



A Brief History of the Greyhound

No one knows exactly when greyhounds came into the lives of humans. At some point after the retreat of the last glaciers people discovered the advantages of dogs as hunting partners because they were fast, agile, strong, and could run leaving clumsy humans far behind. They kept those dogs close to them, bred them selectively and developed a lean, graceful, swift dog of a sight hound type. Dogs that resemble greyhounds decorate a funerary vase from what is now Iran that is over 6,000 years old.



Greyhound-like dogs were the favorites of Egyptian Pharaohs. They were valued so highly that the birth of a hound was celebrated almost as much as the birth of a son, and death was mourned with elaborate ceremony. These dogs were prized as royalty among canines, living with their families or housed in special kennels and cared for by special handlers. When a member of the Egyptian nobility died, his sight hounds were often buried beside him. Anubis, the Egyptian god who helped judge the souls of the dead and guided deserving souls to the underworld, was pictured as having the body of a man and the head of a jackal or a greyhound-like dog.

Sight hounds were also valued by the Greeks who depicted them in art and literature. When Homer's Odysseus returns home in disguise after twenty years of wandering, his old dog Argus raises his head wearily, wags his tail once in recognition and dies. Argus is portrayed as loyal, lean, swift and fearless; the description of a greyhound indeed.

These dogs were also popular and revered by the Romans. In Roman art Diana, who succeeded the Greek Artemis, is almost always portrayed accompanied by her sight hounds.

The Middle Ages were a bad time for dogs and animals in general. Abandoned dogs starved, but those who were lucky enough to belong to the local clergy or nobility survived. Greyhounds disappear from art in these centuries. Indeed, art itself almost disappeared, but Medieval Irish monks included sight hounds in the illuminations of the world's most beautiful manuscripts.



How these dogs, which were and are any color but grey, came to be called "greyhounds" is a mystery. What is clear is that by the early Renaissance this particular breed of sight hound had acquired the modern name of **greyhound**. Greyhounds became popular and the wealthy aspired to being portrayed with them at every possible occasion.

The first greyhounds in the American continent were used as attack dogs or weapons. Fierce greyhounds and mastiffs were imported by Columbus and the early conquistadors to subdue the natives and often simply to torment them for sport.

In the **1930s** American greyhound racing became very popular as tracks proliferated around the country. Large amounts of money were invested, inevitably attracting corruption and organized crime. Regulatory boards were established in the UK and the US to register racing dogs and oversee the sport.

Today, in the United States, commercial **greyhound racing is illegal in forty-four states**. However, dog racing still remains legal and operational **in the state of West Virginia**. The royal dogs of the Pharaohs have simply become commercial assets, to be cruelly exploited or thrown away according to their monetary value. Even the most "responsible" kennels confine their dogs to tiny crates for an average of **20 hours a day**, allowing them out only to relieve themselves or to perform. When they race, greyhounds face the risk of **serious injury and even death at every turn**.

As a breed, greyhounds are gentle and affectionate. Remarkably calm in temperament, they are highly sensitive to the least physical or emotional discomfort. Adopted greyhounds are ideal companions for the elderly, and many become therapy dogs in nursing homes. It's time for their exploitation to end.

Thankfully, American greyhound racing is now a dying industry. **Since 2001, the industry has been leveled**. At that time, there were nearly 50 tracks in 15 states, but after the passage of Florida's Amendment 13 in 2018 followed by the phase-out of dog racing in Arkansas and Iowa in 2022, there remain just two tracks nationwide and a federal bill to ban dog racing is pending in the US Congress. **It is the ultimate goal of greyhound advocates to end dog racing everywhere.**

If we care enough, we can make it happen! Greyhound racing is cruel and inhumane and must end. For more information, please visit our website at grey2kusaedu.org.