

Race-specific anti-abortion billboards arrive in Oakland

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OAKLAND -- A national anti-abortion advertising campaign targeting racial minorities with specific billboards reached Oakland this month with at least 25 "Black & Beautiful" signs plastered across East and West Oakland.

The eye-catching advertisement, which features the picture of a black infant under the bold-lettered title "Black & Beautiful," directs residents to a website sponsored by The Radiance Foundation, a Georgia-based group opposed to abortion.

Similar advertisements have also been erected on the inner-city streets of Atlanta, Chicago, New York and Los Angeles. All have similar messages to the billboards in Atlanta, first erected in 2009, comparing abortion to slavery.

In addition, another conservative group, American Principals in Action, has followed a similar race-based anti-abortion campaign in Los Angeles that is targeted at Latinas.

Its signs, in both Spanish and English, read: "The Most Dangerous Place for a Latino Baby is in the Mother's Womb."

While The Radiance Foundation and groups associated with it call the billboards educational, abortion rights and civil rights organizations have labeled them racist, offensive and misleading.

"They are using these terms with abortion to try to divide our community," said Alicia Waters, a member of Trust Black Women California, an organization created in 2009 to combat the advertisements. "To me that is offensive. It is not a message that uplifts our

community. It is not a message that helps young women make a difficult choice."

The billboards began appearing in Oakland this month and have been spotted in West Oakland and along Foothill and MacArthur boulevards in East Oakland. Waters said her group has counted as many as 25 billboards, but a representative from the group sponsoring the ads says as many as 60 have been erected in the city.

"The billboards have created a venue for dialogue," said Walter Hoye III, president of the Issues 4 Life Foundation, who went to jail in 2009 after refusing to abide by a city law that forbids anti-abortion protesters from approaching women entering clinics. "They are not racist. I am not racist, and the billboards are not racist."

Hoye's foundation is sponsored by the Radiance Foundation to help in the billboard campaign, but Hoye refused this week to say how much the campaign costs or how much money he is receiving from the Radiance Foundation.

"I'm not going to answer that question," Hoye said when asked how the billboards were financed.

Although Hoye, an African-American minister, said he did not believe the billboards were racist or offensive, the California NAACP said they were and urged groups to pressure any billboard company that decides to conduct business with The Radiance Foundation or any group affiliated with it.

"It's a horrible approach, and I think it is racist on



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the face of it," said Alice Huffman, president of the California NAACP. "It's misleading and a very, very poisonous approach to politics. They are just alienating people on both sides."

Huffman said she was disturbed that the billboards attack Planned Parenthood, a health care provider that, in many cases, is the only source for health care in poor minority communities.

"They are creating an illusion that Planned Parenthood is an organization that is murdering black babies," Huffman said. "They just don't do abortions, they do education. They fill a need in the community."

In fact, Walters said, 97 percent of Planned Parenthood services are focused on preventing pregnancy.

Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Oakland, also denounced the billboards, saying the advertisements "stigmatize women of color and perpetuate myths about parenting skills and the types of women who seek and use abortion services."

Waters said it was important to bring attention to the billboards to show members of the Radiance Foundation and others that "they don't get to dominate the community with offensive signs."

