

**FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE****CONTACT**

Jasmine Rodriguez, 42 West
562-745-4237
jasmine.rodriguez@42west.com

Aisha Almada, ITVS
415-356-8383
aisha.almada@itvs.org

For downloadable images,
visit our [press page](#).

SPOTLIGHTING THE IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE SUSTAINING THE KENTUCKY DERBY, “BACKSIDE: THE UNSEEN HANDS OF HORSE RACING,” PREMIERES AS AN INDEPENDENT LENS/VOCES CO-PRESENTATION ON APRIL 13

*Documentary Looks Beyond the Glamour and Pageantry to the
Unseen Workers Keeping Horseracing’s Biggest Stage Running*

(San Francisco, CA) February 23, 2025— “Backside: The Unseen Hands of Horse Racing,” a powerful new documentary revealing the hidden labor sustaining one of America’s most celebrated sporting traditions, the Kentucky Derby, will premiere April 13, 2026, as a co-presentation of PBS’s INDEPENDENT LENS and VOCES. Set behind the iconic pageantry of the world’s most famous horse race, the documentary takes viewers into the rarely seen world of the “backside” of Churchill Downs, where grooms and hotwalkers, the majority of whom are immigrants, care for some of the most valuable racehorses in the world.

Through intimate, observational storytelling, director Raúl O. Paz-Pastrana honors the resilience, expertise, and dignity of a community whose contributions have long remained invisible. Rising before dawn and laboring long after the crowds leave, these workers form the backbone of an elite industry shaped by race, class, and power. Showcasing the grit, skill, and deep knowledge required to maintain peak equine performance, the film emphasizes the profound, symbiotic relationship between humans and horses—a bond that can decide everything in the high-stakes world of horseracing. Paz-Pastrana gives voice to the people who sustain this elite American institution and quietly illuminates how wealth and tradition are upheld through largely unseen immigrant hands.

“Paz-Pastrana has created a fly-on-the-wall portrait that strips away spectacle and lets the humanity of this work speak for itself,” said Lois Vossen, INDEPENDENT LENS founding executive producer. “A film’s intimacy is rooted in the trust between filmmaker and subjects, and the results are the rigorously observed rhythms, labor, and emotional stakes of the hidden forces shaping American life. ‘Backside’ captures why INDEPENDENT LENS exists: to give voice to the unseen and reframe what we think we know.”

 ITVS

1435 FOLSOM STREET
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94103
T. 415 356 8383
F. 415 356 8391
PBS.ORG/INDEPENDENTLENS

Filmed over the course of a full racing season, “Backside” offers a portrait of contemporary America, contrasting the massive wealth on display with the physical demands, low wages, and limited visibility of the labor force sustaining it, while underscoring how race and class continue to shape opportunity in the United States.

“What makes this film so powerful is how it allows the viewer into the lives of these workers,” added Sandie Viquez Pedlow, executive director of Latino Public Broadcasting. “Immigrants are foundational to our society, and ‘Backside’ honors their passion, expertise, and dignity with rare warmth and clarity.”

While mainstream coverage of horse racing tends to spotlight jockeys, trainers, gamblers, and the horses themselves, “Backside” centers on the migrant labor force that makes the entire enterprise possible. Rather than romanticizing hardship or reducing workers’ stories to immigration narratives, the documentary reveals the complexity of their lives and aspirations.

“Backside: The Unseen Hands of Horse Racing” is a co-production of Backside Films, LLC., ITVS and Latino Public Broadcasting. A co-presentation of PBS’s INDEPENDENT LENS and VOCES, the film premieres on PBS on April 13, 2026, at 10 p.m. ([check local listings](#)). The film will also be available to stream on the [PBS app](#) and [PBS YouTube](#).

Visit the [“Backside: The Unseen Hands of Horse Racing”](#) page on INDEPENDENT LENS to learn more about the film.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Raúl O. Paz-Pastrana (Director)

Raúl is a Mexican immigrant filmmaker whose work explores themes of belonging, alienation, and “home.” His feature film “Border South” (2019) screened at festivals worldwide. Raúl is a Bay Area Video Coalition Media Maker Fellow, Firelight Media Documentary Lab Fellow, New America National Fellow, and a Creative Capital Awards Artist Fellow.

Patricia Alvarez Astacio (Producer)

Patricia is a Puerto Rican anthropologist and filmmaker whose films have been screened globally at festivals including the Havana International Film Festival, the Royal Anthropological Institute Film Festival, and the Boston

Latino Film Festival. She was the director of the Society for Visual Anthropology Film and Media Festival.

Gabriella Garcia-Pardo (Producer)

Gabriella is a Colombian American filmmaker focused on our relationship to land and the nonhuman. She also produced “La Bonga” (True/False, 2023), receiving support from Sundance, Catapult, Creative Capital, and Firelight, among others. Her cinematography work has screened at festivals including SXSW, IDFA, and Tribeca.

CREDITS

Director	Raúl O. Paz-Pastrana
Producer	Patricia Alvarez Astacio Gabriella Garcia-Pardo
Executive Producers	Carrie Lozano Lois Vossen Royd Chung Sandie Viquez Pedlow

ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

INDEPENDENT LENS is an award-winning documentary series that fosters understanding, seeks to build empathy, and encourages a more united society. Produced by ITVS, INDEPENDENT LENS documentaries have premiered on PBS for 25 years and streamed on YouTube, helping Americans foster deeper connections between communities and themselves. From the Oscar-nominated “I Am Not Your Negro” to the Peabody-acclaimed docuseries “Philly D.A.” and the Emmy® Award-winning “The Invisible War,” INDEPENDENT LENS provides viewers with in-depth, nuanced storytelling reflecting the experiences of people from a variety of voices and communities. INDEPENDENT LENS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting: a private corporation funded by the American People, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Acton Family Giving, Park Foundation, and Wyncote Foundation.

Stream anytime on the PBS app or YouTube. Learn more at pbs.org/independentlens.

ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) is the largest co-producer of independent documentaries in the United States. For more than 30 years the San Francisco nonprofit has funded and partnered with documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning titles and premieres them on our Emmy Award-winning PBS series, INDEPENDENT LENS. ITVS titles appear on PBS, WORLD, NETA, and can be streamed on various digital platforms including the PBS app. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Acton Family Giving, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, Park Foundation, and Wyncote Foundation. For more information, visit itvs.org.

ABOUT VOCES

Produced by Latino Public Broadcasting, the acclaimed PBS documentary series [VOCES](#) features the best of Latino arts, culture and history and shines a light on current issues that impact Latino Americans. Devoted to exploring the rich diversity of the Latino experience, VOCES presents new and established filmmakers and brings their powerful and illuminating stories to a national audience—on TV, online, and on the PBS app. Luis Ortiz is series producer; Sandie Viquez Pedlow is executive producer. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and X.

###