



Contact: Josh Golin

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

53 Parker Hill Ave. Boston, MA 02120-3225

Phone: 617-278-4172 • Fax: 617-232-7343

Email: jgolin@jbcc.harvard.edu

Website: www.commercialfreechildhood.org

Contact: Gavin Mc Kiernan

Parents Television Council

707 Wilshire, #2075, Los Angeles, CA 90017

Phone: 213.629.9255 • Fax: 213.629.9254

Email: gmckiernan@parentstv.org

Website: www.parentstv.org

We are writing to urge you to change the Denver Regional Transportation District's policy on advertising to preclude taking advertisements for video games rated Mature (M) or Adults Only (AO)—those that the videogame industry itself deems inappropriate for children under the age of 17. Last fall, ads for the videogame *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories* (Rockstar Games, 2006) were featured on RTD trains.

Despite their M and AO ratings and the fact that they feature graphic violence—including violence against women, and explicit sexual content, the *Grand Theft Auto* series is frequently marketed in venues frequented by children. The *Grand Theft Auto* series has proven to be extremely popular with young people. In 2002, the top selling video game for teens and preteens was *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, in which players could kill a prostitute after having sex with her.¹

By advertising *Vice City Stories*, the latest installment in the series, the RTD enabled Rockstar Games to reach countless children—those who ride the trains and buses and those whose neighborhoods these vehicles pass through – with advertising for a game in which players can kill rival gang members, law enforcement, and innocent bystanders as they attempt to set up their own illicit businesses, such as drug cartels and prostitution rings, and commit armed robbery.

At the 2006 Summit on Video Games, Youth and Public Policy, academic, medical and health experts signed a statement saying: “Behavioral science research demonstrates that playing violent video games can increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior in children and youth.”² The most recent studies employing state-of-the-art neuroimaging techniques support the behavioral research.³ After reviewing 1000 studies over 30 years of research, a consortium of the major American public health organizations concluded that “viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children.”⁴ There is evidence that violent video games can engender more aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; and decrease empathetic, helpful behaviors with peers.⁵

Concern about children's exposure to ads for violent video games is growing, and cities around the country have started to take action. Last December, in response to community concerns about *Grand Theft Auto* ads, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, amended its advertising policy and will no longer take ads for video games rated M or AO.⁶ In Portland Oregon, after receiving complaints from many

riders, the transit authority (Trimet) decided to remove advertisements for *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories*.⁷

We urge you to join with these other transit authorities and send a strong message to the videogame industry that public property cannot be used to promote violence to children. Please amend your advertising policy to preclude taking advertisements for video games that the Entertainment Software Rating Board deems inappropriate for children.

Sincerely,

Action Coalition for Media Education
Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood
Concerned Educators Allied for a Safe Environment
Center for Screen-Time Awareness
Center for Successful Parenting
Children Now
Commercial Alert
Common Sense Media
Center for a New American Dream
Dads and Daughters
Darkness to Light
Hardy Girls, Healthy Woman
Industry Ears
Kids Can Make a Difference
The Motherhood Project
National Institute on Media and the Family
Obligation, Inc.
Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc.
Parents Television Council
The Praxis Project
Stand for Children
Stoughton Institute
Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment

Craig A. Anderson, PhD, Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Iowa State University; co-author, *Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents*.
William R. Beardslee, MD, Gardner/Monks Professor of Child Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School; Academic Chair, Children's Hospital Boston
Lyn Mikel Brown, EdD, Associate Professor of Education and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Colby College; co-author, *Packaging Girlhood*
Dr. Brad J. Bushman, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan
Dr. Joanne Cantor, Director, Center for Communication Research, Department of Communication Arts, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Nancy Carlsson-Paige, EdD, Professor of Education, Lesley University
Raffi Cavoukian, singer; author; founder of Child Honoring
Douglas A. Gentile, Ph.D., Iowa State University; co-author, *Violent Video Game Effects on Children and Adolescents*.
Reverend Ray A. Hammond, MD, MA, Co-Pastor, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church; Chairman and Co-Founder of the Boston Ten Point Coalition
Allen Kanner, PhD, co-editor, *Psychology and Consumer Culture*
Tim Kasser, PhD, Associate Professor of Psychology, Knox College; author, *The High Price of Materialism*

Jean Kilbourne, EdD, author, *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel*

Gerald P. Koocher, PhD, Dean, School for Health Studies, Simmons College, Boston

Velma LaPoint, PhD, Professor of Child Development, School of Education, Howard University

Rabbi Michael Lerner, Chair, Network of Spiritual Progressives; Editor, Tikkun.

Diane E. Levin, PhD, Professor of Education, Wheelock College; author, *Remote Control Childhood*

Susan Linn, EdD, Judge Baker Children's Center; author, *Consuming Kids*

Jane Norton, Executive Director, Denver Police Foundation and Former Lt. Gov., Colorado

Mike Norton, Former Colorado U.S. Attorney

Peggy O'Mara, Editor/Publisher Mothering magazine

Alvin F. Poussaint, MD, Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School and Judge Baker Children's Center

Deborah Prothrow-Stith, MD, Professor of Public Health Practice and Associate Dean, Harvard School of Public Health

Michael Rich, MD, MPH, Director, Center on Media and Child Health, Children's Hospital Boston; Harvard Medical School; Harvard School of Public Health

Dr. Bruce Roseman, Associate Professor of and Chief of Clinical Pediatric Neurology and Pediatrics University of New Hampshire

Juliet B. Schor, PhD, Professor of Sociology, Boston College; author, *Born to Buy*

Donald Shifrin, MD, Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, University of Washington School of Medicine

Victor Strasburger, MD, Professor of Pediatrics, University of New Mexico School of Medicine; co-author, *Children, Adolescents, & the Media*

Julie Taylor, Children, Youth and Family Advocacy, Women's Division, The United Methodist Church.

David Walsh, PhD, author of *No. Why Kids-of all Ages-Need It and Ways Parents Can Say It* and *Why Do They Act That Way? A Guide to the Adolescent Brain*

¹ Snider, M. (2002). Video Games: Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. *USA Today*, 27 December, 8D.

² Consensus statement from the Institute for Media and the Family's 2006 Summit on Video Games, Youth, and Public Policy. <http://www.mediafamily.org/press/20061031.shtml>.

³ Anderson, D.R. et al (2006). Brain imaging—An introduction to a new approach to studying media processes and effects. *Media Psychology*, 8, 1-6. Mathews, V.P., Kronenberger, W.G., Wang, Y., Lurito, J.T., Lowe, M.J., & Dunn, D.W. (2005). Media violence exposure and frontal lobe activation measured by fMRI in aggressive and non-aggressive adolescents. *Journal of Computer Assisted Tomography*, 29, 287-292.

⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics (2000). Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children, July 26. www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/jstmtevc.htm.

⁵ Anderson, C.A. (2004). An update on the effects of violent video games. *Journal of Adolescence* 27, 113-122. Gentile, D. A. & Anderson, C. A. (2003). Violent video games: The newest media violence hazard. In D. A. Gentile (Ed.), *Media violence and children*. (p131-152). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing.

⁶ Associated Press (December 12, 2006). T will no longer display advertisements for violent video games. Available at <http://www3.whdh.com/news/articles/local/BO36805/>

⁷ TriMet pulls Grand Theft Auto Ads. Available at <http://www.kptv.com/news/10316072/detail.html>.