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Essay Prompt 1

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Horseracing, Animal Welfare, and Activists

The Dunning-Kruger effect is a cognitive bias stating that people with low ability or knowledge overestimate their ability or expertise. The activists that protest horse racing demonstrate this theory when they try to explain why horse racing is wrong and cruel, and it is our job as horsemen and workers in the industry to dispel the lies that activists put out to the public. There are several areas and subjects which are constantly misconstrued to forward the agenda of PETA or HSUS activists. These include horse medication, training practices, and corruption. While it is good to have watchdogs to protect the industry and the integrity of the sport, the overt lies of the activists not only harm the farm industry, veterinarians, and the horsemen, but also the horses activists claim they are protecting.

Misinformation and the misleading facts of the activists when it comes to training practices are laughable and they are easily rebutted when an expert or even a layman in the industry is asked about the life of a racehorse. The biggest lie is that horses are treated poorly and run into the ground for profit. While this does happen from some bad actors, most horsemen know that the horses are treated like kings and elite athletes. Horsemen will skip meals and live in tackrooms so their horses can get the best treatment and supplies. The idea that horsemen do not care for the horses is absurd considering the dedication it takes to train a horse. From getting up at 3 AM, working all day, going to the races, and staying after to cool-out the horse, horseracing is a hard job and if people did not love it and the animals, they would not do be part

of the industry. Raising the babies and waiting 3 years to get them to the track shows the time horsemen are willing to spend for their industry and to think horsemen would then turn around and throw away the life of the animal they worked so hard with is ridiculous. This is to say that more owners, trainers, and grooms must come forward and tell their stories of hard work and love for the horses to the public at large.

Protecting the health of the horses requires the help of great veterinarians. The vets also get up early and stay late in order to give their clients and patients the best care. Like in many areas of animal agriculture, activists fundamentally misunderstand and misconstrue racehorse vets and the care they provide. For instance, Lasix is given to many horses to prevent exercise induced pulmonary hemorrhage a.k.a. bleeding. Many activists will disregard sound arguments and insist this is a performance enhancing drug. While limiting use may help the industry identify and not breed to chronic bleeders, taking this drug away could cause many fatalities from horses essentially drowning in their own blood, thus activists have caused harm to the animals they say they want to protect. Taking away drug options that protect the health of equine athletes would be akin to taking away an inhaler from an asthmatic. Strict drug protocols are essential to protect the integrity of the sport but hamstringing a vet's options to treat problems only harms horses.

One of the biggest allegations leveled against the industry is that corruption is rampant. Activists use this argument to push the idea that the industry is beyond saving and getting rid of it is the only option. However, integrity in the sport is necessary for it to stay alive. If people are victims of corruption, an exodus from racing would start causing the sport to cease to exist. The best thing about racing is anyone can win. Some of the greatest racing stories are about common people getting a good horse by chance, and then winning big races. Horses that are given away

can come back and race against horses owned by the Queen of England. Horsemen are and should always root out bad actors that try to abuse the system or their horses. Recent indictments by the FBI of owners, trainers, and veterinarians in certain jurisdictions are welcomed by horsemen that work hard and play by the rules. Bad actors are found in every sport, but activists make it seem as though the industry turns a blind eye to trainers based on status or money. The events surrounding the 2021 Kentucky Derby shows how seriously the industry takes any hint of misconduct. This must continue to preserve the sport and show the public that good sportsmanship and fairness is the top priority.

While activists will only point out the problems, it is up to horsemen to show the value the sport creates. Grooms need to come forward and tell their stories and the job opportunities racing creates. Farmers and local business get billions of dollars feeding and supplying the horsemen and their athletes. Local businesses and restaurants make money taking care of the fans that make the sport possible. Also, many thousands of people get the joy of owning a racehorse after retirement. The industry strives to provide homes to horses once their careers are over. These horses are great companions and become the members of many families. Horsemen must defend the industry and point out the value the industry creates. Activists will continue to attack, and a robust defense is the only way to make sure the general public knows the truth about horseracing and the lives that the industry impacts.