



TOBACCO COMPANY MARKETING TO AFRICAN AMERICANS

“We don’t smoke that s___. We just sell it. We reserve the right to smoke for the young, the poor, the black and stupid.”¹

R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Executive

The tobacco industry has gone to great lengths to target the African-American community over the past 30 years. Through market research and aggressive advertising, the industry has successfully penetrated this population. The industry’s “investment” in the African-American community has had a destructive impact: African Americans suffer the greatest burden of tobacco-related mortality of any ethnic or racial group in the United States.²

Targeting African-American Youths

Research shows that tobacco company advertising and other marketing efforts greatly influence tobacco use initiation among youth non-smokers and is associated with increased tobacco consumption among youth who have already become regular smokers.³ 80 percent of all smokers start before the age of 18 and, not surprisingly, the vast majority of kids smoke the three most heavily advertised brands.^{4 5} One of these heavily advertised brands, Newport, is the cigarette brand leader among African-American youths in the United States.⁶ Eight out of every ten black, youth smokers smoke Newport cigarettes.⁷

While smoking among black youths has decreased steadily since peaking in 1997 and 1998, smoking among African American tenth graders in 2009 was slightly higher than the smoking rate among this group in 1992 (6.6 percent vs. 6.8 percent, respectively). Similarly, smoking among African American twelfth graders was 8.7 percent in 1992 compared to 9.8 percent in 2009.⁸

Targeting African Americans through Advertising

For decades, tobacco companies have specifically targeted minority communities, particularly African-Americans, with intense advertising and promotional efforts. Alarming, research suggests that tobacco-selling retailer density near schools is higher in minority or lower-income communities.⁹ This is disturbing given that a higher density of such retailers near schools has been found to increase experimental smoking among high school students.¹⁰ A recent study of neighborhoods with high schools in California found that as the proportion of African-American high school students rose, the proportion of menthol advertising increased, the odds of a Newport promotion were higher and the cost of Newport cigarettes was lower.¹¹

Numerous studies have documented the disproportionate amount of advertising in low-income, minority communities.

- A 2008 study of retail outlets in California found that the number of cigarette ads per store and the proportion of stores with at least one ad for a sales promotion are increasing more rapidly in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of African-Americans.¹²
- A 2007 study found that there were 2.6 times more tobacco advertisements per person in areas with an African American majority compared to white-majority areas.¹³
- African-American communities have been bombarded with cigarette advertising. Since the MSA, the average youth in the United States is annually exposed to 559 tobacco ads, every adult female 617 advertisements, and every African American adult 892 ads.¹⁴
- A study published in the 2010 July/August issue of the *American Journal of Health Promotion* compared characteristics of storefront tobacco advertisements in a low-income, minority

community and a high-income, nonminority community and found that the low-income, minority community had more tobacco retailers and advertisements were more likely to be larger and promote menthol products.¹⁵

- A study of tobacco advertising in six Boston neighborhoods found that exposure to tobacco advertising was more intense in neighborhoods with more children, with significant Black and Hispanic/Latino populations, and with low socioeconomic status.¹⁶ Another study, based on data collected in Los Angeles, found that compared with White neighborhood thoroughfares, African American and Hispanic neighborhoods contained greater tobacco ad density, and all minority neighborhoods contained greater tobacco ad concentration along the roadsides.¹⁷

Moreover, there is compelling evidence that tobacco companies not only advertise disproportionately in communities with large African-American populations, they also create advertising specifically targeted to these communities. Cigarette ads highly prevalent in African-American communities and publications are often characterized by slogans, relevant and specific messages, or images that have a great appeal among those in the black community, or that depict African Americans in an appealing light.¹⁸ Contrary to how blacks are typically portrayed in the media, cigarette ads portray images of African Americans who are happy, confident, successful and wealthy, in love, attractive, strong and independent.¹⁹ The tobacco industry has used symbols and events held in high esteem by community members as another tactic to reach this community.²⁰

For example, in 2004, Brown & Williamson started an ad campaign for their Kool brand cigarettes clearly aimed at youth, and African-American youth, in particular. The Kool Mixx campaign featured images of young rappers, disc jockeys and dancers on cigarette packs and in advertising. The campaign also included radio giveaways with cigarette purchases and a Hip-Hop disc jockey competition in major cities around the country. The themes, images, radio giveaways and music involved in the campaign all clearly have tremendous appeal to youth, especially African-American youth. Simultaneously, Brown & Williamson promoted a new line of cigarette flavors like Caribbean Chill, Mocha Taboo, and Midnight Berry using images of African-Americans and themes attractive to African-American youth. These cigarettes were promoted through dance clubs and hip-hop music venues.

Marketing Menthol Cigarettes

As a result of market research, the cigarette companies know that most African-American smokers prefer menthol cigarettes, and they exploit that fact in their marketing efforts to African Americans in general and to African-American kids in particular, who tobacco companies often refer to as “young adult blacks.” One Lorillard sales seminar document from 1978 reveals a laundry list of ways to target their menthol brand Newport to the African American community, including “tie-in with any company who help black[s] – ‘we help them, they help us.’ Target group age 16+”.²¹ Other quotes from tobacco industry documents appear below.

Philip Morris: The first observation is that Marlboro would probably have a very difficult time getting anywhere in the young black market. The odds against it there are heavy. Young blacks have found their thing, and it's menthol in general and Kool in particular.²²

R J Reynolds: Since younger adult Blacks overwhelmingly prefer menthol cigarettes, continued emphasis on Salem within the Black market is recommended. Salem is already positioned against younger adults. With emphasis on the younger adult Black market, Salem may be able to provide an alternative to Newport and capitalize on Kool's decline.²³

The tobacco industry has a long industry of promoting menthol cigarettes to minorities.

- Expenditures for magazine advertising of mentholated cigarettes, popular with African Americans, increased from 13 percent of total ad expenditures in 1998 to 76 percent in 2006.²⁴

- Between 1998-2002, *Ebony* was 9.8 times more likely than *People* to contain ads for menthols, and the Spanish-language version of *People* was 2.6 times more likely to contain menthol ads than the English-language version.²⁵
- During the two years after the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) in November 1998, the average annual expenditures for Newport in magazines with high youth readership increased 13.2 percent (from \$5.3 to \$6.0 million).²⁶

Further, advertising for menthol cigarettes has been higher in high-minority areas than in wealthier, majority-white neighborhoods. One study conducted before the Master Settlement Agreement's ban on billboards (but not all outdoor advertisements) found that in one city, Black neighborhoods were significantly more likely to have ads for menthols than other neighborhoods.²⁷ Another study found that 29% of point-of-sale advertisements in predominantly African American or Latino neighborhoods were for menthols versus 10% in non-minority neighborhoods.²⁸

Tobacco companies have also recently introduced new menthol products to attract new smokers. In 2008, RJ Reynolds, which merged with Brown & Williamson in 2005, introduced Camel Crush, which allows smokers to crush a Cool Burst™ pellet in the filter and release menthol gel to turn a non-menthol cigarette into a menthol cigarette. In 2009, RJR released redesigned Camel Menthol cigarettes with Cool Burst™ pellets, to allow smokers to increase the menthol amount in their already-mentholized cigarette. In March 2007, Philip Morris USA introduced Marlboro Smooth, and in June 2009, PM USA introduced Marlboro Blend No. 54, advertised as “richer” and “bolder” compared to the regular Marlboro menthol cigarettes and Marlboro Smooth.

The aggressive advertising of mentholated cigarettes by the major cigarette companies seems to have paid off. Among adult and teen African-American smokers, the most popular brands are Newport, Kool, and Marlboro. While about 42 percent of black adults smoke Newport, 80.4 percent of black kids smoke this brand.²⁹ In addition, although there was an overall decrease in youth smoking rates between 2000 and 2002, during the same period, youth menthol cigarette use increased by 18.5%.³⁰ These statistics are especially disturbing because menthol cigarettes have higher carbon monoxide concentrations than non-menthol cigarettes and may be associated with a greater absorption of nicotine.³¹ Moreover, research indicates that mentholated cigarettes may increase the risk of both lung and bronchial cancer by promoting lung permeability and diffusability of smoke particles.³²

Disturbing Effects of Industry Marketing Tactics

While smoking rates among African Americans are not higher than national levels, this ethnic group suffers disproportionately from smoking-caused chronic and preventable diseases.³³ Each year, approximately 45,000 African Americans die from a smoking-caused illness. An estimated 1.6 million black Americans alive today, who are now under the age of 18, will become regular smokers, and about 500,000 of these will die prematurely from a tobacco-related disease.³⁴

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids September 15, 2011 / Ann Boonn

Related Campaign Fact Sheets

- *Tobacco Use and African Americans*, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0006.pdf>
- *Tobacco Company Marketing to Kids*, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0008.pdf>

¹ Giovanni, J, “Come to Cancer Country; USA; Focus,” *The Times of London*, August 2, 1992 [quoting Dave Goerlitz, RJ Reynolds’ lead Winston model for seven years, re what an R.J. Reynolds executive replied to him when Goerlitz asked why the executive did not smoke].

² CDC, “African Americans and Tobacco,” 1998, http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_1998/sgr-min-afr.htm; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *Tobacco Use Among US Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups—African Americans, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 1998, http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/sgr_1998/index.htm.

- ³ National Cancer Institute, *The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*, Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No. 19, NIH Pub. No. 07-6242, June 2008, http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/19/m19_complete.pdf. See also, Pucci, LG & Siegel, M, "Exposure to brand-specific cigarette advertising in magazines and its impact on youth smoking," *Preventive Medicine* 29(5):313-20, November 1999; Sargent, JD, et al., "Effect of seeing tobacco use in films on trying smoking among adolescents: a cross sectional study," *British Medical Journal* 323(7326):1394-7, December 15, 2001.
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