



UNDERSTANDING MULE PREJUDICE

By Vic Otten,

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In most cases you know it when you see it.....someone states: "What kind of a half ass job is that?" Or, someone refers to a person as "stubborn as a mule," or uses the phrase, "There's another mule kicking in your stall (an allegory that means your woman is messing around on you with another guy)". These are examples of associations with the mule that contain negative connotations. And while they may seem harmless and even funny, these stereotypes, based on a negative and irrational opinion formulated without a factual basis, can have profound impacts on mules, their owners and society.

Mule discrimination is when mules are treated differently than other equines because of such prejudice. This comes in many forms. For example, a person might refuse to go on a trail ride because of your long eared companion. Or a show barn may refuse to allow the boarding of mules. Additionally, it is not unusual for a farrier to refuse to shoe a mule despite the fact that the farrier has never had a bad experience with a mule.

This is tragic, given the fact that this country, and much of the world, was built on the back of mules. Countless loads of laundry would not have been processed if it was not for the 20 Mule Team that hauled borax out of Death Valley from 1883 to 1889. Likewise, mules played a significant part in the rapid growth of the film industry starring in such classics as *Francis the Talking Mule*, *Two Mules for Sister Sarah*, *Gus* and *Gunsmoke*. Let's
Mules and More

not forget the brave mules that have played an integral role in this nation's military.....most recently helping the United States in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan and other parts of the Middle East.

Sadly, mule prejudice has even found its way into the government with the passing of the 2008 Farm Bill. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., netted tax breaks for the thoroughbred horse racing industry in the Farm Bill estimated to be worth \$126 million over the next 10 years. Section 15344 of the bill specifically names race horses and only discusses tax exemptions for race horses. Because of this, the Farm Bill does not seem to allow tax exemptions for mule breeders. Why were the mules left out of the bill?

I am not the first to write about mule prejudice and likely will not be the last. It appears that mule prejudice was first addressed in the article entitled, *The Ass and the Mule* published in 1848. Author J. S. Skinner writes "Let me then invoke the liberality of my readers to cast aside all prejudice against this useful and too often abused hybrid, and impartially to hear me for my cause." Little has changed since this great visionary attempted to extol the virtues of this fine hybrid, despite the efforts of many.

Like other forms of bias, mule prejudice is primarily based on ignorance and deep rooted beliefs passed on from generation to generation. The root causes and solutions are too complicated to explore in the short article. There are some people who believe there is a conspiracy started by the 'Horse Industrial Complex' designed to lower the demand for mules and that this secrete organization is quietly disseminating false information to keep this prejudice alive.

The Society to Obliterate Mule Prejudice (S.T.O.M.P.) is a recently formed organization with the primary goal of reducing mule prejudice. For more information about mule prejudice, visit the S.T.O.M.P. website at www.mulerights.com

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