



Our Hen House

CHANGE THE WORLD FOR ANIMALS

a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization

Interview with Wayne Hsiung

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **WAYNE HSIUNG** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 245.*

JASMIN: Today our guest is Wayne Hsiung. I've been hearing about Wayne's advocacy efforts for a very long time. And I recently had the opportunity to meet him, just randomly ran into him, while he was going through New York City. And that was exciting, and I am really interested in his campaign work to change the world for animals. And I'm sure that after you hear about the work he is doing at Chipotle, you will find him just as fascinating as I do, so here is Wayne Hsiung.

Wayne Hsiung is an attorney and founding organizer of Direct Action Everywhere, which you can find at directactioneverywhere.com, as well as a coordinator for Animal Liberationists of Color, which you can find on Facebook. He was the lead organizer of the International Earthlings March, which mobilized thousands of activists in 17 countries; served as a law professor at Northwestern, where he coauthored research with Harvard's Cass Sunstein on climate change and animals; and has organized for social justice issues since 1999, including programs for low-income youth and against capital punishment. Wayne studied behavioral economics as an NSF Graduate Fellow at MIT and an Olin Fellow at the University of Chicago Law School. He blogs at the Liberationist about social change. Wayne has spoken on social justice issues at Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Chicago, and Stanford, and recently presented on the science of social change at the National Animal Rights Conference. Prior to Direct Action Everywhere, Wayne was an attorney at two national law firms, where he litigated consumer fraud class actions and maintained a pro bono animal law practice. Despite holding two graduate degrees, he is regularly outwitted by his four furry companions.

Welcome to Our Hen House, Wayne.

WAYNE: It's great to be here, it's really an honor.

JASMIN: Well, we are very excited to talk to you. We've heard a lot about your advocacy efforts for a long time and are excited to find out more about it. I know that you have done a lot of work in your career and you are the founding organizer of Direct Action Everywhere, and one of the campaigns that Direct Action Everywhere works on tirelessly is a campaign involving Chipotle. And you've called Chipotle the most important target in the animal rights movement. One reason is that it's growing exponentially. Can you describe this company and its growth worldwide?

WAYNE: Sure. So Chipotle was a pretty small operation before McDonald's took it over in the '90s. And they expanded their operations and supply chain immensely, and their marketing footprint, over that decade from roughly the mid-'90s to 2006, from having, I think it was just a few dozen stores in the '90s, to having close to two thousand today. So it's not just the number of restaurants that they have but the growth in these restaurants that's been just astounding. So Chipotle is now the most profitable fast food chain in the country. It's the fastest growing by a huge margin. For the past five years its market capitalization has increased by 1000%, and particularly the area where it's grown more than any other is in selling so-called "responsibly raised" meat.

MARIANN: Yeah, I know that. Chipotle is well known for its claim to be a responsible company. I think that's really one of its major selling points, and certainly includes holding up its responsibility to animals in its claims. So does Chipotle actually impose quote-unquote "humane" standards on all of its suppliers?

WAYNE: It does not. And many folks, including independent reporters, have actually asked them, "What do you actually mean by 'responsibly raised,' specifically?" And there's an article on BuzzFeed by a reporter that had nothing to do with our campaign, where the reporter was just as confused as we were as to what this actually means. So specifically, how much space are pigs receiving? Are they being castrated? Are cows being sent to CAFOs? Simple questions that even McDonald's and Whole Foods are able to answer, Chipotle won't answer. So they focus on using these vague, abstract terms that appeal to the public without giving any of the specifics. But there are both factual and moral dimensions to that fraud, and one of the central points of our campaign is, even if they were giving animals good lives, which they actually are not -- in fact they're sourcing from many of the same abusive conventional factory farms as their former owner McDonald's. But even if they were giving the animals supposedly humane living conditions, at the end of the day, they're still killing them. And these are animals no different than our dogs and cats at home. If someone were killing dogs and cats humanely you would not say that it was humane because we understand that killing is inherently a violent, not humane, act.

JASMIN: Yeah, and of course, we're on the same page with you with that way, obviously. So I just need to backtrack for one second before I get more into the kind of vegan angle on this. I just want to make sure that we have all the facts right first. Does Chipotle actually have any standards for how animals are raised, even if it doesn't follow those standards all or most of the time?

WAYNE: As far as we can tell, no. So they talk about things like pasture raised, deeply bedded pens, they talk about responsibly raising animals, but in terms of the specifics they don't have any auditor requirements as far as I can tell. And we've corresponded with the head of their Food With Integrity program, their head director of communications, people who are very high up in the supply chain, and we've received basically no satisfactory response as to what specific conditions the animals receive.

MARIANN: What about Chipotle's vegan choices? Do you think people should be supportive of those?

WAYNE: So I think an important thing to point out about this campaign is it's not a boycott campaign. In the initial stage of this campaign I did some economic analysis of the likely impact if even every single vegan on this planet decided not to shop at Chipotle, and the

ultimate impact would be less than 0.05% of their sales. So the vegan community is irrelevant to that, they don't care about us one way or the other. What does matter to them is their marketing image and their brand, and so what we're trying to do with Chipotle is use them as a cultural lens and symbol through which the animal liberation movement can more honestly and directly and assertively state that killing animals is wrong, no matter how it's done, no matter if you sing a song before they die, no matter if you give them a good pasture, and a big pasture. And I think it's a powerful target partly because of the moral draw but partly because as we've noted, they just factually lie. And even people outside of the animal rights movement have been challenging these claims.

So I think personally the vegan option is a wonderful thing. We're not asking activists to not shop at Chipotle. If Chipotle is the only place where you can get a vegan option, by all means, take it up. It's better than going to McDonald's and buying a burger for sure. But at the end of the day our point is the vegan option is not enough. That's such a small and tiny portion of their sales. Our estimate is it's less than 1.2% of their total sales. So at the end of the day economically the vegan option doesn't matter one way or the other. What really matters is the 97, 98% of their sales that involve violence to animals, and that's what we're focusing on.

MARIANN: It's a really interesting campaign and I think it's a really important choice. Obviously this is where the animal rights movement is evolving, that certain companies *are* responding to the messaging that's starting to reach the public, often in a very incoherent fashion, that animals matter, and they're responding of course in dishonest ways. And that's what you're pointing out that Chipotle is doing. But your campaign has so many different pieces to it. Do you have trouble with that? Like, it's the classic messaging problem of the animal rights movement. And you do it very well, but do you have trouble with people understanding whether you're complaining about Chipotle's failure to live up to its standards or the fact that they're killing animals -- which, so many other chains are doing that exact same thing. The thing that singles out Chipotle is that its messaging is so deceptive. Do you have trouble with people understanding which of those two things you're complaining about?

WAYNE: Sure. So I think in the broader problem, no. I think when we've talked to people in the press, people on the street, 100% of them essentially, when we tell them about the facts of the situation, the fact that Chipotle sources from Harris Ranch, that they source from OSI Industries, they source from even Iron Ranch -- which, the protocols that Iron Ranch has allow the pigs to be raised in anywhere from 5 to 12 square feet of space, which is the size of a large bathtub. When we tell them these factual claims about Chipotle that demonstrate that the company is engaged in mass consumer fraud, universally people are upset and outraged, people even on the right wing. And it's one of the reasons why I think the press coverage we've gotten, including national media outlets like Salon and important local media outlets like the Oakland Tribune, has been pretty much universally positive.

I think within the animal rights movement there is this problem. And so there are some folks within the vegan community who've been a little bit confused about the campaign, partly because of the fact that maybe we haven't been as focused on our message as we should and partly because this is a grassroots campaign. So I'm an organizer for DxE in the Bay Area but we've got organizers across the world in 50 cities in 16 different countries. And each of them takes a slightly different perspective, and that's part of the beauty of

grassroots campaigns. So the central focus of this campaign absolutely is the humane washing.

And I think the only point we're going to make about the vegan option that might be controversial within the animal rights movement is we don't believe that the company is actually engaged in a good faith effort to spread veganism and the vegan options. So there's a lot of research into the corporate marketing techniques that corporations use when they enter in an ethical or healthy option with the intent to just have that healthy or ethical option lead into their brand. And there's a wonderful study done by some psychologists at Cornell showing that Subway did the same exact thing with healthy foods. So they added healthy options, not because they expected consumers to buy them, but because it actually has been shown to increase the purchases of the unhealthy options. So you go to Subway, you start thinking, "healthy foods," and as a result you buy the big Subway sandwich with massive amounts of meat and dairy and even get the cookie and chips that go along with it. And Chipotle's doing exactly the same thing with the vegan option. Again, it's 1.2% of their sales, it's been declining over the past 10 months since they made it go national. And their hope is not that they're actually going to sell it, they're not doing this in good faith. They're doing it because they hope that it leads into their brand, it convinces people in places like San Francisco and New York, who otherwise would be concerned about animal welfare, that they can go to this fast food chain in good conscience. And we have to make sure that they don't tell that story without a challenge.

JASMIN: Well, let's talk a little bit about the campaign itself and the various aspects of it. Can you tell me a little bit more about what it is you're doing and how you're working to accomplish that?

WAYNE: Sure. DxE's mission is to create empowered networks of animal rights activists. And as a social scientist myself I can say incredible amounts of research over the past 40 years by political scientists, economists, psychologists, and sociologists have shown that the precondition to any social movement having any sort of real and permanent success is having a solid base. And right now the animal rights movement simply doesn't have a solid base. So our first and foremost objective with this campaign is to create networks of activists throughout the world where we can empower and support each other to take stronger and more direct and more confident action against animal abuse.

So the primary mechanism through which we've tried to develop this network is a campaign that we call "It's Not Food; It's Violence." And while people think of this as a Chipotle campaign, in fact a good 50% of the cities that participate are not actually focusing on Chipotle. And one of the beauties of a grassroots campaign is we do allow people that autonomy. We encourage people to protest at any space where animals are being used for food. So in Chennai, India, for example, the woman who's been protesting with us, Aishwarya, has been to Burger King and KFC and other places of violence but there actually isn't even a Chipotle in Chennai yet. There will be if Chipotle continues to expand, but there isn't yet. And we actually encourage and support that 100%. There are other cities where people feel like, "You know what? I actually kind of like Chipotle, I'm a fan of their vegan option, worried about potential backlash effects if we target Chipotle," and we encourage them to protest at other places as well.

So this is ultimately a campaign to conspire and encourage people to take a strong stance against violence against animals in our food system. And I think historically most of the

vitriol and anger and most hateful and aggressive actions have been taken against animals in the vivisection and fur and abuse of companion animals. And what we're trying to do is reshape some of that outrage and focus on the big picture issues, on the animals that are being exploited by majorities, not minorities, and therefore strengthen the entire movement.

MARIANN: I've read that you have particular thoughts on the meaning of direct action. And obviously it's an important phrase to you, that's the name of the organization that you're a founder of. Can you tell us what you mean by direct action?

WAYNE: So when we talk about direct action we're really trying to take this term and this concept back to its historical understanding. If you look at Gandhi or Emmeline Pankhurst and Martin Luther King, Jr., when they wrote about direct action they weren't just talking about illegal action. They weren't even necessarily talking about aggression or hostility. They were talking about confrontation rather than compromise. The classic distinction between direct action and other forms of activism was, are you confronting the system? Are you working outside of the system to try and reshape it fundamentally or are you working within it? And my own view is that there's value in both of those approaches but any successful movement needs both of them. And so what we're trying to do is go back to this original conception of direct action which focuses on confronting the system.

And when you look at the history of direct action networks, the Southern Christian Leadership Council which Martin Luther King, Jr. founded, their conception of direct action and their express mission was, we want to take direct action to the world. We want activists all over the world to be taking direct action against Jim Crow. Their conception of direct action was encourage people to do protests, to do marches, to do nonviolent civil disobedience, but above all encourage them to speak out against this system. Don't accommodate it any longer. Don't pretend it's not a horrendous and violent and racist thing but speak out against it directly.

And I think more modern movements like ACT UP took the same conception. So if you look at the direct action guidelines that ACT UP used -- and ACT UP was an LGBTQ liberation and AIDS advocacy network that really I think is more responsible for the progress we've made in LGBT equality since the 1980s. And their conception of direct action expressly included things like personal conversations. If you directly confront someone within your local network, within your community, and say, "You know what? As much as you believe that because I love someone different from who you love I'm doing something wrong and problematic, I just want to say to you honestly and directly and even lovingly that I disagree. I disagree and I want to live in a world where everyone is free and everyone's equal." And that's what we're trying to do, get back to the conception of direct action that's existed really for thousands of years, even back to Socrates. His conception of direct action was to speak in places where your speech was unwelcome, to be willing to be a political dissenter. And that's what we're trying to do with DxE.

JASMIN: I know that you have been traveling a lot. In fact, I ran into you at Peacefood Cafe in New York City and it was nice to finally meet you in person. And you've been traveling talking about all of these issues. Can you tell me a little bit more about where you've been going and what kind of reception you've been getting from the general public who might not be as savvy as Our Hen House listeners and not already know about animal issues?

WAYNE: Yeah, we've been blown away by the response. And I think we've been in 12 different cities on this tour at this point. I actually don't have the exact count.

We started out in Providence at Providence College and at Harvard and Harvard Law School. And both of the groups that sponsored us at those institutions were not even animal rights groups. These are environmental groups. At Providence there was this wonderful group that's run and organized by an indigenous woman at Providence called FANG, Fighting Against Natural Gas, they do a lot of fracking work. And they met one of our organizers at an environmental action camp, and were interested in our activism because they just saw it as an inspiring model of activism, that we're just kind of achieving the same shift that the environmental movement is achieving, which is moving away from individual consumer action and focusing more on systemic change and movement building. And Sherry and I just had such a wonderful time talking about the issues that are common to the environmental and animal rights movement and also talking about the competition we see in popular conceptions of direct action. And Sherry and I had long conversations about how, for people who are immigrants and people of color, having a conception of direct action that only focuses on illegal actions like vandalism is really kind of exclusive in many ways because most of my family members are immigrants, and the idea that the only way you can take direct action against the system is by breaking the law really is threatening and dangerous for people who potentially could have their lives destroyed and be thrown out of this country for even minor transgressions against the law. So both of us really focused on the fact that for our movement to build we have to have conceptions of direct action that focus just as much on social and moral disruption as legal disruption.

And at Harvard Law School we were also sponsored by the Divest fossil fuel group there, and I have a friend there who I talked to over the past seven or eight years about the mutual activism we're doing. And I was really inspired to see the work that the divestment kids are doing in Harvard and across the country and I think that they were really inspired by the work that we're doing. And even more important, they were inspired by the substance of the message too. So it wasn't just that they liked the model of activism that we were using. They were seeing the complements and intersections between the activism that we're doing for animals and the activism they're doing for the environment, because ultimately if you care about the environment you probably care about the inhabitants of the environment. In fact that's probably the only reason to care about the environment, that there are other living creatures out there who are suffering and dying because of human encroachment on natural habitats.

So roughly half of the sponsors on this tour have been environmental groups, anti-racism groups, other social justice groups. And I think that's a demonstration that the world is ready for a stronger message. We don't have to be afraid that people will ostracize us or hate us or dislike us because we have a strong message. In fact, a strong message is a virtue, and if you state your message confidently, if you state your message honestly, and with love -- I mean, it has to be by love, not violence and hate. And even people who were once your opponents can be drawn to your message. And I think that's the lesson of this tour.

MARIANN: Can you tell us about Animal Liberationists of Color, another organization with which you're involved?

WAYNE: Sure. So Animal Liberationists of Color is separate from DxE and we have a separate set of organizers, but there's a lot of overlap because DxE and ALOC have made

a central objective of trying to increase the movement's diversity. So just some basic facts about it: so roughly 95 to 97% of the public faces of this movement are still white.

Historically most of the hostility and anger in this movement, the angriest and most hostile and aggressive campaigns, have been focused on practices in foreign communities among people of color, so people were talking about murdering Michael Vick, which I thought was just shocking, the amount of angry and violent rhetoric, notwithstanding the fact that I agree that what Michael Vick did to these dogs was a terrible thing. And routinely whenever someone posts something about dogs being killed in China or cats being eaten or fur farms in China or Asia, you see people coming out of the woodwork saying things like, "The Chinese are a subspecies" or "I wish the entire Chinese population could be wiped out." And one of the most astonishing things I saw recently was a number of people responding to one of these pictures on Facebook saying that the Chinese are animals. And it's a perverse thing because our movement is talking about how much we love animals, how much we support animals, how much we want to protect animals. And yet we're seeing the same racial dynamics come out that reinforce the objectification of animals and violence against animals, reinforce the notion that if you're different from us, if you look strange, if you talk strange, if you have a different culture than us, you're a subject for ridicule and possibly even violence.

So what we try to do at Animal Liberationists of Color is primarily three things. One is to acknowledge that there is a gap, that most of the people on this planet are people of color, 85% of the people on this planet are people of color. Within the United States, 37% of the people in this country are people of color. And if we want to change the world, we have to represent the world, and right now we're just not doing a good job. Got that.

And what we need to do in response, and this is the second thing that Animal Liberationists of Color is trying to achieve, is help animal rights organizations create diversity policies. And I've worked as a corporate lawyer -- many people don't know this and maybe I should be embarrassed about it, but for four years I worked as a corporate lawyer for some of the largest companies in the world. And it was astonishing to me how many of these big corporations, Fortune 500 companies like Intel, are really, really concerned about racial diversity. And we have to do at least as good as these big corporations in making our movement more diverse. And one of the interesting things is when big corporations seek out racial diversity, they're not doing it out of the goodness of their hearts, 'cause these are profit-seeking entities that are ruthlessly trying to maximize their bottom lines. They're doing it because they recognize it's important for effectiveness.

And if I could just give a couple of personal examples from the perspective of DxE and ALOC, one of our most important organizers is an Asian woman, an immigrant who lived in India for I think the first seven or eight years of her life, Priya Sawhney. And she is just an incredibly inspiring, charismatic, intelligent figure. She draws people to her, she's an incredible public speaker. She did a little video just a week or two ago that has 1500 shares on Facebook and tens of thousands of people have viewed this. And she wasn't identified as a leader in this movement until we came along. And I think so often at animal rights groups -- and in other organizations, it's not just animal rights groups -- we look around at the people in this room and we see someone come into the group and see that they're obviously different, they talk a little funny, they look a little funny, their skin color is a little bit different, and subconsciously -- it's not even an intentional process -- they think to

themselves, “She is not one of us.” An example like Priya shows us that we have to overcome that bias from a purely strategic perspective. Even if we’re not concerned about the ethics of our racial diversity, we have to overcome it just to tap into the potential that’s out there, because we have leaders out there and if we don’t go out and find those leaders and develop them and empower them, our movement’s not gonna be as effective as it can be.

JASMIN: Well, totally without question, I think that the work you’re doing is refreshing. And can you tell us how people could find out more about all of your work?

WAYNE: Sure. The best way to follow us is probably to follow our website and our Facebook page. Our website is just directactioneverywhere.com, and our Facebook page is facebook.com/directactioneverywhere. But maybe the most important thing that we’re trying to accomplish is for people to create autonomous chapters, to do great activism yourselves, to use our organizing principles, our resources, our materials, which have now been translated into eight different languages, and do your own actions. That’s what really builds movements, when people have that do-it-yourself mentality and empower themselves and empower each other to be the best damn activists they possibly can be. So even more important than looking to our Facebook page and our website, make one yourself. Do something great yourself and share it with us so we can share it with the world. That’s what we’re trying to encourage people to do.

JASMIN: Wayne, thank you so much for sharing your story. And you’re very inspiring, I also feel extremely motivated right now. And thank you for joining us today on Our Hen House.

WAYNE: Thank you so much too. And there are so many fans of Our Hen House in the Bay Area, I’m sure a lot of them will be excited to see some of the Bay Area activism on the show.

JASMIN: Aw, awesome.

WAYNE: Thank you so much.

JASMIN: Thank you.

That was Wayne Hsiung. Learn more at directactioneverywhere.com.