

Activists Protest Over Rap Artist 50 Cent

Written by Shirley Hawkins / OW Staff Writer ID2060
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The billboards are scattered all over town: A tattooed, shirtless hip-hop rapper, 50 Cent, pictured in a “thuggish” pose, stands with his back to the camera while grasping a microphone in one hand and a gun in the other.

Another poster features the popular gangster rap artist cradling a baby while a gun is shown tucked in his pants.

The billboards are promoting rapper 50 Cent’s semi-autobiographical movie “Get Rich or Die Trying,” which will be released by Paramount Pictures on Nov. 9th.

But for many South Los Angeles residents and community activists, the billboards and posters are a painful reminder of the gun violence that continues to take the lives of young people. The billboards have sparked “outrage” among residents who feel the advertisements are a “slap in the face.”

Community activists held a press conference Tuesday at 64th Street and Crenshaw Boulevard, where a “Get Rich or Die Trying” billboard is perched prominently over the roof of the Golden Day School, a day care center.

“We are outraged because 50 Cent and Paramount Studios are promoting gun violence right next to a child care center,” declared Najee Ali, founder of Project Islamic Hope. “We’ve lost too many lives to gun violence, and we don’t want our youth influenced by death and destruction. We are demanding that Paramount Studios remove these billboards.”

With statistics continuing to climb of young people who have lost their lives to gun violence in South Los Angeles every week, Ali said he was “appalled” by the billboard and poster. “This council district has the most homicides in the city,” Ali pointed out. “We have mothers in this very neighborhood who have lost their children to gun violence.”

Cynthia Olivas, director of the Golden Day School Number 2 on Western Avenue, glanced at

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the billboard and shook her head. "My children are 3 and 5 years old, and they already know about violence," said Olivas. "They can sing 50 Cent songs even though they don't know their ABCs. I'm concerned about a sign that is directly above our school," said Olivas. "We're here to help kids, not teach them violence."

Community activist Linda Jay said that she was "outraged" by the rapper and his movie's "message." "50 Cent, we need you to stop advertising poison in our community. We have contributed to your millions, and we need you to use common sense," said Jay. "I challenge you to come to this neighborhood and watch as these kids are gunned down in the streets and shot in the back. We need you to stop advocating violence."

Dr. Sandra Moore of Citizens for Fair Pricing said that her family had been personally touched by violence. "My daughter lost her life to violence in these streets," declared Moore. "I don't blame 50 Cent, I blame Paramount, they're the predators in our community. I want to tell Paramount to stop using our community as a dumping ground to project a gun-and-violence message."

Pausing, Dr. Moore added, "50 Cent is only a pawn. I'm talking to the head honchos of Paramount. We're calling you out."

Sharmaine Parker, founder and executive of National Coalition for African American Parent Involvement in Education, an advocacy group for parents, said, "African-American males between 12 to 24 years old are more likely than any other race of children to be victims and perpetrators of violent crimes. This billboard must be removed from our community."

Community activist Earl Ofari Hutchinson, founder of the Urban Issues Forum of Greater Los Angeles, agreed. "Six blocks away from here, there have been three shootings and two deaths in the past several weeks, and residents are outraged," declared Hutchinson. "This billboard depicts a microphone in one hand and a gun in the other. The overt and covert message being sent is that violence is OK," Hutchinson pointed out. "This billboard is projecting violence. Paramount, you are doing damage in our community, and that includes 50 Cent. These billboards must go."

Lita Herron of Mothers on the March said that both 50 Cent and Paramount should be held

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accountable. "50 Cent doesn't have good sense. He needs to teach our children a more productive way to live. I'm not raising grandkids to go to prison or the grave," Herron said.

Chairman of Project Islamic Hope, Donald Bakeer, a former teacher with the Los Angeles Unified School District for 30 years and author of the book "Crips," said that he was amazed that the billboard was prominently featured in Rolling 60s gang territory. "50 Cent could not step into this neighborhood without a bodyguard," Bakeer noted. "That movie title and song, 'Get Rich or Die Trying,' makes people think it's OK to jack people. That slogan is going to echo across the country while 50 Cent steps over dead bodies to get his paycheck."

Ali said that Bakeer and other community activists plan to meet with Paramount Studios executives next week to discuss the marketing and promotion campaign for "Get Rich or Die Trying." "They have the power to immediately take down the billboards if there is enough community pressure placed on them," declared Ali.