



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 a long history of going to great lengths to target the African-American community. 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 More than 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 One of these heavily advertised brands, Newport, is the cigarette brand leader among African-American youths in the United States. More than seven out of every ten black, youth smokers smoke Newport cigarettes.⁵

Cigarette smoking among black youths has decreased since peaking in 1997 and 1999, although declines have stalled in recent years. In 2013, 8.2 percent of African American high school students smoked cigarettes.⁶ Rates of cigar smoking among African American youth have significantly increased in recent years, however. Among African American high school students, cigar use now exceeds cigarette smoking (11.7% current cigar use vs. 8.2% current cigarette use).⁷

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.⁸ This is disturbing given that a higher density of such retailers near schools has been found to increase experimental smoking among high school students.⁹ 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.¹⁰ Additional research shows that African American youth are three times more likely to recognize the Newport brand than other students, and students of all races who recognize the Newport brand are more likely to start smoking.¹¹

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

- The 2011 California Tobacco Advertising Survey reports that there were significantly more menthol advertisements at stores in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of African-American residents and in low-income neighborhoods.¹²
- A 2011 study of cigarette prices in retail stores across the U.S. found that Newport cigarettes are significantly less expensive in neighborhoods with higher proportions of African Americans.¹³

- Research shows that little cigars and cigarillos are more available and cheaper in African American neighborhoods. The use of exterior advertising is also significantly more prevalent in African American neighborhoods.¹⁴
- 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.¹⁵
- 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.¹⁶
- 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.¹⁷
- 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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 depict African Americans in an appealing light.²⁰ 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.²¹

The tobacco industry has also used symbols and events held in high esteem by community members as another tactic to reach this community.²² 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. They exploit this fact in their marketing efforts to African Americans, in general, and to African-American kids (whom tobacco companies often refer to as “young adult blacks”), in particular. 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+.”²³ 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."²⁴

*RJ 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."*²⁵

The tobacco industry is relentless in its promotion of 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 2006.²⁶
- Between 1998–2002, *Ebony*, a magazine tailored to the African American culture, 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.²⁷
- 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).²⁸

Moreover, 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.²⁹ Another study found that 29 percent of point-of-sale advertisements in predominantly African American or Latino neighborhoods were for menthols versus 10 percent in non-minority neighborhoods.³⁰

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. In 2012, PM USA launched yet another menthol product—Marlboro NXT, a cigarette with a crushable menthol capsule designed to compete with Reynolds' Camel Crush.

The aggressive advertising of mentholated cigarettes by the major cigarette companies has paid off. Newport is the leading brand of cigarettes among African American youth ages 12-17 (73.6%) and young adults ages 18-25 (78.5%).³¹ Preference for Camel menthol and Marlboro menthol cigarettes has increased in recent years, too, particularly among adolescents and young adults.³²

In addition, while the percentage of youth and young adults who smoke non-menthol cigarettes decreased from 2004-2010, the percentage of youth smoking menthol cigarettes remained constant, and the percentage of young adults smoking menthol cigarettes actually increased.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵

In 2013, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released a report that found menthol cigarettes lead to increased smoking initiation among youth and young adults, greater addiction, and decreased success in quitting smoking. The agency concluded that, "these findings, combined with the evidence indicating that menthol's cooling and anesthetic properties can reduce the harshness of cigarette smoke and the evidence indicating that menthol cigarettes are marketed as a smoother alternative to

nonmenthol cigarettes, make it likely that menthol cigarettes pose a public health risk above that seen with nonmenthol cigarettes.”³⁶

Disturbing Effects of Industry Marketing Tactics

While smoking rates among African Americans are lower than national levels, this ethnic group suffers disproportionately from smoking-caused chronic and preventable diseases.³⁷ Each year, approximately 45,000 African Americans die from a smoking-caused illness. An estimated 1.6 million African 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.³⁸

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, January 26, 2015 / Lorna Schmidt

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>

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- ³ HHS, *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2012, http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/2012/. See also, 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. 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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