

MEET THE NEW AMERICAN SWEATSHOP

A New Media, Public Education Campaign for Car Wash Workers' Health and Safety



A SPECIAL REPORT *from* BRAVE NEW FOUNDATION

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Introduction

"Several studies have concluded that immigrant workers suffer a greater risk of injury and illness, because they are employed in more hazardous jobs...But the experience of immigrant workers cannot be understood solely by the types of jobs they occupy. Other factors—including immigration status, lack of training, language barriers and the lack of health insurance—compound their risk."¹

Brave New Foundation has long recognized its unique responsibility as a leader in the production and distribution of viral communications campaigns and social network media strategizing to address social justice issues. We also recognize that one of our most important accomplishments will be to evaluate the efficacy of our model. We are therefore proud to present this special report detailing the outcomes of our recent partnership with the CLEAN Carwash Campaign to produce *Meet The New American Sweatshop*—a new media, public education campaign dedicated to raising public awareness about workplace health and safety issues facing low-wage immigrant workers in California's car wash industry.

Supported by grants from The Ford Foundation and The California Wellness Foundation, the campaign objectives for this project are to:

1. *Work with community-based organizations to reach low-wage and immigrant workers with bilingual/bicultural educational outreach to help them identify workplace hazards, raise awareness of their rights and improve health and safety*
2. *Raise public awareness through our members and email blasts by campaign partner economic justice, human rights, immigrant and faith groups*
3. *Impact the local media and major state-wide markets, including the Spanish- language media, to drive employer compliance and agency enforcement.*

Evaluation is a key component of our work. We measure the impact of our education, outreach and organizing efforts with the following metrics: (1) Online views of our videos; (2) Webpage and blog links to our videos; (3) Social media traffic on networks such as Facebook, including impressions (views), reach, and comments; and (4) Earned mainstream media coverage. This report outlines the outcomes of this campaign.

Production Activities

In early 2011, Brave New Foundation's producers met with representatives from the CLEAN Carwash Campaign to outline the parameters of our partnership, through which we'd raise public and worker awareness of carwash workers' rights and health and safety hazards through: (1) the production of an online public education video campaign, (2) the amplification of this campaign messaging in mainstream media

¹ S. Teran, R. Baker, and J. Sum, Improving Health and Safety Conditions for California's Immigrant Workers, 2002

outlets and blogosphere, and (3) the production of an educational video intended for use by the CLEAN Carwash Campaign in its outreach to carwash workers. Through this partnership, the CLEAN campaign agreed to serve as BNF's information resource on the health and safety hazards, wage theft, and other issues impacting carwash workers in California. The CLEAN campaign also assisted BNF in understanding the complexities of the issues faced by carwash workers, and provided connections to workers willing to be interviewed as part of our series.

During production of the CLEAN Carwash Campaign video series, we made the strategic decision to distribute the campaign videos and messages through Brave New Foundation's online communications project, *Cuéntame*. Because of the overlapping message themes and target audiences, this union was an obvious fit from the start.

Brave New Foundation launched *Cuéntame* in early 2010 in order to leverage social media networks to build on- and off-line activism and awareness around key social change issues impacting the Latino community including criminal/juvenile justice, racism and immigrant rights. It has since grown to become the largest Latino page on Facebook, with over 150,000 people (combined Facebook and Email subscribers) engaged in our online and video campaigns. Then in March 2011, we launched *Cuéntame's* independent website, www.mycuentame.org, to explore new methods of news aggregation and network-building that integrates multiple online and social media platforms, including our Facebook forum. Through this platform, we're able to more strategically distribute and measure the impact of our messages so that we can engage a wider audience during the production and distribution phases of our video campaigns.

Production Outcomes

We launched *Meet The New American Sweatshop* on August 31, 2011, with the following videos uploaded to *Cuéntame* and Brave New Foundation's YouTube, Facebook, and MyCuentame.org web sites:



Video: Meet the New American Sweatshop (National Campaign)

URL:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTCiYI84Snw&feature=relmfu>

Description: We need your help in exposing this travesty. Have you seen similar conditions at your local carwash? Post it today @ <http://mycuentame.org/carwash>. Carwash workers across the country are routinely abused, intimidated and exploited. They are the face of the new American sweatshop. Don't turn a blind eye to the abuse and the exploitation. Carwash workers, routinely subjected to health and safety hazards, often end up with severe kidney damage, respiratory problems and nerve deterioration. You can stop this!



Video: Meet the New American Sweatshop in Los Angeles (Los Angeles Campaign)

URL:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGDrfMmYYYw&feature=player_embedded

Description: We need your help in exposing this travesty. Find out which locations in Los Angeles to boycott immediately: <http://mycuentame.org/carwashla>. Carwash workers across the country are routinely abused, intimidated and exploited. They are the face of the new American sweatshop. Don't turn a blind eye to the abuse and the exploitation. Carwash workers, routinely subjected to health and safety hazards, often end up with severe kidney damage, respiratory problems and nerve deterioration. You can stop this!

In addition to producing our public awareness videos, Brave New Foundation completed production of a 4-minute educational video for the CLEAN Carwash Campaign to use specifically in their outreach to carwash workers. Titled 'Únete a la Lucha' (translated as 'Join The Fight'), the video is a Spanish-language messaging tool produced with the carwash workers as the target audience. The CLEAN Carwash Campaign plans to use the educational video to raise awareness among carwash workers about their rights in the workplace.

According to the CLEAN Carwash Campaign, there are approximately 10,000 carwash workers in Los Angeles County, many of whom are undocumented Latino immigrants. L.A.'s *carwasheros*, as they call themselves, are often unaware that they have rights to even basic protections such as minimum wage, health and safety gear, and the right to report abuses.

Video: Únete a la Lucha (Join the Fight)

URL:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2DPbMz4NE>

Description: We worked with the CLEAN Car Wash campaign to produce this educational video that helps their fight for social justice. Learn more about the CLEAN Carwash Campaign at <http://cleancarwashla.org> or email cleancarwashLA@gmail.com

Carwashero! Para ayuda va a la (Car wash worker, for help go to the) LA-CLEAN Carwash Campaign 4274 Melrose Ave. c/o Trinity Episcopal Church, Los Angeles, CA, 90029



"The video is a powerful tool for conveying to carwash workers not only that they have rights, but to show them that they aren't alone in suffering these abuses and to motivate them to take collective action to improve their workplaces and their lives. This medium is particularly useful for CLEAN as many carwash workers have limited literacy and written materials are often not an effective way of communicating."

"The video will be distributed to workers in a number of ways. We will show the video in committee meetings of workers at individual carwashes, in our monthly meetings of the Carwash Workers Organizing Committee (CWOC). We will distribute the approximately 100 DVDs we'll be given by Brave New Foundation to worker leaders for use in house visits to individual carwash workers. Organizers will use the video as a way to open discussion about wage and hour rights, health and safety regulations, anti-discrimination laws and the right to act collectively."

- Chloe Osmer, CLEAN Carwash Campaign

Brave New Foundation will host the video on our YouTube channel to accommodate mobile access. This will allow CLEAN Carwash Campaign representatives and affiliates to more quickly share the video with workers on location at carwashes, protests, and demonstrations through mobile technologies such as smartphones, iPods or laptop computers. Our hope is that with this immediate access, the educational video will become a powerful organizing tool for the CLEAN Carwash Campaign to empower their brigade of workers and advocates.

Inspiring Activism & Culture-Shifting

The overall goal of *Meet The New American Sweatshop* was to inspire activism and raise public awareness about carwash workers and the health/workplace hazards they face by amplifying the issue through our original productions and media distribution. However, successful communications outcomes can no longer be measured simply by landing a single story in a major news source. For our stories to have meaningful impact, they must be distributed by a coalition of media sources, non-profit groups, issue- or community-based partners, and issue blogs that can adopt and promote our campaign causes.

For this reason, our distribution strategy aims to incorporate community engagement through info-activism campaigns, and culture-shifting within media coverage of an issue by targeting mainstream news sources, community media outlets, social media networks, and stakeholder blogs in the outreach of our campaign videos. This wide-scale distribution allows us to attack an issue from numerous angles, using a variety of online crowd-building tactics, so that we can engage a wider audience of stakeholders who demonstrate a willingness and feasibility to engage in our mode of online activism.

Our efforts to promote activism and culture-shifting are accounted for using metrics that evaluate: (1) interactivity and engagement of our targeted audience in our suggested methods of activism, and (2) efforts to shift the attention of media outlets to our campaign issues. These metrics include the following:

Engagement & Activism Metrics

- ✓ Number of views of our videos and other content
- ✓ Number of 'likes'/'shares' a video gets
- ✓ Number of hits/'impressions' on our websites or Facebook pages
- ✓ Number of people who undertake the actions we propose, like signing petitions, making phone calls, and forwarding a video

Culture Shifting Metrics

- ✓ Number of media mentions that use one of our core messages on the issue
- ✓ Number of editorials and op-eds pushing for reform
- ✓ Size of audiences (viewers, listeners, readers)
- ✓ Number of stories focusing on the issue in local outlets

Distribution Strategy & Outcomes

One of the most significant strategic changes we made to the project this year was to distribute the CLEAN Carwash Campaign video series through *Cuéntame's* multiple online communications platforms. This allows us to reach wider audiences with more geographic- and issue-specific information and messaging, as well as allows us to more accurately track our impact. Social news, networks and targeted content and issues are supplanting e-mail as a traditional form of online mobilization. This communications renaissance allows for new innovations in news aggregation and distribution, and integrated social network platforms provide a dramatically useful tool within today's news ecosystem. This is the main reason *Cuéntame* stands out from other social platforms.

We still continued to share videos via Brave New Foundation's 1.3 million member email list, website and YouTube channel. However, *Cuéntame's* Facebook page and website, MyCuentame.org (with Facebook and Twitter plug-ins), allows us to build upon existing online models to create a personalized user experience, with messages being sent to individuals from within their networks of peers. Slowly the traditional methods for organizing are being replaced by online communication and engagement tools. Now even those tools are giving way to social and peer-to-peer approaches. This peer-to-peer level of viral communications campaigning is where *Cuéntame's* distribution and engagement work has proven most impactful.

Cuéntame currently has Facebook audience of over 61,000 active members. Because the average Facebook user has 130 friends, automatic re-posting of our videos via fan friend newsfeeds gives each video post a **potential reach of over 7.9 million people**. Additionally, each 'Like' or 'Share' on our MyCuentame.org websites is posted on a users' Facebook page, allowing us to track the reach of each individual blog entry or video post.

Distribution Outcomes for *Meet The New American Sweatshop* include the following:

OVER 25,000 VIEWS



OVER 624,000
IMPRESSIONS/VIEWS

facebook

SHARED BY OVER
1,800 PEOPLE



"Thanks, Cuéntame, for the video and support of the Carwasheros. It's easy, especially in such a large city like LA, for unscrupulous owners to abuse their workers. The only way to stop it is to do exactly what you're doing. I salute you, and especially the workers who are losing their fear."

- Becky Mota, Cuéntame Member

Marketing & Communications Outcomes

Media amplification and online blog distribution is a key strategic component of our public awareness video campaigns. Our model impacts the public narrative and mainstream media coverage of our campaign issues. With *Meet The New American Sweatshop*, we also prioritized the Spanish-language and Los Angeles markets as primary targets of our communications strategy. Additionally, our marketing staff widely-distributed our message and videos within highly trafficked political and labor blogs throughout the country. The enclosed addenda include press coverage and blogs posted between August 30 and September 6. In the coming weeks our campaign will also be featured in a national NPR story.

Advocacy Outcomes

As with all of Brave New Foundation's campaigns, the underlying goal of our productions is to inspire people to advocate for social change. With *Meet The New American Sweatshop*, our efforts to motivate the public to support the *carwasheros* were vindicated when Bonus Car Wash in Santa Monica announced the mutual agreement of the nation's first labor contract between car wash workers and owners on October 25, 2011.

A Look Ahead

As we move into our next campaign on immigrant workers' health rights, we will combine lessons learned over the past year as we continue our efforts to debunk misinformation about migrant work and workers, mobilize communities of supporters, and reframe the mainstream media narrative to drive a policy shift supportive of immigrant communities and families.

As previously stated, one of the most significant strategic decisions we made in the execution of our campaign was to distribute our videos through *Cuéntame* and its vast network of followers. *Cuéntame* is one of Brave New Foundation's most successful and interactive online networks. The biggest lesson learned over the past year is that the *Cuéntame* audience becomes more engaged in our messages when we offer them the chance to be interactive. Therefore, we provide a curated space on our Facebook and MyCuentame.org sites for the *Cuéntame* community to comment on all our work, including the *Meet The New American Sweatshop* campaign. By being able to debate the issue with our producers and followers, the public learns about the experiences of workers and followers who share their own stories of abuse or of witnessing abusive carwash owners.

We are deeply grateful for the support of The Ford Foundation and The California Wellness Foundation and the CLEAN Carwash Campaign in the production and distribution of *Meet the New American Sweatshop* and *Únete a la Lucha*, and look forward to the next chapter of our campaign on immigrant workers' health rights.



Addendum A

Media Coverage of *Meet The New American Sweatshop*

Los Angeles Times

Workers win contract with country's first unionized car wash

October 25, 2011 | 6:56 am



Workers at a Southern California car wash have organized and won a labor contract with their employers, making it what's believed to be the only unionized car wash in the country.

The agreement, to be announced at a press conference Tuesday morning, is between some 30 car wash workers and the Sikder family, owners of Bonus Car Wash, at 2800 Lincoln Blvd. in Santa Monica, according to the contract The Times has received.

As part of the agreement, the family has agreed to attempt to reopen Marina Car Wash in Venice, which had closed and had employed another 30 workers, said Chloe Osmer of the Community Labor Environmental Action Network (CLEAN), a group formed to organize car-wash workers.

The contract calls for small pay increases of 2%. Its greater importance, Osmer said, is that it calls for owners to abide by state labor law regarding car wash working conditions, such as work breaks and when workers can clock in. It also provides a procedure for hearing workers' grievances and requires any new owners of the car wash to abide by the contract.

In the past, workers would be asked to show up for work at a certain time, but then not allowed to clock in until customers began arriving. Work breaks were also limited, said Eduardo Tapia, a Bonus worker for five years.

"It was a two-year struggle," said Tapia. Now, "we have 10 more minutes of break. We have our water to drink. If they say show up at work at 10:30, I start work at 10:30."

Times' telephone calls to Bonus Car Wash and the Sikder family attorney requesting comment were not returned.

[For the record, 8:45 a.m. Tuesday, Oct. 25: An earlier version of this post stated that car wash owners would reopen Marina Car Wash in Venice as part of the agreement with workers. The owners said they will try to reopen the business, which is on property that they don't own.]



US Car Wash Owners routinely violate employment laws

THURSDAY, 01 SEPTEMBER 2011 17:58



The website Cuentame has documented labor abuses, hazardous conditions, exploitation and intimidation in the \$23 billion US car wash industry. Cuentame says car wash operators routinely violate basic employment laws like those requiring workers to take rest breaks or have access to shade and clean drinking water. Car wash workers are often paid less than the minimum wage, sometimes less than \$3 an hour or work for tips alone. Employees who complain about working conditions are often intimidated by car wash operators. Workers have reported severe kidney damage, respiratory problems and nerve deterioration from exposure to hazardous chemicals. Most workers are Latinos and immigrants. Many do not know their rights, allowing abusive car wash operators to take advantage.

Most lack health insurance and use up all their earnings to pay medical bills. Cuentame says: "Carwash workers are the face of the new American sweatshop." [Source](#)



MON SEP 05, 2011 AT 09:15 AM PDT

California's carwashes face serious abuses and dangerous conditions

by Laura Clawson for Daily Kos Labor

All around the country, workers are fighting for better pay and working conditions and for the simple right to be heard. Some of them are in unions, some of them are not, some are fighting to join unions, some are organizing but not under a traditional union model.

In California's **carwashes**, workers are fighting serious abuses.



According to **Cuentame**:

Carwash operators routinely violate basic employment laws like those requiring workers be permitted to take rest breaks or have access to shade and clean drinking water. Workers frequently work more than 10 hours a day, more than 6 days a week, without even the slightest thought of overtime. In fact, car wash workers are often paid much less than the legal minimum wage, sometimes earning less than \$3 an hour or working for cash tips alone. Employees who complain about the exploitative conditions at the workplace are often intimidated and threatened by car wash operators.

CLEAN—Community-Labor-Environmental Action Network—which includes unions, environmental groups, Latino/a organizations, and other community organizations, **is committed to**:

- Supporting the right of carwash workers to organize a union and bargain collectively.
- Improving working conditions and ensuring that carwash employers meet labor standards and abide by fair workplace practices.
- Demanding environmental clean up to ensure that wastewater from carwashes does not contaminate our rivers or oceans.

ORIGINALLY POSTED TO **DAILY KOS LABOR** ON MON SEP 05, 2011 AT 09:15 AM PDT.
ALSO REPUBLISHED BY **CALIFORNIA POLITICS** AND **DAILY KOS**.



"CARWASHEROS" ORGANIZING IN LOS ANGELES

By [kyledeb](#) on September 6, 2011 3:29 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

Check out the latest from Cuentame:

It's this sort of local organizing that easily makes California one of the most pro-migrant states in the Union, in addition to being the most populous one. This also brings to mind some of the great organizing going on in San Francisco with **67 Sueños**, which I hope to write more about soon, *primero Dios*.

Separately these sorts of efforts might seem insignificant in the face of **the massive deportation machine that the Obama administration has set up**, but all together they are what make the migrant rights movement one of the most vibrant and active social movements in the U.S. today. There's something amazing about being able to go almost anywhere in the U.S. and find people in solidarity with the work I'm doing.

I use to delude myself into thinking that these sorts of efforts weren't worth my time if they didn't contribute to larger change. It's certainly important to think systemically and to try to incorporate local efforts into national and global trends, but if I had to choose the effectiveness of one over the other, which no one should, I would certainly say that you're more likely to get significant things done in your neighborhood then you are trying to wrap your head around , much less make change around, global and national developments.

That reminds me: Ask California Governor Jerry Brown to pass **the California DREAM Act** and the **Fair Treatment for Farm Workers Act** if you haven't done so, yet. The second link is to a Presente.org petition that I helped write up.

New documentary describes abuse in LA carwash industry

🕒 SEPTEMBER 6, 2011 BY [WILLIAM ROGERS](#) 💬 [0 COMMENTS](#)

A newly released mini-documentary, [The New American Sweatshop](#), shows what it's like to work in a Los Angeles carwash, and the picture it paints is grim. "For too long Los Angeles car wash owners have been allowed to operate in the shadows, abusing and exploiting their workers with little fear of repercussions," said Chloe Osmer, acting director of the Community-Labor Environmental Action Network (CLEAN). "We are honored to have worked with Robert Greenwald and his team at Brave New Foundation to help bring these abuses to light."

The documentary gives carwash workers in Los Angeles the opportunity to describe what it's like to work in a carwash. They tell of a work environment that is dangerous and unhealthy, where workers suffer countless abuses both large and small, and where wage theft is rampant.

Los Angeles has about 500 carwashes that employ 10,000 workers, most of who are immigrants from Latin America. The abuses suffered by these workers caused some to seek help, and as a result, the CLEAN Carwash Campaign was born. The campaign helps carwash workers recover stolen wages and fight other indignities on the job. Its long-term goal is to build a union of carwash workers that bargains collectively over wages and working conditions. The campaign is a joint project of CLEAN and the [Carwash Workers Organizing Committee](#) of the United Steelworkers

One of the main problems that led to the CLEAN Carwash Campaign was the many instances of wage theft in the carwash industry. About five years ago, Los Angeles community groups began receiving numerous wage theft complaints from carwash workers. The community groups sought help from local unions, and the campaign was born.

The campaign helped initiate legal actions against employers like Handy J Carwash. In June, a court ruled against Handy J in a suit brought against the company by a former employee named Tomas Rodriguez, who had worked for Handy J for 16 years. "The court ruled on the unjust and illegal acts that are so common in this industry," said Matt Hew Siroly, Rodriguez's attorney.

The judge found that the company forced employees to report to work before they could clock in and work after they clocked out and that the company often did not pay time and one-half for overtime work. The court awarded Rodriguez more than \$80,000 in lost wages and damages.

In addition to falling victim to wage theft, carwash workers also are forced to work with dangerous chemicals. One worker said in the documentary that sulfuric acid is often used to wash the rims of tires, but workers are given no protective gear to shield them from the corrosive effects of the acid.

Female workers are sometimes the victims of sexual abuse. One of the workers interviewed in the documentary described an incident in which she was groped and fondled by a supervisor, who she thought intended to rape her. She was able to avoid rape by fighting back against her attacker.

The workers who told their stories in the documentary hope that the video will shed light on the problems they face every day at work, and they want other carwash workers to know that they don't have to tolerate abuses at work anymore.

"I want to send a message to all the workers in the carwash industry," said a carwash worker activist in the documentary. "Do not be afraid of your boss even if he threatens you with deportation, it doesn't matter. We are human beings and have the right to raise our voices."

Brave New Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit company. Our mission is to champion social justice issues by using a model of media, education, and grassroots volunteer involvement that inspires, empowers, motivates and teaches civic participation and makes a difference.



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Meet The New American Sweatshop

Brave New Foundation's Education, Awareness and Action Campaign for Low-wage Immigrant Workers

Assumptions: A comprehensive, integrated new media education, advocacy and community engagement campaign can empower workers with health and safety knowledge, and raise awareness among the public and policymakers on critical workplace health and safety issues.

Goal(s): to reach ethnically diverse communities of low-wage workers and improve their health and safety knowledge; to raise public awareness and build political will for greater regulation and oversight of job sectors employing large numbers of low-wage workers; to significantly reduce workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES	MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES	LONG TERM OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff • Funding • Partners • Materials • Production Equipment • Studio / Facilities 	<p>Research Low-wage Immigrant Worker Health & Safety Issues</p> <p>Create Campaign Strategy and Story Arc/Chapters</p> <p>Identify Partner Groups</p> <p>Campaign Blogging</p> <p>Script, Cast, Shoot, Edit & Launch Campaign Videos</p> <p>Translate Campaign Materials & Videos</p> <p>Contact Press & Media</p>	<p>Informed Project Staff</p> <p>Coalition Buy-in</p> <p>Two Campaign Videos Produced Each Year (National & Community-specific)</p> <p>Bilingual, Bicultural Videos, DVDs & Education Materials</p> <p>Earned Media Coverage</p> <p>Blog Publication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of new coalitions and strengthening of existing ones <p>Increased 'chatter' in the blogosphere on worker health and safety issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worker education and outreach. Public and policy maker awareness raised. <p>Outreach to immigrant workers & employers</p> <p>Raised public and policy maker awareness</p>	<p>Continued growth of worker's rights and health and safety coalitions</p> <p>Broader knowledge base</p> <p>Empowered workers, engaged advocates, activated consumers, informed decision makers</p> <p>Bilingual, bicultural safety trainings</p> <p>Improved industry oversight and regulation</p>	<p>Reduction of workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths</p>

EVALUATION STUDY

Process Indicators: meeting scheduled production and distribution benchmarks; quality of final video look and stories; subject message testing response; effectiveness of launch strategy; open rates/click-through rates; responses to press/media pitches.

Short Term Indicators: increase in numbers of campaign group partners; blog posts logged; workers/new workers served; earned mainstream/ethnic media, video views/impressions/comments/links, community screenings.

Short Term Indicators: increased financial and volunteer support for worker advocacy groups; new laws and regulations; increased inspection and enforcement.

Longs Term Indicators: significant reduction in annual DOL injury and fatality statistics.