

For Immediate Release

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JACL Statement on the use of a racial slur in the movie “The Goods: Live Hard, Sell Hard

After viewing a trailer for the movie “The Goods: Live Hard, Sell Hard” produced by Paramount Vantage and starring Jeremy Piven, the Japanese American Citizens League is outraged by a scene where the Piven character uses a racial slur to launch a physical attack on an Asian character and, as if to justify this obscenity, the character admits that they’ve just participated in a hate crime.

The film is about a hard-driving car sales team trying to save a dealership. The scene in question shows the Piven character giving his sales team a pep talk. The members of the sales team include an Asian American and a man who views the Asian character skeptically. The Piven character says, “Don’t get me started on Pearl Harbor -- the Japs flying in low and fast. We are Americans and they are the enemy! Never again!” A man looks at the discomfited Asian and says, “Let’s get him!” which results in the beating of the Asian. The Piven character then says, “Alright, stop! We have all just participated in a hate crime. Let’s get our stories straight. Dang came at us with a samurai sword, fire extinguisher and Chinese throwing stars.”

The producers characterize the film as a satirical comedy, however, there is nothing funny about the use of racial slurs and there is little that is insightful or thought-provoking in a scene that displays a shocking lack of judgment. By their very nature, racial slurs are hurtful and they have the potential for causing great harm by singling out and marginalizing an identifiable group of people. The scene is a sad reminder of a time during the 1980s and 1990s when “Japan-bashing” based on perceived economic threats reached a dangerous level where racial slurs provoked hate crimes and real people were really victimized resulting in a situation where Asian Americans were made to feel isolated and vulnerable.

Unfortunately, slurs have been used in the past to define and denigrate racial and ethnic groups. There is no need to perpetuate the use of slurs today or in the future. People, especially the young, who view the movie may come to believe the use of the slur is acceptable. Japanese Americans are particularly offended because the use of racial slurs during the 1940s helped to vilify and demean our community and was a factor leading to our forced eviction from our homes and communities on the West Coast, followed by confinement for up to three years in concentration camps. The producers of The Goods: Live Hard, Sell Hard need to apologize because they crossed a line in thinking they could use a racial slur simply for the sake of a laugh.