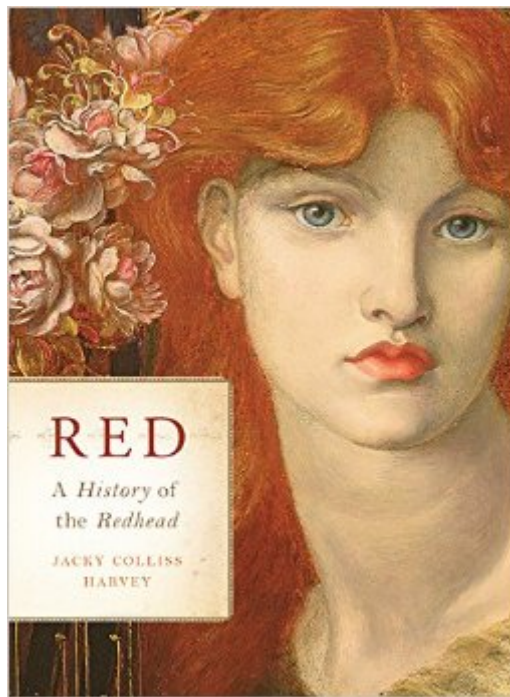


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# Red: A History Of The Redhead



## Synopsis

**NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER** The brilliantly told, captivating history of red hair throughout the ages and across multiple disciplines, including science, religion, politics, feminism and sexuality, literature, and art. The mere mention of red hair calls to mind vivid pictures. Stereotypes of redheaded women range from the fun-loving scatterbrain, like Lucille Ball, to the fiery-tempered vixen or the penitent prostitute (Mary Magdalene, for example, is almost always depicted as a redhead). Red-haired men are often associated with either the savage barbarian or the redheaded clown. But why is this so? *Red: A History of the Redhead* is the first book to explore the history of red hair and red-headedness throughout the world. With an obsessive fascination that is as contagious as it is compelling, author Jacky Colliss Harvey begins her quest in prehistory and traces the redhead gene as it made its way out of Africa with the early human diaspora, only to emerge under Northern skies. She goes on to explore red hair in the ancient world (from the Tarim mummies in China to the Islamic kingdom of the Khazars); the prejudice manifested against red hair across medieval Europe; red hair during the Renaissance as both an indicator of Jewishness during the Inquisition and the height of fashion in Protestant England, where it was made famous by the Henry VIII and Elizabeth I; the modern age of art, and literature, and the first positive symbols of red hair in children's characters; modern medicine and science and the genetic and chemical decoding of red hair; and finally, red hair in contemporary culture, from advertising and exploitation to "gingerism" and the new movement against bullying. More than a book for redheads, *Red* is the exploration of evolution and gene mutation, as well as a compelling social and cultural study of how prejudice and misconceptions of "other" evolve across centuries and continents and are handed down through generations and from one culture to another.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Full disclosure: I originally bought this book because I've recently become friends with the author, and I thought it might be mildly interesting. I was wrong. It's fascinating. Around the central topic of red hair Jacky Colliss Harvey makes connections with genetics, evolutionary theory, history, mythology, art, literature, religion, and popular culture. All these topics are woven together as a narrative; you're reading a scholarly work (with an incredible amount of research) but you read it as a story, so well organized is it. The writing is superb; even complex sentences go smoothly and her descriptions of places and works of art are works of art themselves. Moreover, although a scholarly work, the personality of the author comes through. There is the perfect balance of academic fact with a conversational tone, treating the reader with respect. And you interact with the book (rather than reading it passively); I had fun realizing I knew some of the historical or factual or popular references, but equal fun looking up the ones I didn't know and, thus, learning even more. Finally, although I can't speak for most of the topics in the book, the areas that are my professional specialty (human evolution, genetics, and evolutionary theory) were all accurate and up-to-date. In short, one of the most pleasurable reading experiences of a nonfiction book I've had in a very long time.

I spent a good part of my childhood explaining to people that my sister and I, two red heads, were not adopted or kidnapped but did really belong to our parents, two people with very dark brown hair. I probably became a geneticist because I spent so much time explaining the pedigree of my hair to people. As I got older, the comments changed and everything became linked to my hair. If I got mad, it was because I was a red head. If I was in the sun, strangers would offer me sunscreen because I was a red head. The moment I walked into a room full of strangers, I would instinctively scan for another red head. Someone in that room would eventually comment on the hair color. I have walked down streets and had people make the sign against the devil. I have always thought all of these incidents were in my head. Jacky Colliss Harvey's *Red: A History of the Redhead* affirmed my suspicions that a bias truly exists against red heads. Harvey begins by explaining the history of the red head gene and its place in evolution in one of the best and clearest explanation of genetic drift ever written for a layperson. She then details the history of the red head through art and reveals how the modern attitudes are as ancient as the Bible. I found myself nodding along with Harvey as she detailed the biases and stereotypes red heads encounter on a daily basis. My one

criticism of the book is that Harvey spent too much time discussing the art and not enough time discussing the modern plight and interpretations of the red head. Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed the book and would recommend it to anyone with red head as a reminder that you are not alone. I received this book as part of the GoodReads First Read program. This does not influence my review at all.

I really enjoyed this book. It was fascinating to learn where the stereotypes that redheads are subjected to originated, and have the author trace these stereotypes through various times and cultures. The author's tone is very conversational, and her art history background is evident, both of which I really enjoyed. And I loved the package -- really beautiful. Fascinating book. Highly recommended.

The most surprising pleasure of the summer reading season is surely Red, Jacky Colliss Harvey's astonishing History of the Redhead. This exegesis of a well-known but under-explored species combines autobiography, anthropology, art history and oh-so-much else. Beautifully written and brilliantly observed, it draws you in from the first sentence. There are few subjects I could imagine myself less drawn to, and yet, after the first ten pages, I could not put it down. Hats off, Ms. Harvey.

I really enjoyed this book, it was very enlightening. I have always found the different shades of red hair rather lovely, I myself do not have red hair (although I have dyed my hair red once or twice) so growing up I never noticed that there was any stigma associated with red hair. I was floored to read that women in the Tudor period would use white lead to get that pale skin look, how horrifying it must have been for them to suffer the effects of its use. I would definitely recommend this book to all those who have or wish they had red hair.

What's really remarkable about this book is how interesting it is for non-redheads. Red isn't just the story of how people came to have red hair, or how the gene itself spread, or where it spread, but how non-redheads have reacted to it: the Spanish inquisition, Parisian artists, Hollywood filmmakers, and the occasional Man-With-a-Thing-For-Redheads. It's the rare book that manages to weave together history, science, pop culture, and fine arts to discuss a topic that literally stares us in the face every day.

Awesome book and required reading for all redheads. NOT better dead than red, fellow gingers! We

kick brunette and blonde butt! Harvey gives us the science, history, and art history as well as sociology and pop culture. She examines the genetics and the biases from a variety of perspectives. And she ends the book with an intimate look at what it's like to attend the Dutch festival Redhead Days with 6000 other gingers. A riveting read.

Yes, I grew up a red head, though I have now faded to strawberry blonde, little gray yet at mid seventy (an advantage, perhaps). Red makes you stand out and is unwelcome to a shy person. But it has it's pay-offs. I would have liked to hear more about the biology, chemistry, and genetics and less of the red-in-art. A moderately interesting quick read.

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