



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 cigarette company advertising and other marketing efforts greatly influence tobacco use initiation among adolescent non-smokers and maintenance among those youths 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 2008 was almost identical to the smoking rate among this group in 1992 (6.6 percent vs. 6.5 percent, respectively), and smoking among African American twelfth graders was actually higher in 2008 than it was in 1992 (8.7 percent vs. 10.3 percent, respectively).⁸

Targeting African Americans through Advertising

The tobacco industry targets the African-American community through intense advertising and promotional efforts.

- 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.⁹
- 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. In addition, the odds that billboards were tobacco-related in African American communities were 70 percent higher than in white communities.¹⁰
- 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.¹¹
- There is more interior and exterior tobacco advertising in retail outlets in low-income communities and communities with larger African-American populations.¹²
- Expenditures for magazine advertising of mentholated cigarettes, popular with African-Americans, increased from 13 percent of total ad expenditures in 1998 to 49 percent in 2005.¹³
- 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).¹⁴
- Studies have found more cigarette ads in African-American magazines, such as *Ebony* and *Jet*, than in similar magazines, such as *Time* and *People*.¹⁵

- Additionally, before the MSA's ban on tobacco billboard advertising in 1999, there were higher densities of tobacco ad billboards in ethnic communities than in predominantly white communities.¹⁶

Moreover, cigarette ads highly prevalent in minority 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ The tobacco industry has used symbols and events held in high esteem by community members as another tactic to reach this community.¹⁹

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."

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.²⁰

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.²¹

RJ Reynolds, which merged with Brown & Williamson in 2005, recently introduced yet another extension of the Kool brand, Kool XL, and is heavily advertising it to compete against Newport's dominance among young African Americans.

Philip Morris has just introduced Marlboro Smooth, a new menthol product. Both Marlboro Smooth and Kool XL are promoted using the "smoother" message, possibly to imply a reduction in menthol levels to target young African American smokers.

Advertising Age, a leading advertising trade journal, estimates that RJ Reynolds spent between \$10 and \$15 million, in 1997, on advertising-related expenditures to launch a new Camel menthol cigarette.²² In July 1999, Philip Morris began testing a new menthol version of its best-selling Marlboro brand, reportedly to attract more customers from the African-American community.²³

The aggressive advertising of these mentholated brands 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. However, while about 42 percent of black adults smoke Newport, 80.4 percent of black kids smoke this brand.²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶

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.²⁷ 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.²⁸

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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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