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Pit Bulls are Cool Dudes

Throughout history, dogs have been lovingly revered and held as a staple member of the modern American family. They don't call them "man's best friend" for nothing! Dogs are as much a member of the family as a brother or a sister. All sorts of breeds receive love in families, TV, film, and pop culture. All... but pit bulls. When one even hears mention of the words "pit bull," immediately one's mind calls for images of vicious beasts and stories of violent attacks and aggression. But why? Why do so many people have such a natural disdain for these dogs? Well, the same way any other stereotype forms. A misconception arises, spreads, and is perpetuated, often in the process becoming harsher and bigger than the original thought. But as history has shown, prejudgments are almost always wrong. So why should this one be any different? The idea that all pit bulls are vicious monsters is extremely false and the prejudice against these beautiful creatures needs to end, and it needs to end sooner rather than later. Our organization, the Pitbull Protection Project, seeks to do just that. Through education, we hope to spread the truth and awareness about these dogs, and end the hate against them.

The name "pit bull" refers to a number of breeds - American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, Staffordshire Bull Terrier, and any crosses between the three. Some places also qualify the American Bulldog under the term pit bull. However, many breeds such as the Bullmastiff,

Bulldog, and Boxer are commonly mistaken for pit bulls. Described by the American Kennel Club, as “people-oriented, friendly, intelligent, and loyal,” pit bulls were originally bred to combine the “spirit and agility of the terrier with the courage and tenacity of the Bulldog.” Later in history, the dogs were more commonly domesticated because of their gentle temperament and loyalty to families. They were even used as “nanny dogs,” due to their tolerance with children. Helen Keller owned a pit bull, called Sir Thomas, and the Little Rascals even had a pit companion named Petey. Does a nanny dog sound synonymous with “killing machine”? Most would say no. The United Kennel Club even notes that pit bulls are not the best choice for a guard dog, due to their being “extremely friendly, even with strangers.”

Pit bulls have, regrettably, had a prominent role in dog fighting. This has obviously contributed to the negative myths and attitudes surrounding these dogs. Furthermore, while they do have a role in dog attacks, pit bulls are not significantly more prone to these attacks than other dogs. There is a huge possibility of skewed data that presents pit bulls in a more negative light than in reality. For example, according to Wikipedia, “of the 101 attacks in which breed was recorded, pit bulls were implicated in 42 of those attacks.” Note that this datum says “of the 101 attacks *in which breed was recorded.*” It seems that, following the anti-pit bull trend of most Americans, someone would be more likely to record the breed if it was a pit bull. Pit bull bites draw more media attention than bites by other breeds. In a study, the National Canine Research Council found a bias against pit bulls by the media. Each of three separate fatal attacks by non-pit bull breeds was mentioned only once or twice in local papers. Alternatively, one non-fatal pit bull attack was covered over 230 times in national and international newspapers, and on major television networks including CNN, MSNBC and FOX. Recall a previous

statement about perpetuated stereotypes. By these stereotypes, the media seeks to gain in big stories, which further extend the stereotype that pit bulls are vicious, mean, aggressive, et cetera. However, as also previously stated, these stereotypes and prejudgments are almost always incorrect. Pit bulls have an 86% American Temperament Testing Society passing rate, which is higher than miniature poodles (77.9%), beagles (80.3%), or collies (79.7%). It stands that pit bulls are not the vicious monsters that society paints them to be. They just aren't. But they are being discriminated against.

Breed-specific legislation is laws and regulations that focus on certain "aggressive" breeds, namely pit bulls. These regulations can range from constant confinement of the dog, to excessive taxes and fines, even to an outright ban of the breed. This legislation is becoming increasingly common, and can be used to sneak in regulations that are plain unfair.

Camryn Sears, Christine Slate, and I have set out to make a difference for the sake of the pit bulls. Our organization, the Pit bull Protection Project, seeks to provide education and truth to citizens in order to end the misconceptions and prejudices against pit bulls, and call them to action to vote against unfair breed-specific legislation. Our website, <http://thepitbullprotectionproject.weebly.com/>, provides information on legislation, as well as REAL information about these loving dogs, and information on how to make a difference. We created an informational video, found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJyZiNBv38M>, that gives more insight into the prejudice and how to end it.

When we first started this project, I joined in because I thought it would be fairly easy. I thought, "well, of course pit bulls aren't vicious. Everyone knows that." To my surprise, everyone did not know that. I was a bit taken aback by the amount of false allegations and myths surrounding pit

bulls, who have always been one of my favorite breeds. I knew then that this wasn't just a school project anymore, this was a personal mission to educate myself as much as possible, and in turn spread the truth and educate others. Our action isn't much, just raising awareness, but that itself is a crucial component and the first step in bringing about a real change to something that needs to be dealt with. Further, I hope that now I can begin to take more action now that I have a strong foundation in what I know and believe. I want to get in touch with local shelters, and with other organizations focused on pit bulls, and hopefully continue to spread the truth and make a difference. I'm really glad that I was a part of this project, because I've truly become impassioned and I want to continue to work for the cause.

Works Cited

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<<http://www.pitsisters.org/Facts-About-Pit-Bulls.html>>.