

## Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No Kill Revolution in America

By Nathan J. Winograd

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Reviewed by Tom Cushing

IN THIS NO-KILL MANIFESTO, ATTORNEY Nathan Winograd identifies the moment when he believes the budding humane movement lost its way. Overruling the wishes of its founder, Henry Bergh, ASPCA agreed in the late 1800s to operate New York's cruelly primitive dog pounds. Thus, the organization became accustomed to killing animals, albeit more compassionately than under the city's brutal regime. Winograd argues that the animal welfare establishment has remained mired in 19th-century thinking and processes, to unnecessarily fatal effect for the five million healthy animals destroyed in U.S. animal "shelters" each year.

He traces the movement's history, highlighting its failed attempts to legislate, educate and coercively sterilize the nation out of its presumed pet overpopulation problem. Policies have been founded, he claims, on twin (and false) premises: that there are too many companion animals to be absorbed into proper homes, and that the public can be harangued into more responsible care of its pets. This has led shelters to the hopeless approach of "adopting out a few and killing the rest" of their unlucky tenants, while blaming an indifferent citizenry for their thankless task.

He then describes no-kill successes in San Francisco; Charlottesville, Va.; and Reno, Nev., as well as his own shelter management work in rural Tompkins County, N.Y. Here the book comes alive as he reports life-or-death tales of animals who were spared the needle by the best efforts of shelter personnel applying the logic, tactics and creative hard work of the no-kill paradigm: low-cost

spay/neuter, foster and rescue care, medical/behavioral interventions, trap/neuter/release for feral cats, and several species of community outreach. In each case, shelters dramatically reduced their kill rates to under 10 percent of *all* animals without selective intake or "adoptability" analyses to eliminate problem critters—no smoke, no mirrors. He also explodes the claim of inherent overpopulation, demonstrating that sufficient homes are available only if they can be more effectively linked with needy animals.

Finally, Winograd indicts the humane establishment for seeking to discredit—rather than embrace—these successes. San Francisco was proclaimed too urban (and, remarkably, "too gay"); Tompkins County, too rural and Yankee; Charlottesville, too collegiate, and so on. Institutional interests, he believes, have outweighed their life-saving mission. Indeed, the response of the mainstream organizations to this book will be crucial and instructive. One hopes for a collaboration toward better, 21st-century "best practices." Eyes on the prize, everyone—our behavior should not embarrass our pets.

The world owes much to those rare individuals who see things differently—and who then devote themselves to vindicating their maverick conclusions. Though *Redemption* is repetitive, may be over-harsh on no-kill's detractors, and concentrates more on diagnosis than cure, it's an important work. The shelter world has shielded most of the public from the grim realities of its operations, and has convinced the rest that change is possible only at the margins. This book is a clarion call to the burgeoning, pet-loving community—readers of *The Bark*, perhaps—to demand better from its shelters, and to participate in the soulful work of saving lives.

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