

Should 'Drive-By Fashions' be locked up for good?

Fashion Glimpse

By Christine Brophy

When people think of prison and drive-by shootings, they don't normally think of fashion. Now money-hungry marketers are trying to make a trend out of glorifying criminals and violence through apparel.

Frank Allgeyer, entrepreneur of Drive-By Fashions, and B.U.M. sportswear, with their line of jeans called Prison Blues, found a way to make money by marketing the grim attraction of society's mischief makers.

Drive-by Fashions originated in New Hampshire where Allgeyer started charging customers for putting bullet holes through articles of clothing with either a rifle, pistol, or machine gun, the Boston Globe reported. T-shirts, pants, and jeans could all be shot like Swiss cheese for under \$40.

"That guy is making money off a real problem to society," said John Bellmore of Joey Fourrier's Victim Services. Bellmore is just one of the many people who have been touched by random urban violence. Five years ago his son Mark Bellmore, a Northeastern University student, was stabbed to death walking not far from the University Police station.

"It glorifies drive-by shootings," Bellmore said. He said that it is also glorifying death and that "it serves to make the problem worse."

Bellmore said that if he had a child who died in a drive-by shooting, he would be upset seeing bullet-

ridden clothes flaunted on the streets. "Unfortunately you can't pass a law outlawing something like that."

But not everyone sees it as condoning violence. Ronald McAllister, a NU sociology professor, sees it as communicating survival and toughness.

"I don't think it is trying to make bad look good," McAllister said. "It is saying something about someone who survived." He said that Drive-By Fashions and Prison Blues jeans express "I'm tough. I'm aggressive. I've been in prison. I've been shot at. I survived a drive-by."

Still, McAllister thinks this message is a perverse one. He said what is bothersome is that someone is making money off of someone else's troubles.

Prison Blues made over \$6 million last year, reported the North Shore Sunday news. It stated that the apparel, which is targeted towards people 14 - 25 years old, is constructed behind bars by Oregon inmates. It was reported that the marketing director, Brad Haga admitted that the "allure and mystery" of criminals provides a "unique marketing niche." Prison Blues are on their way to Boston, the North Shore Sunday reported.

But how well will these trends go over for Bostonians who live in an urban area where crime and violence are at our doorsteps or blocks away? In New Hampshire where drive-by shootings are less frequent, consumers might be searching for

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that sort of toughness. But in parts of Massachusetts like Springfield, Dorchester, Roxbury, Lowell, and Worcester, where drive-by shootings and crime hold a regular space in the papers, and where it is all too real for those who hear gun shots at night or have lost friends or family to senseless violence, it might not have such an appeal.

In 1993, statistics from the Executive Office of Public Safety show that over half of the homicides in Massachusetts were gun related.

Do these new fashions glorify death, violence and criminal activity, or perhaps do they make a statement of survival? Maybe it is really making a statement about greed — trivializing crime and violence all for a quick buck. Consumers will have to form their own opinions. They will make or break this trend.