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Prompt #1

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Demonstrating the Value Horse Racing Creates

The horse racing industry only consists of drugs, deception, and death. Racehorses have been victims of a multibillion-dollar industry that is rife with drug abuse, injuries, and lead horses racing to their graves. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is a commonly known organization whose mission focuses on animal rights. PETA strongly believes and portrays the horse racing industry as cruel and abusive only, and I'll be honest, they had me misled like they do with their 6.5 million members and supporters.

Before ever stepping foot in the backstretch, at a young age, I was always an animal lover. I had horses in Mexico and enjoyed the freedom that horseback riding gave me. I have always lived in Cicero and whenever my parents headed to I-55, we always came across Hawthorne. My parents would always hear stories of how unsanitary and cruel the backstretch was, and news outlets weren't any help with debunking these beliefs. I grew up believing that racehorses were abused, drugged, and sent to slaughter. Everything that PETA stands for, I did too. PETA has been successful with its campaign against horse racing due to many trainers and jockey mistakes in using unethical practices during races. A great example is the 2021 Kentucky Derby, trainer Bob Baffert who won with Medina Spirit and failed the post-race drug test. These huge events are the ones that demonstrate the value of horse racing and there is no room for error. However, the horse racing industry fails to respond to these claims and does not show the true values of what horse racing consists of.

Horse racing does come with benefits like creating a community, motivation, competition, loyalty, and progression. This is how I would respond to organizations like PETA and show the public the values that horse racing does create. Once I began working for the backstretch, I experienced firsthand how racehorses were truly treated. It was to my surprise that they were treated like royalty and with such delicacy. Workers having to arrive early and leave late, carefully analyzing if the horses were all healthy and ready to train. It also demonstrates the hard work, persistence, and patience of all the backstretch people, even including the children who have to sacrifice their time away from their parents due to the busy schedule that comes with this job. This is where PETA fails to view the pros of horse racing, and neglects the hard work of backstretch workers.

All racetracks have photographers and this could be used as an advantage by documenting the lives of backstretch workers. This all contributes to the magic that consumers gain when throwing office parties in the suites, or the parents standing at the rail with their children on their shoulders cheering on their pick. As cliché it may sound, actions do speak louder than words. The main reason why organizations like PETA have been successful and grown in supporters is that they focus on the heartfelt aspect and if the horse racing industry follows that marketing tactic by speaking more about the backstretch, then there could be less controversy on how horse racing is being portrayed.

The backstretch has bright college students who are interested in making their resumes more attractive. So why not take advantage of that and ask our students to collaborate with our photographers to create a montage and interview our workers about their responsibilities. Creating a heartfelt story would gain awareness and show the public that our horses aren't racing to their grave but rather smothered with love. The horse racing industry only focuses on big

events and top trainers, it's time to focus on the backbone of this industry and that's our workers who keep the track running.

Demonstrate the hard work and integrity that is applied when working in the backstretch. Having grooms waking up as early as 4 AM to muck over five stables, hotwalker parents having to get their children ready for school and prepare their lunch when they are gone long hours, or gallopers risking an injury every day to prepare these horses for the races.

The backstretch has created a community among workers and it also consists of friendly competition. The media outlets don't show that, they don't get to experience the life of a worker. They don't see the cookouts that neighbors have, the laughter shared amongst each other, or hear the "good mornings" that we say to one another when passing by. They also don't see the patience that workers have when a horse doesn't want to cooperate, or the kisses and endless snacks we give them. Horse racing has become the lives of backstretch workers and many immigrants only know about this lifestyle and are prideful about it. Horse racing allows minorities to progress in life by investing in partnerships and buying a horse, allowing their income to work for them. We see workers begin as hotwalkers, then become grooms, then foreman, and finally an assistant trainer. Many of these workers stay in the backstretch because they have simply grown to love their job and their passion for horses strengthens as it did with me. The horse racing industry doesn't invest in any advertisements and this can be a potential reason why people strongly believe that horse racing is becoming a dying industry.

Being a proud member of the backstretch community, I always speak about the misconception of horse racing when given the opportunity. Whenever I have an assignment to introduce myself to the classroom, I always do a presentation of how I spend my summer at Arlington. I include small clips or pictures of my daily routine and emphasize how workers

dedicate their lives to maintain these horses in the best shape. I always end my presentation by saying, "there is no better feeling than seeing the horse you groom win, the pride in my face, seeing how all my hard work has paid off."