

We Are America

HOW A WRESTLER GOT AMERICA TO RETHINK PATRIOTISM



SUMMARY

Love Has No Labels is an Ad Council campaign that combats bias with love. The campaign creative floods culture with diverse images of love to normalize them, thereby reducing our implicit bias towards those who are different from us.

In its first year, Love Has No Labels demonstrated the power of love to bond two individuals together despite the differences that often keep them apart: race, religion, gender, sexuality, age, and disability. The campaign launched on Valentine's Day 2015, at a time when Americans were fighting for love equality.

In 2016, the political, cultural, and social climate became more divided; the filter bubble that blocked out differing opinions intensified, and conversation shifted to excluding people from the American narrative. We had to rethink our strategy: finding a time, an argument, and a voice that would reach people with a message that love for America means love for all Americans

We launched a campaign on July 4th with what may have seemed to be an unlikely spokesperson, WWE Superstar John Cena. Our decision to use a patriotic tough guy,

and to reframe what love of country really means, helped us break through to the people who needed to hear our message the most.

#WEAREAMERICA: UNITING THE DIVIDED STATES

2016 was a difficult time to campaign for tolerance.

The Ad Council, supported by leading advertisers, had launched Love Has No Labels as a campaign to tackle unconscious bias, on Valentine's Day 2015.

The campaign challenged people's unconscious bias by showing diverse images of love across gender, race, religion, age and disability lines. It gained more momentum after Obergefell vs. Hodges, the US Supreme Court's landmark June 2015 ruling in favor of gay marriage.

2016 was going to be different.

The United States of America felt more like the Divided States of America. A strong "us vs. them" narrative was forming around political, racial, ethnic, and religious lines. Some Americans swelled with national pride while excluding groups of Americans. The other side fought for inclusion of all Americans.

Race-relations were at their worst since the 1992 LA riots, and hate crimes in major metropolitan areas across the US were on the rise, with some cities seeing over 20% more incidents than the year before.

Social media and online behavior widened the division. People were filtering out messages from "the other side," meaning that people were less likely to encounter or even interact with an opposing viewpoint.

To succeed, Love Has No Labels needed to address this growing climate of intolerance with a unifying message that rose above politics. This task faced distinct challenges.

Firstly, the filter bubble would make it harder to reach the right audiences. It would be easy to preach to the choir by connecting with people already committed to diversity and inclusion. It would be harder to reach the people who were



unaware of their unconscious bias, given how little overlap in conversation was occurring online.

To succeed, Love Has No Labels needed to address this growing climate of intolerance with a unifying message that rose above politics.

Secondly, the voices of intolerance were growing louder. Many brands were actively promoting messages of acceptance and inclusion, but hadn't been able to break through to those with bias. Instead of helping them recognize and address their biases, these messages were only aggravating them and solidifying their feelings. This pattern would continue through 2016, culminating in a call to boycott Budweiser after the brand's Super Bowl spot promoted diversity and immigration.

If people didn't want to listen, they could tune us out, or even attack our message if it reached them the wrong way.

Love Has No Labels had an obligation to speak out on behalf of Americans who

were being excluded— but our message had to be one of unity. We were at risk of fostering even more division if it was seen as leftist shaming. How could we get our message embraced by all?

THE STRATEGY: FINDING THE RIGHT MOMENT, THE RIGHT VOICE, AND THE RIGHT SETTING

"We the people..."

During 2016, "we" was a hard sentiment to find in America amongst the "us vs. them" mindset dividing the country. But there was still one day when we could find it: the Fourth of July. Independence Day has always been a day where everyone comes together to express their love of their country. It's a day when patriotism is at its most inclusive.

The moment inspired a new way to position inclusivity. To be a patriot is to love your country and your fellow countrymen. To love America is to love the people of America, which means embracing the

diversity of lives and backgrounds that make up the American people.

The one day where the inclusive spirit of patriotism overwhelms any exclusive spirit of nationalism would be a perfect day to introduce a message that love of America should mean love and respect for everyone who makes America great.

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The next challenge was harder: how would we convey the story? Here, casting became a strategic choice. We could have placed words in the mouth of a typical champion of diversity and inclusion. The frontrunner idea in our first creative review was a monologue from a smart young comic with an acute sense of the social fault lines in today's America. But we knew this wouldn't work in the environment we were operating in. He would have been dismissed as a shill for the liberal elite media and his important message would fall on deaf ears.

We needed someone who would appeal across the political, social, and cultural divides in America and break through the filter bubble. No easy task.

We started our search for someone who would appeal most to a demographic whose attitudes towards diversity and inclusion weren't as far along as other groups: white men. It's an unusual starting point for an inclusion campaign, but it taps a truth about unconscious bias and filter bubbles: we are more likely to listen and respect people who look like us.

We aligned on John Cena: as the face of the global entertainment company WWE, who had interrupted a 2011 WWE event to announce the death of Osama Bin Laden, he was an unquestionably patriotic tough guy. And for our more activist audience across the aisle, he was also respected for his dedication to charity, especially with Make-A-Wish, where he has granted over 500 wishes.

He was the perfect unexpected candidate who could relay our message and break through the political echo chambers online.

We adopted a similar strategy in finding the right setting to film John Cena: we couldn't shoot the film in a rainbow nation metropolis like New York City, as it would feel too expected, and not relatable enough. It also wouldn't serve our mission of showing how diverse the average American town really is— we needed people watching to feel like the location could be their town, too.

We chose Ybor City, Florida, as our backdrop for the film. Just like John Cena, Ybor City looks like a stereotypical All-American town on the surface, but its rich history as an immigrant city provided the diversity we needed for our message.

**#WEAREAMERICA:
THE EXECUTION**

We launched #WeAreAmerica with a three-minute film on the Love Has No Labels Facebook page, Upworthy's Facebook page, and John Cena's own page. In the film, Cena speaks directly to camera and asks viewers to rethink what patriotism means by telling them to close their eyes and visualize the average American. He then proceeds to shatter stereotypes of the "typical American" by providing stats on the people who actually make up the country— and no surprise, it's largely minorities. As Cena tells us how minorities including Latinos, senior citizens, lesbians, and Muslims make up the fabric of America, we see corresponding citizens walking down the street behind him.

His rousing speech broke down the meaning of patriotism, concluding that love of country is love of its people, because love has no labels. The video became a rallying cry for people to join, and share that they too believed that to love America is to love all Americans.

In addition to the video, we created outdoor and print ads that showed scenes of minority Americans showing their love of country to further break down stereotypes of the average American. In these ads, a



Muslim-American plants an American flag in his front lawn, a gay military couple shares a kiss upon reuniting, a Sikh man prays in a gurdwara with an American flag turban, a transgender cheerleader stretches with her teammates, and a girl with Down Syndrome paints her face with stars and stripes. These ads helped demonstrate that despite labels based on gender, religion, sexual orientation, race, and disability, we are all American.

THE RESULTS

Since #WeAreAmerica launched in July 2016, net PSA awareness has risen from 46% to 55%. Awareness of the We Are America campaign stands at 45% as of June. And Love Has No Labels brand awareness rose from 19% to 25%.

The video went immediately viral (18 million views on John Cena's Facebook page alone). At time of entry, combined views exceeded 89 million. It has been liked 900,000 times, and shared over 2 million times. Impressively, sentiment on the film within the first month was overwhelmingly positive, as 99% of comments on the film were positive or neutral.

National and international TV networks picked it up (CNN, ABC World News, Fox), as well as Good Morning America—garnering over \$4.2m in earned media coverage for a lightly-funded nonprofit campaign. Press coverage from outlets like Sports Illustrated and Fox Sports helped us continue to reach the target most in need of this message. In fact, 92% of visitors to lovehasnolabels.com were new visitors in the month after launch, alluding to the fact that this work helped us reach a new audience.

The campaign received a resurgence in momentum in early 2017 when topics such as Black Lives Matter protests, women's marches, and travel bans covered news headlines. Users organically re-shared the film, resulting in an additional 27 million views (with limited Facebook media support).

And a full year after the video's initial launch, the video continued to resonate with audience as the online film received over 8 million additional views around July 4, 2017.

Two things about these results are especially heartening: one, shares outpaced likes as viewers saw in the video a way to share their own views about patriotism and America. Our video became a way for them to articulate what they had been feeling but hadn't been able to say.

Secondly, the uptick in interest months after the campaign launch demonstrates that this film resonated with people as a way to express their support for diversity and inclusion.

