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Controversial Antiabortion Billboards to Stay Up in Oakland, For Now

POLITICS [Katie J.M. Baker](#) — Mon, Jun 27, 2011 at 12:33 PM

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A group of **controversial antiabortion billboards** targeting Oakland's African-American community won't be taken down early, according to CBS Outdoor General Manager Jeff McCuen.

The sixty billboards in question, which currently line boulevards in both West and East Oakland, feature a sleeping African-American baby under the phrase, "Black & Beautiful" and a link:

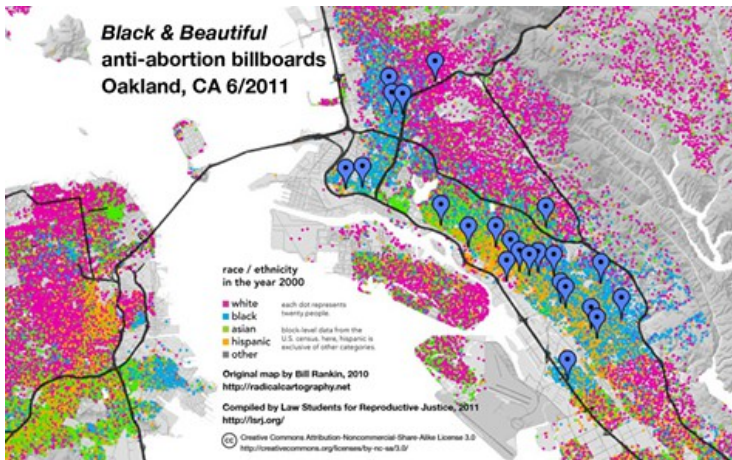
[TooManyAborted.Com/CA](#).

The Atlanta-based Radiance Foundation, which partnered with local non-profit Issues4Life to put up the ads earlier this month, said the goal of the campaign is to draw attention to the high rates of abortion among African-Americans.

"I'm pleased with all the coverage we've gotten," said Walter B. Hoye II, president of Issues4Life. Hoye — **who served jail time** in 2009 for violating an Oakland ordinance that bars protesters from coming within eight feet of anyone entering an abortion clinic — said he thinks the billboards will create "an environment for discussion."

But some local politicians and advocacy groups say the billboards are racist and manipulative: "I am deeply offended by the race-based billboards that are being displayed in my congressional district," Congresswoman Barbara Lee said in a statement. "These billboards stigmatize women of color and perpetuate myths about parenting skills and the types of women who seek and use abortion services."

According to The Guttmacher Institute, black Americans are almost four times as likely as whites to have an abortion. But Planned Parenthood Mira Monte spokeswoman Lupe Rodriguez said those rates are due to inaccessibility to medical care and contraception. "This is a disturbing tactic to shame women in this community from seeking health care," she said.



A number of Bay Area advocacy groups — including Asian Reproductive Rights, the California chapter of Trust Black Women, and Black Women For Wellness — joined together to strategize within hours of the billboards going up. “Oakland is very multiracial, so we saw this ad campaign as an attack on all women of color that live there,” said Eveline Shen, Executive Director of Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice and an anchor member of the multi-racial Strong Families Coalition.

The groups launched a call-in campaign to local CBS Outdoor billboard representative Jeff McCuen to pressure the company, which owns the billboards, to take the ads down.

McCuen didn't respond to multiple requests for comment, but wrote Shen an e-mail last Friday saying CBS Outdoor did not plan to halt the campaign.

“The Radiance ads are within the standards we apply to all submissions, and we would apply those same standards in deciding whether to accept an ad presenting an opposing viewpoint,” McCuen wrote. “At the end of the day we have faith in the public's ability to use their judgment with regard to the issues involved in this debate.”

Radiance's Chief Creative Officer Ryan Bomberger — who, like Hoye, is black — said he didn't expect the billboards to be taken down. “It's hard to look at a billboard that says black and beautiful and say that that's a racist statement,” Bomberger said. “Especially when abortion is destroying the Black community.”

Race-specific antiabortion ads have recently appeared in urban areas all over the country, paid for by national pro-life organizations like the Radiance Foundation, which wouldn't disclose campaign costs. Advocates and city council members in cities like Los Angeles and New York have recently pressured companies to remove similar billboards, which claimed “The Most Dangerous Place for a Latino/African American is in the Womb.” But Bomberger said Radiance — which has successfully led billboard campaigns in five other states — has never had a campaign taken down.

“This was clearly an offensive effort to divide communities of color,” said Alicia Walters, spokeswoman for the California chapter of Trust Black Women, a group that sprung up in response to Radiance's first billboard campaign in Atlanta last year. “Regardless of what ethnicity they hide behind, the bottom line is they're trying to restrict access to reproductive healthcare.”

The groups opposing the billboard met again to re-strategize today and are planning on launching a “Take Action” segment on the site reproductivejustice.org this afternoon; for now, they're inviting people to go [here](#) to contact McCuen to take the billboards down.

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Posted by [Lawngun](#) on June 28, 2011 at 4:48 PM | [Report this comment](#)



Why can't I have free speech to say that Anti-Abortionists are liars who are using emotions to insert a state religion into our country against the constitution. Why can't I say it is idiocy to claim the Earth is 10,000 years old? Why is there no freedom of speech to say that life began 1,000,000,000 years ago, not in the womb but