport’s perceived association with illegal gambling and vice. One detractor, a local police chief, declared that he would rather have smallpox strike his little town of Hanson, Massachusetts, than see the “bums and gangsters” that would be drawn to town by the dog tracks. Largely because of this attitude, tracks often remained open only as long as it took for the local authorities to locate them and shut them down, sometimes by force.
The Blue Star Amusement Company in Emeryville, California, established in 1919, is widely acknowledged to have been the country’s first greyhound track, but the facility did not enjoy lasting success. Even though most early tracks were short-lived, they still left their mark upon the American consciousness. The track in Cicero, Illinois, allegedly controlled by Al Capone during the Prohibition era, is a prime example of how underworld associations tarnished the reputation of dog racing. Nonetheless, in spite of the rather haphazard process of track openings and closings according to the vagaries of local law enforcement, promoters were eventually able to target fertile ground (i.e., specific states) for establishing legalized gambling on greyhound racing. In 1926, through Owen Patrick Smith’s creation of the International Greyhound Racing Association (INGRA), the sport could begin to become more organized and regulated, although not without its fair share of squabbles and controversies.

Gambling on greyhound racing emerged as a legalized activity in a few states beginning in the 1930s. A track’s success or failure was based upon a complicated interplay of factors, including, but not limited to, local and state politics, the strength of the thoroughbred horse-racing lobby, the
degree and effectiveness of animal protectionism in the community, the strength of churches and/or other antigambling forces, and, by the end of the twentieth century, the existence of a state lottery and/or other competing gambling operations such as untaxed Indian gaming establishments or commercial casinos. After taking these factors into account, a savvy, effective promoter could himself often make the critical difference in ensuring that racing could be successfully legalized in a virgin state. States such as Kentucky where thoroughbred horse racing was popular usually found ways to harness political forces that were eager to overpower greyhound racing interests. Dog track operators in Erlanger, Kentucky, for example, fought a losing battle against their opponents, although not before bringing their grievances all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In essence, depending upon a state’s unique social, cultural, and political dynamics, greyhound racing either flourished or foundered.

Florida has always dominated the landscape of dog racing in the United States. Early promoters lured visitors to the Florida greyhound tracks with images of glamour and sophistication as well as a “sun and fun” aesthetic.
New Kensington Derby Night, Saturday Night, October 26, 1935. This greyhound track operated near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, during the early 1930s. The International Greyhound Racing Association (INGRA) banner can be seen on the upper left. (Greyhound Hall of Fame)
characterized by voluptuous bathing beauties. An expanding market for tourism in the early 1920s nurtured the rise of dog racing in the Miami area, a pattern that was repeated in other regions of the Sunshine State throughout the following decades. Advertisements in the 1930s made a concerted effort to associate greyhound racing with an exclusive clientele. Through its connection to English coursing, dog racing already boasted a link, albeit a tenuous one, with a vaguely aristocratic past. This remote association with wealth and the upper class was aggressively exploited by Florida promoters. Advertisements led Floridians and tourists to believe that the Miami tracks were a “mecca for the elite of sportdom.” In fact, despite this claim, dog races were often frequented by a broad array of fans, including large numbers from the middle and working classes.

After World War II the sport was legalized in various other states, including Arkansas, Colorado, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont, to name just a few examples. Armed with more disposable income after the war than before, Americans were eager to participate in a growing consumer culture that emphasized pleasure over production, and the tourist industry expanded tremendously. In Florida in the 1950s the number of visitors doubled, which proved to be a direct boon to the greyhound-racing industry. Elsewhere some tracks, such as Wonderland in Revere, Massachusetts, would reach million-dollar handles well into the 1980s.

Early on, institutionalized greyhound racing in the United States acquired a structure that in many ways changed very little throughout the twentieth century. In contrast to thoroughbred horse racing, racing greyhounds are not assigned racing appointments as individual competitors (with the possible exception of special stakes races). Rather, entire racing kennels acquire a booking, that is, a racing contract, with a racetrack. In the early years, when racing was seasonal, dogmen would travel the racing circuit, securing, for example, a booking at a Florida track in the winter and one at a New England track in the summer. There were a number of such racing circuits in existence, but all of them required seasonal travel from track to track, often over long distances.

The causes of greyhound racing’s eventual decline are, like the reasons for its growth, multifaceted and complicated. The sport’s popularity among the American public began to wane in the last decades of the twentieth century. A more competitive and diversified entertainment market rendered it increasingly difficult for greyhound promoters to attract fans to the tracks. State lotteries, Native American gaming venues, riverboat casinos, and slot machine parlors—and more recently the Internet—all emerged as
competitors for the gambling dollar. Even though the industry successfully legalized the sport in new states during the 1970s and 1980s, there were failures that eventually negated these successes. The industry’s inability to legalize pari-mutuel wagering on greyhound racing in California during the 1970s was a grave disappointment. Although a hotbed of coursing at the turn of the previous century, the state resisted the development of dog racing. Instead, it was thoroughbred horse racing that managed to secure a monopoly over the state’s pari-mutuel market. The industry’s failure to thrive in Kansas, a state with deep-rooted ties to greyhound breeding and coursing traditions, was another especially deep blow. A flurry of track closures from 1990 to 2010 was for many observers a harbinger of the industry’s inevitable demise.

Internal disagreements also compromised the sport’s ability to thrive. Long-standing tensions between the dogmen and track owners concerning racing contracts were tremendously damaging. On a number of occasions, most notably in 1935, 1948, 1957, and 1975, the dogmen struck at a number of tracks, demanding better purses. They had long felt that track operators wielded too much control during the booking process, arguing that they awarded racing contracts on a “take it or leave it” basis. The American public evinced little sympathy for the dogmen’s financial woes and difficulties with track management, since dogmen were increasingly viewed as guilty of exploiting animals for profit. Increasing kennel sizes led to new problems, namely, an excessive number of greyhounds produced for the industry, which in turn resulted in rising rates of greyhound euthanasia. State subsidies designed to buttress the weakening pari-mutuel industry did little to win the public over to the dogmen’s point of view.

Before these troubles surfaced, however, greyhound racing in the United States had emerged as a sporting pastime in an era of cheaper and simpler amusements. The sport found comfortable space to grow and flourish through its associations with rural culture, gambling, popular leisure, and a burgeoning tourism industry. On the other hand, its development was complicated in the mid-twentieth century by the evolving welter of attitudes and values concerning the treatment of animals, the powerful competition from other sporting and gambling activities, and the stigma of being less than a proper pursuit. Success in drawing gamblers and other spectators to new tracks remained largely dependent on a variable calculus of local socioeconomic conditions, cultural preferences, and consumer habits. As the greyhound racing industry expanded, promoters continuously battled an array of negative, often class-based perceptions about the sport. At one point or
another, dog racing has been associated with organized crime, political corruption, moral debasement, animal cruelty, and other social problems. Its troubled image is partially a consequence of its apparently unbreakable link to the working class and “lowbrow” culture, this even when “respectable” middle- and upper-class Americans continued to patronize the tracks. Somehow, thoroughbred horse racing largely managed to escape a similar stigma, even though the working and middle classes also attended these races. More recently, however, thoroughbred horse racing has also come under fire for its treatment of racehorses, especially lower-value claiming horses.

The issue of class is perhaps the most challenging element of the American institution of dog racing to decipher, especially in a country that admits to its existence only reluctantly. Who actually attended the dog races? Historical attendance reports are sometimes available, but they speak to how many—rather than who—attended the races. A few scattered sociological studies exist, most of which were conducted in the last few decades of the twentieth century. Aside from tantalizing bits of information to be gleaned from these queries, the sources offer little more than circumstantial evidence for firm conclusions. Other means of pinpointing early greyhound-racing audiences must be used. Where were tracks opened? What do contemporary photographs show us? What newspapers and magazines covered the sport, and how was it presented? Can the accounts be taken at face value? Historians have tackled this tricky interpretative task when studying greyhound racing in the United Kingdom, but a similar effort has not been attempted within the realm of American greyhound racing.

In addition to the question of class, the rise of animal advocacy in the United States is another central theme in this book. The ethos of kindness toward animals was first conceptualized in the ancient world, but for centuries their welfare was most widely accepted as entirely subordinate to the will of humankind. Early modern thinkers began to challenge man’s position of authority over animals and explored the possibility that animals were worthy of moral consideration. Animal protection as a social and political force began to emerge in the late nineteenth century. Americans were introduced to animal advocacy on a significant, national scale when Henry Bergh founded the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in New York City in 1866.

The ASPCA was initially involved in children’s causes as well as agitation for improved treatment of urban working horses and other animals. Eventually Bergh’s society and like organizations focused specifically on animals,
while other groups came forth to improve the lives of abused or neglected children. A hallmark of the Progressive era that followed soon thereafter was the creation, development, and systematization of social welfare agencies. Bureaucracies designed to address specific social concerns gradually emerged, and reform efforts became more professionalized. Initiatives designed to battle moral lapses in society were no longer issued solely from the domain of good Christian men and women. Such efforts became a part of the larger struggle of social reformers to improve society and protect the poor from vice. Their campaigns frequently involved educated, middle-class reformers targeting the working class, leading many historians to argue that their efforts were a form of social control.  

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, scattered references to the cruelty of coursing do surface, although such objections were few and far between. They were often cast aside as the actions of “do-gooders,” social reformers who tried to deprive Americans of their “rightful” pleasures, particularly alcohol but also gambling. Coursing was always a relatively minor presence in American culture and rarely caught the attention of the national press before the 1970s. A 1947 feature in *Life* did not even entertain the possibility that the sport was cruel to animals in general, or even rabbits in particular.  

Coursing’s close cousin—greyhound racing—did eventually attract the national eye, however. The sport’s growing visibility in American popular culture (and the gambling that inevitably accompanied it) proved to be a double-edged sword. Critics who noticed dog racing’s widening appeal were quick to point out the more controversial aspects of the sport. Animal protectionists, who had long believed that greyhound racing was marred by cruel practices, launched an aggressive assault against dog racing in the late 1970s. Although there had always been some complaints about its treatment of animals, early objections to coursing and dog racing had usually centered on the welfare of the rabbit (or other live quarry used in training or competition) rather than the dog. Animal advocates had questioned the acceptability of using greyhounds to kill live prey, especially when presented as sport and entertainment. But the nature of the criticism gradually shifted to concerns over the care of the dogs themselves. With the rise of the animal rights movement in the 1970s, the industry was increasingly subject to damaging exposés about its cruel treatment of greyhounds, especially the mass destruction of dogs once they were no longer viable for racing. Appalled by this practice, some volunteers took action by establishing greyhound adoption groups throughout the country. Moreover, even with the
introduction of organized greyhound adoption in the early 1980s, which created a formal means of securing permanent, loving homes for ex-racers, many reformers advocated the total abolition of dog racing. Nevertheless, the growing popularity of adopted greyhounds did little to quash the acrimonious debate over greyhound racing itself.

Much to their distress, those in the greyhound racing business also continued to see the reputation of the sport tarnished by the media. A number of documented cases of abuse surfaced in the 1980s and 1990s, causing a public-relations nightmare for racing insiders. The industry blamed “bad apples” and labeled the abuses as isolated incidents, whereas critics claimed that the problem was systemic. However Americans chose to interpret the events, the news was hard to miss. CNN, HBO, and other broadcast media operations aired graphic exposés on the cruelty of greyhound racing, reaching millions of viewers who previously might have had little or no objection to the sport. Phrases such as a “Dachau for dogs” and an “Auschwitz of dog racing” were tossed about to describe egregious cases of abuse in the greyhound industry, with one woman interviewed in 2006 saying, “If you don’t speak out, you have... a Holocaust of greyhounds.”

Given these circumstances, the greyhound racing industry found itself under increasing pressure to institute reforms. In response, it took steps to improve the care of racing dogs in all phases of their careers. Many animal protectionists argued that these actions were rarely sufficient and little more than empty political gestures. Even if the industry were to institute dramatic reforms (it did, in fact, create its own greyhound welfare organization, the American Greyhound Council [AGC], in 1987) and effectively eliminate all possibility of abuse, it is unlikely to recover from its tarnished reputation. This phenomenon could fairly be described as a “sins of the fathers” syndrome; in the eyes of many critics, some of the past wrongs were so egregious as to preclude forgiveness. It explains why those men and women in the business who are well intentioned often feel so frustrated by and alienated from animal protectionists, and it reveals why the quality of public dialogue over the sport is so poor.

Key cultural developments in the United States have thrown these communities into conflict. The twentieth century brought about changing views of work and play, which in turn directly affected the lives of animals. Most critically, Americans have witnessed a tremendous shift in the perceived role of dogs. While for most of human history canines were assigned various utilitarian duties, ranging from herding, hunting, guarding, and fighting, they are now chiefly embraced as domestic companions. The dramatic
rise of pet keeping can be attributed to a number of societal changes. Harriet Ritvo observes that pet keeping in England was strongly influenced by both status and capitalism, as pets became reflections of their owners’ class.\textsuperscript{30} Pets were popular during the Victorian age, when a “domestic ethic of kindness” was embraced by middle-class Protestant families. A similar pattern emerged in the United States. Katherine C. Grier, the author of \textit{Pets in America}, proposes that keeping and nurturing pets was a means of achieving self-cultivation. As the country became increasingly urbanized, pet keeping was a way to explore one’s conflicting feelings toward civilized domesticity and the natural animal (i.e., animality).\textsuperscript{31}

The commercial structure of the modern pet-keeping industry emerged from 1840 to 1930, but affection for companion animals in the United States became “fully integrated into mass consumer culture” only in the twentieth century, according to Susan Jones, author of \textit{Valuing Animals}.\textsuperscript{32} Americans incorporated the “companionship and affection implicit in pet keeping” into the consumer realm as the primary value of dogs shifted from utilitarian to emotional.\textsuperscript{33} The acquisition of a purebred dog could even serve as a sign of growing income and status in American homes. After World War II pet keeping became even more deeply embedded in consumer culture. To cite but one example, American Kennel Club (AKC) registrations, which track the purchase of purebred dogs, grew from 442,875 in 1960 to 1,129,200 in 1970.\textsuperscript{34}

Today, the prominent position of dogs as consumer objects cannot be underestimated. Pet keeping in the United States is a $36 to $43 billion industry, outselling even baby-care products. Given this statistic, it is perhaps not surprising that dogs are often referred to by their doting caretakers as “fur babies.” Now more than ever, dogs are a part of the family; in 1998, 24 percent of dogs lived outdoors, outside of the house, whereas in 2006 the number was down to 13 percent. Whereas in 1995, 55 percent of dog owners referred to themselves as their pet’s “mommy” or “daddy,” the number had risen to 83 percent in 2001. Surveys have shown that somewhere between 50 and 70 percent of Americans now regard their pets as family members. The possibilities for consumption that result from these shifting attitudes are endless. Not surprisingly, our habits are carefully tracked by organizations such as the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMA).\textsuperscript{35}

The evolving relationship between consumerism and dogs has had an adverse effect on the greyhound racing industry. People once drawn to race-tracks for entertainment eventually began to question the ethics of betting
on animals. Dogs once expected to earn their keep were now coddled, free of duties or obligations. Pets had an emotional rather than economic value, a shift seen nowhere more clearly than in the racing greyhound. Once a commodity, greyhounds were gradually transformed into pets in the public eye, emotional assets with the additional cachet for their adopters as being “rescues.” When pets, including greyhounds, became a new kind of consumer product—one that could be loved and cuddled rather than bet on—the racing industry began to realize that the growing greyhound adoption movement might be a mixed blessing. Few denied the importance of finding good, permanent homes for ex-racers, but the obvious need to do so exposed a gaping hole in the system of dog racing: the overbreeding of greyhounds and the overwhelming need to care for them or destroy them once their careers were over.

In contrast to previous years, when greyhounds were almost exclusively viewed on the racetrack, greyhounds are now seen more frequently in public dog parks, at adoption events, and, for some, on our sofas and in our
beds. Just what is a greyhound, and how have they been used throughout history? Greyhounds are sight hounds, long thought to be one of the oldest dog breeds (perhaps having originated in the Middle East), but recent DNA evidence throws some of these long-held theories into question. Greyhound-like dogs can be seen in a variety of early artistic representations, ranging from ancient Egyptian and Greek paintings to medieval tapestries. They are undoubtedly the fastest of all canines, capable of reaching speeds of 45 miles per hour. When not in motion, however, they tend to be relaxed, even lazy, thus resulting in the nickname “the 45-mile-an-hour couch potato.” American racing greyhounds are presently registered with the National Greyhound Association (NGA; formerly the National Coursing Association [NCA]) and are bred specifically for racing competitions, whereas AKC greyhounds, of which there are far fewer, are bred for conformation to the AKC breed standard and do not race. The greyhound, with its short and smooth coat, comes in a variety of colors, including brindle, fawn, white, black, and a number of variations in between. They tend to be about 27 to 30 inches tall, weighing anywhere from 55 to 80 pounds.
mалнourished or starved even when they are in perfect health. Their flexible spines, large hearts, and powerful lungs allow them to achieve tremendous speeds, even after only a few strides. Their innate running abilities naturally led humans to use them for hunting purposes, although their skills were later called upon for recreational sporting activities.

To date, few books have attempted to tackle the history of greyhound racing in the United States. Cynthia A. Branigan's book *The Reign of the Greyhound* provides a sweeping overview of the breed from prehistory to the present and does not focus exclusively on American greyhound racing. A few informal memoirs have been written by individuals with extensive personal experience in the industry. Of these, Paul C. Hartwell's *The Road from Emeryville: A History of Greyhound Racing*, published in 1980, is the most notable. His book is both a memoir and a general history of the sport and serves as the most reliable history of the sport currently available. Leslie A. Wootten, like Hartwell, the descendant of an industry pioneer, published a short history of a champion racing greyhound, *Keefer: The People's Choice*, in 2007. Three years later Ryan H. Reed came out with a book documenting his travels from racetrack to racetrack, *Born to Run: The Racing Greyhound from Competitor to Companion*. This work cannot be characterized as a history of the sport but is instead more of a travelogue or personal discovery narrative about greyhound racing. *The History of Greyhound Racing in New England*, published by Robert Temple, is a brief, journalistic account of some of the high points of racing in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Vermont, with an emphasis on star greyhounds and regional highlights.

A foray into the study of organized greyhound racing requires a familiarity with some basic industry terminology. The form of legalized gambling conducted at greyhound tracks in the United States since the 1930s is known as pari-mutuel wagering. This system of betting emerged in France in the 1860s, and its name roughly translates as “betting among ourselves” or “betting among each other.” It involves the pooling of all wagers into one pot from which track management takes a commission and pays the winning bettors, namely, those who bet on dogs finishing in the first three or four places. The amount of money bet on a given greyhound determines the odds. When more money is wagered on a dog, the odds decrease; when less money is wagered, the odds increase.

Chapter 1, “Chasing Rabbits,” looks back to the origins of greyhound racing in the United Kingdom, namely, coursing. Coursing later found some devotees in the United States but was eventually transformed into
greyhound racing. Chapter 2, “Boom or Bust,” charts the uneven but dynamic growth of the new sport of greyhound racing in the 1920s and introduces the dogmen who were integral to its development before legalization. Chapter 3, “Horses, Hounds, and Hustlers,” samples locations where dog racing was suppressed or encouraged. Kentucky, New York, and California all serve as case studies that expose thoroughbred horse racing as a chief opponent to dog-racing interests. In Massachusetts and other states, even when gambling on greyhound racing was legalized, the sport was still not welcomed by all community members. Chapter 4, “Halcyon Days, Florida Nights,” traces the phenomenal popularity of greyhound racing in Florida and the celebrity culture that began to accompany it. Chapter 5, “Doggone Mad,” examines the damaging media reports and graphic exposés focused on the alleged cruelty of greyhound racing. The end of the twentieth century inaugurated a period of aggressive criticism of the dog-racing industry, an assault from which the sport has never recovered. Chapter 6, “The Fall,” tracks the postwar growth of greyhound racing that was gradually undermined by a variety of sociocultural changes. The expansion and diversification of American mass culture pulled gamblers and fans away from the tracks to new and different venues.

Despite greyhound racing’s visibility in communities across the United
States for almost a century, its presence in American culture has largely been overlooked by scholars. In contrast, the sport’s close cousin, thoroughbred horse racing, has long attracted both popular and scholarly attention. Until now, the socioeconomic, political, and ideological factors that fueled the rise and fall of dog racing in the United States have never been examined as a whole. *Going to the Dogs* provides a broad narrative of American greyhound racing in the twentieth century. The story is not limited to greyhounds in pursuit of the mechanical rabbit; it is the story of Americans at work, at play, and at odds. This book will interpret dog racing as a dynamic cultural phenomenon, a pastime that has long attracted passionate supporters and detractors. The subject remains a hotly debated one: Americans continue to struggle over their competing views about the role of dogs—and indeed, of all animals. For some, the sport belongs to a lifestyle. An attack against greyhound racing is interpreted as nothing less than a cultural assault. For others, the lives and livelihoods of animals are at stake. This past century has seen a colossal shift in how we perceive and understand greyhound racing. The purpose of *Going to the Dogs* is to elucidate how and why this cultural transformation took place.