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## Racialized Geography, Corporate Activity, and Health Disparities: Tobacco Industry Targeting of Inner Cities

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*Abstract:* Industry has played a complex role in the rise of tobacco-related diseases in the United States. The tobacco industry's activities, including targeted marketing, are arguably among the most powerful corporate influences on health and health policy. We analyzed over 400 internal tobacco industry documents to explore how, during the past several decades, the industry targeted inner cities populated predominantly by low-income African American residents with highly concentrated menthol cigarette marketing. We study how major tobacco companies competed against one another in *menthol wars* fought within these urban cores. Little previous work has analyzed the way in which the inner city's complex geography of race, class, and place shaped the avenues used by tobacco corporations to increase tobacco use in low-income, predominantly African American urban cores in the 1970s–1990s. Our analysis shows how the industry's activities contributed to the racialized geography of today's tobacco-related health disparities.

*Key words:* Smoking, tobacco industry, African Americans, racial disparities, inner city geography.

Despite significant reductions in overall smoking rates in the United States, smoking among poor, less educated, and underserved populations remains higher than among the general population.<sup>1–5</sup> For example, prevalence rates for low-income African Americans have been reported to range from 33% to 59%,<sup>6–11</sup> compared with 21% for the general population.<sup>12</sup> Tobacco company advertising and promotion are associated with increased cigarette consumption; their presence and pervasiveness serve as external cues to smoking.<sup>13</sup> Tobacco companies have strategically targeted marginalized communities,<sup>14–25</sup> who may have limited information about specific and relative health risks of smoking and few social supports and resources such as tailored cessation programs.<sup>26–29</sup> Tobacco-related diseases have hurt lower-income urban communities,

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where lack of educational opportunity is compounded by lack of access to health care, few employment opportunities, and environmental injustice.<sup>7,30</sup>

Tobacco use is a major contributor to health disparities in the United States.<sup>5,31</sup> Age-adjusted mortality rates for tobacco-related cancers,<sup>32-37</sup> cardiovascular disease and stroke are higher among African Americans than among White Americans.<sup>38</sup> Tobacco-related health disparities are defined as “differences in the patterns, prevention, and treatment of tobacco use; the risk, incidence, morbidity, mortality, and burden of tobacco-related illness that exist among specific population groups in the United States; and related differences in capacity and infrastructure, access to resources, and environmental tobacco smoke exposure.”<sup>30, p. 211</sup> Individual level risk factors account for only part of persistent health disparities. In this paper, we suggest that it is not only tobacco use behavior that shapes disparities, but the disparate distribution of conditions that promote tobacco use. For example, African Americans who report experiencing racial discrimination as subjectively stressful are more likely to smoke.<sup>39</sup> Macro-level factors identified as fundamental causes of disease also influence multiple disease outcomes and affect both individual and social contexts.<sup>40</sup>

The expanding literature on social and environmental injustices recognizes the interplay between individual, social, and geographic factors, including racism and segregation, and their contribution to persistent racial disparities in health.<sup>41-44</sup> This interplay creates what have been called *riskscapes*,<sup>45-46</sup> within which poverty, racial discrimination, segregation, the environment, and other factors work together to shape health disparities. Work from critical geography, public health, and history has drawn attention to localized power relationships, emphasizing that space is neither neutral nor passive.<sup>47-51</sup> Rather, geographic location and social position intertwine and form a loop; places shape one’s social station and the social station of a place’s residents shapes societal views of that place.<sup>52</sup> *Racialized geography*, as described by Sundstrom, is a complex interplay between race, class, and place, occurring at the nexus of political, economic, and social systems.<sup>52</sup>

One factor shaping the riskscapes of inner cities is corporate activity, which has been identified as a fundamental structural cause of disease through producing and promoting products harmful to health.<sup>53</sup> The tobacco industry’s disease-promoting activities<sup>54</sup> are among the most powerful corporate influences on inner city health. Such activities have included targeted marketing, thwarting and undermining tobacco control efforts, deceptive scientific practices, and influencing policymakers and community leadership groups.<sup>55-59</sup>

For this paper, we analyzed previously secret internal documents to explore how, during the past several decades, inner cities populated predominantly by poor African American residents were targeted with highly concentrated menthol cigarette marketing from the entire industry. Today, at least 70% of African American smokers consume menthol cigarettes, compared with 30% of White smokers.<sup>5</sup> Menthol cigarettes, which contain higher amounts of tar and nicotine than non-mentholated brands,<sup>60-64</sup> are associated with nicotine dependence and lower cessation rates,<sup>65-69</sup> and may play a role in increasing systemic exposure to tobacco toxins and carcinogens,<sup>70-76</sup> thus, it is reasonable to consider how activities that promoted tobacco use and mentholated

cigarette use specifically have contributed to today's tobacco-related health disparities disfavoring African Americans.

This study shows how the major tobacco companies between the late 1970s–1990s aggressively competed against one another in the *menthol wars* fought within inner city urban cores. The most popular menthol brands were Kool (manufactured by Brown & Williamson, which merged with RJ Reynolds in 2003 to become Reynolds American Tobacco Company), Salem (Reynolds American), Newport (Lorillard), and Philip Morris's Benson & Hedges Menthol. During the time of this marketing blitz, smoking among African Americans increased,<sup>77</sup> the use of menthol cigarettes among African Americans increased,<sup>78</sup> and the overall menthol share of the tobacco market exploded. During the same time period, smoking prevalence among African Americans exceeded that among Whites, and African Americans (especially the poor and less educated) were among those least likely to quit smoking.<sup>79–80</sup> While previous research has described disproportionate levels of menthol cigarette advertising in poor inner city neighborhoods compared with predominantly White neighborhoods,<sup>16,31,81</sup> little work has demonstrated the specific ways in which the inner city's complex geography of race, class, and place shaped the avenues used by tobacco corporations to increase tobacco use in low-income, predominantly African American urban cores during the 1970s–1990s.

## Methods

We used archival approaches<sup>82</sup> to conduct this study, using data from previously undisclosed tobacco industry documents made public under *State of Minnesota versus Philip Morris, Inc.*<sup>83</sup> and electronically available following the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between 46 state attorneys general and 7 tobacco industry defendants.<sup>84</sup> Between May 2005–August 2006, we collected and analyzed more than 400 documents related to tobacco industry targeting of low-income, inner-city communities. Documents were retrieved in paper form from the Minnesota Depository and electronically from the University of California, San Francisco Legacy Tobacco Documents Library (<http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu>) and from industry document websites.<sup>85</sup>

We searched using an iterative snowball approach,<sup>86</sup> beginning with combinations of search terms such as *African American*, *Black*, *ethnic*, *ghetto*, *inner city*, *menthol*, *Negro*, and *urban*. Retrieved documents were used to identify additional search terms. We focused primarily on Brown & Williamson, Lorillard, Philip Morris, and RJ Reynolds, as their menthol brands were the most heavily marketed in African American communities.

To begin interpreting the data, the first and second authors reviewed all documents and selected key documents for review by the third author. Drawing on findings from the retrieved tobacco documents and other relevant textual data sources, we developed an account of tobacco industry marketing activities focused on inner cities. Table 1 shows a geographic account, and Figure 1 shows temporal concentration of selected major tobacco marketing initiatives. We organized material by company and by strategy. The results are presented as follows: we first review background information about menthol cigarettes and industry interest in inner city areas, derived predominantly from

**Table 1.**

**TOBACCO ACTIVITIES AND CENSUS DATA, 1980, IN SELECT CITIES<sup>a</sup>**

| City (census year) | Total population | Race      |         |           |         | Tobacco company inner city activities |           |                    |     |             |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|---------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----|-------------|
|                    |                  | White     |         | Black     |         | Brown & Williamson                    | Lorillard | Philip Morris, USA |     | RJ Reynolds |
|                    |                  | Number    | Percent | Number    | Percent |                                       |           | Morris, USA        | USA |             |
| Atlanta, GA        | 425,022          | 137,879   | 32.4    | 282,911   | 66.6    |                                       | X         | X                  | X   | X           |
| Baltimore, MD      | 786,775          | 345,113   | 43.9    | 431,151   | 54.8    | X                                     | X         | X                  | X   | X           |
| Boston, MA         | 562,994          | 393,937   | 70.0    | 126,229   | 22.4    |                                       | X         | X                  | X   |             |
| Chicago, IL        | 3,005,072        | 1,490,216 | 49.6    | 1,197,000 | 39.8    | X                                     | X         | X                  | X   | X           |
| Cincinnati, OH     | 385,457          | 251,144   | 65.2    | 130,467   | 33.8    | X                                     | X         | X                  | X   | X           |
| Cleveland, OH      | 573,822          | 307,264   | 53.5    | 251,347   | 43.8    |                                       | X         | X                  | X   |             |
| Columbus, OH       | 564,871          | 430,678   | 76.2    | 124,880   | 22.1    |                                       | X         | X                  | X   |             |
| Dallas, TX         | 904,078          | 555,270   | 61.4    | 265,594   | 29.4    |                                       | X         | X                  | X   |             |
| Detroit, MI        | 1,203,339        | 413,730   | 34.4    | 758,939   | 63.1    | X                                     | X         | X                  | X   | X           |
| Durham, NC         | 100,831          | 52,317    | 51.9    | 47,474    | 47.1    |                                       |           |                    |     |             |
| Ft. Lauderdale, FL | 153,279          | 118,983   | 77.6    | 32,225    | 21.0    |                                       | X         | X                  |     |             |
| Hartford, CT       | 136,392          | 68,603    | 50.3    | 46,186    | 33.9    |                                       | X         | X                  |     |             |
| Houston, TX        | 1,595,138        | 978,353   | 61.3    | 440,346   | 27.6    | X                                     | X         | X                  | X   |             |
| Indianapolis, IN   | 700,807          | 540,294   | 77.1    | 152,626   | 21.8    |                                       |           | X                  | X   |             |
| Jackson, MS        | 202,895          | 106,285   | 52.4    | 95,357    | 47.0    |                                       |           | X                  | X   |             |
| Jacksonville, FL   | 540,920          | 394,756   | 73.0    | 137,324   | 25.4    |                                       | X         | X                  | X   |             |
| Los Angeles, CA    | 2,966,850        | 1,816,761 | 61.2    | 505,210   | 17.0    | X                                     | X         | X                  | X   | X           |
| Louisville, KY     | 298,451          | 212,102   | 71.1    | 84,080    | 28.2    |                                       | X         | X                  | X   |             |
| Memphis, TN        | 646,356          | 333,789   | 51.6    | 307,702   | 47.6    | X                                     | X         | X                  | X   | X           |

(Continued on p. 14)

**Table 1 (continued).**

| City (census year) | Total population | Race      |         |           |         | Tobacco company inner city activities |           |                    |             |   |  |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|---------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-------------|---|--|
|                    |                  | White     |         | Black     |         | Brown & Williamson                    | Lorillard | Philip Morris, USA | RJ Reynolds |   |  |
|                    |                  | Number    | Percent | Number    | Percent |                                       |           |                    |             |   |  |
| Miami, FL          | 346,865          | 231,008   | 66.6    | 87,110    | 25.1    |                                       | X         |                    | X           |   |  |
| Milwaukee, WI      | 636,212          | 466,620   | 73.3    | 146,940   | 23.1    |                                       | X         |                    |             |   |  |
| New Haven, CT      | 126,109          | 78,326    | 62.1    | 40,235    | 31.9    |                                       | X         |                    |             |   |  |
| New Orleans, LA    | 557,515          | 236,987   | 42.5    | 308,149   | 55.3    | X                                     |           | X                  |             |   |  |
| New York, NY       | 7,071,639        | 4,294,075 | 60.7    | 1,784,337 | 25.2    | X                                     |           | X                  |             | X |  |
| Norfolk, VA        | 266,979          | 162,300   | 60.8    | 93,987    | 35.2    |                                       |           |                    |             | X |  |
| Oakland, CA        | 339,337          | 129,692   | 38.2    | 159,281   | 46.9    |                                       | X         |                    |             |   |  |
| Paterson, NJ       | 137,970          | 70,203    | 50.9    | 47,091    | 34.1    |                                       | X         |                    |             |   |  |
| Philadelphia, PA   | 1,688,210        | 983,084   | 58.2    | 638,878   | 37.8    |                                       | X         |                    | X           |   |  |
| Pittsburgh, PA     | 423,938          | 316,694   | 74.7    | 101,813   | 24.0    |                                       | X         |                    |             | X |  |
| Richmond, VA       | 219,214          | 104,743   | 47.8    | 112,357   | 51.3    |                                       | X         |                    | X           |   |  |
| St. Louis, MO      | 453,085          | 242,576   | 53.5    | 206,386   | 45.6    |                                       | X         |                    | X           |   |  |
| San Francisco, CA  | 678,974          | 395,081   | 58.2    | 86,414    | 12.7    |                                       | X         |                    | X           |   |  |
| Washington, D.C.   | 638,333          | 171,768   | 26.9    | 448,906   | 70.3    | X                                     |           |                    |             | X |  |

<sup>a</sup>U.S. Census Bureau selected historical census data, 1980.

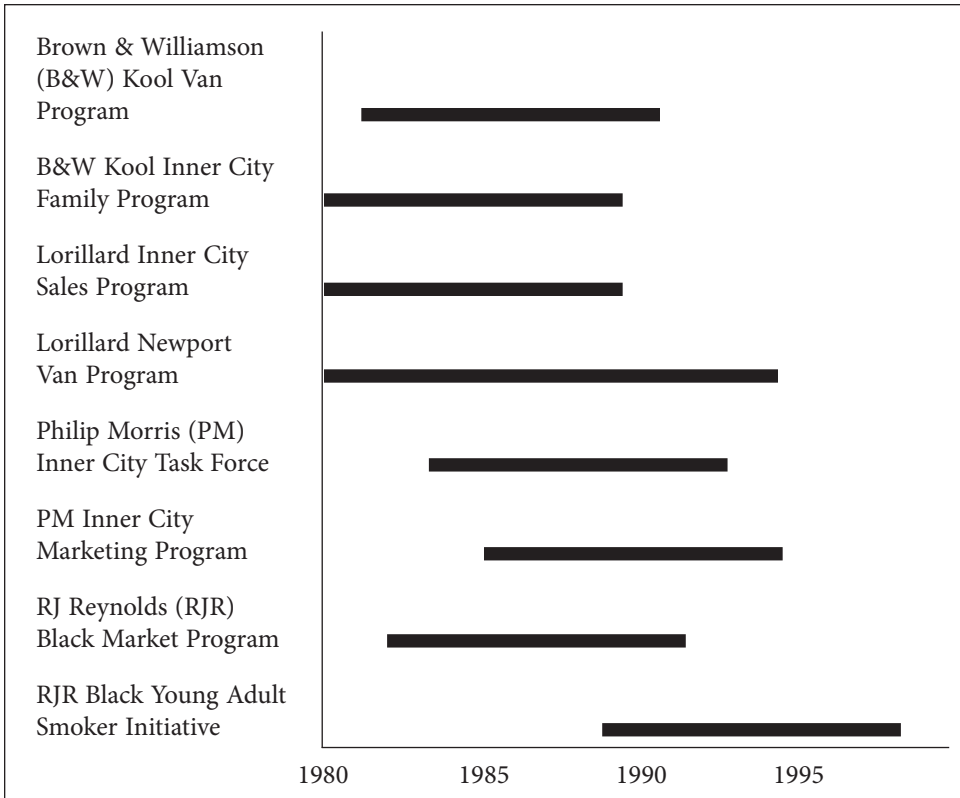


Figure 1. Temporal concentration of selected major tobacco marketing initiatives in U.S. inner cities.

industry documents and secondary sources. We then discuss specific tobacco industry strategies, including studying African American consumers using psychographic and other data; giving out free samples of cigarettes and the use of mobile vans to drive into neighborhoods; specialized inner city retailer programs; and community engagement. We conclude by discussing how today's tobacco-related health disparities were shaped by geographically-specific, intentional and aggressive corporate activity.

## Results

**Background: The tobacco industry and the African American inner city consumer.** Menthol cigarettes have been marketed since the 1920s.<sup>87</sup> Between 1957 and 1963, the menthol share of the total cigarette market grew from 5% to 16%.<sup>88–89</sup> (See Table 2.) By 1964, there were 9 menthol brands, and 23 by 1971.<sup>90</sup> During the 15-year period 1956–1971, the menthol market grew by 48%.<sup>90</sup> By 1982, menthol sales had grown 6 times as fast as sales in the general cigarette market.<sup>91</sup> Salem had dominated the menthol market from its inception in 1956 to 1972, but Kool now led menthol sales. Kool's rise was due in part to its embrace by the African American community.<sup>92</sup>

**Table 2.****MENTHOL U.S. MARKET SHARE, 1920–2001**

| Year      | Market share (%) |
|-----------|------------------|
| 1920–1955 | 2                |
| 1955–1957 | 5                |
| 1963      | 16               |
| 1978      | 28               |
| 1990–2001 | 27–29            |

Source: Gardiner PS. The African Americanization of menthol cigarette use in the United States. *Nicotine Tob Res* 2004;6 Suppl 1:S55–65. (Used with written permission from Nicotine and Tobacco Research.)

As competitive tobacco companies began noticing Kool's increased popularity, especially among African Americans, they began aggressively marketing their menthol products in inner city African American communities.<sup>78,93–97</sup> (Tobacco companies used the term *inner city* to refer to “the usually older and more densely populated central section of a city with large ethnic populations.”<sup>98, p. 5851</sup>) Data collected by or on behalf of tobacco companies revealed that “smoking characteristics of blacks differ significantly from those of whites,” requiring “a different marketing strategy . . . for black consumers.”<sup>99, p. 9184</sup> For decades, tobacco industry research suggested that African Americans were heavy menthol smokers who presented an opportunity for tobacco companies to increase their menthol market share.<sup>100–101</sup> The tobacco companies used multiple avenues designed specifically for the “difficult to reach”<sup>102, p. 5434</sup> group of inner city Black smokers, including analysis of residents' psychographic profiles, mobile van programs through which free cigarettes were distributed, specialized marketing programs, and tailored retail programs. (See Table 3.) According to a 1982 Philip Morris marketing plan, two segments in the African American market were “becoming increasing polarized—half more affluent than ever, and the other significantly lagging the general market in Education and Income.”<sup>103, p. 5627</sup> Tobacco companies were interested in the latter African American consumers, the “younger, less educated, lower in income, urban, [and smoking full-flavor and menthol cigarettes].”<sup>103, p. 5628</sup> Tobacco companies often relied on ethnic marketing firms to provide them with psychographic profiles of African American consumers.<sup>104–110</sup> At least one ethnic marketing firm had multiple tobacco companies as clients.<sup>111–115</sup>

Ethnic marketing firms did more than provide insights into the personalities, behaviors, attitudes, and lifestyles of urban African American consumers. For example, in 1982, SMSi (Special Market Services, Inc.), a Chicago firm that specialized in sampling (giving out for free) cigarettes in minority communities, produced for Philip Morris a report focused on strategies for promoting Benson & Hedges among African American and Hispanic consumers, suggesting specific cities where cigarettes could be sampled.<sup>108</sup> The firm recommended that Philip Morris maintain a “first-class approach” to target



**Table 3.**  
**SAMPLING OF TOBACCO INDUSTRY ACTIVITIES IN U.S. INNER CITY NEIGHBORHOODS**  
**DURING THE 1970s TO 1990s**

| Marketing activity                 | Dates             | Locations  |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| <b>Brown &amp; Williamson</b>      |                   |  |
| Marketing Plans Sales Force        | 01/73–12/73       | Baltimore, MD; Chicago, IL; Cincinnati, OH; Detroit, MI; Houston, TX;  |
| Kool Inner City Music Program      | 1982              | Los Angeles, CA; Memphis, TN; New Orleans, LA; New York City, NY;<br>Washington, DC  |
| Kool Music on Tour Program         | 03/83             | All regions across the U.S.  |
| Kool Van Sampling Program          | 01/84–12/91       |  |
| <b>Lorillard</b>                   |                   |  |
| Media Mix                          | 09/71–12/71       | Chicago; New York City   |
| Criterion (3 Sheet) Program        | 08/74–07/75       | New Jersey; New York City  |
| Newport's 3 and 8 Sheet Showings   | 09/74–06/75       |  |
| Lorillard Marketing Research Study |                   |  |
| Pre-test                           | 09/13/78–09/14/78 | Chicago; Detroit   |
| Pilot Study                        | 09/28/78–09/29/78 | Atlanta, GA; Boston, MA; Chicago; Detroit  |
| Main Study                         | 01/02/79–01/06/79 | Atlanta; Boston; Chicago; Detroit; Jacksonville, FL; Los Angeles; Memphis;<br>New York City  |
| Vantastic Newport Sampler Van      | 09/01/83–09/30/83 | Bronx and Queens, New York City; Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, TX;<br>Hartford, CT; Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, and<br>San Francisco, CA; Paterson, NJ; Philadelphia, PA; Providence, RI<br>New York |
| Play Ball with Newport             | 01/85–12/85       | Madison Square Garden, New York  |
| Krush Groove Concert Van Sampling  | 12/27/85          |  |

(Continued on p. 18)

**Table 3 (continued).**

| Marketing activity                                | Dates             | Locations   |
|---|-------------------|---|
| Newport Van Program (10 Vans)                     | 1988–1991         | All regions across the U.S. (including Alabama; Baltimore/Washington, DC; Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus, OH; Chicago; Connecticut; Detroit and Flint, MI; Florida; Knoxville and Louisville, KY; Massachusetts; Memphis; Milwaukee, WI; Mississippi; New Orleans; Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, PA; Rhode Island; St. Louis, MO; Texas) |
| Newport Inner City Lighter Promotion              | 01/89–03/89       | Baltimore; Boston; Chicago; Detroit; Milwaukee; New York City; Providence; Richmond, VA; Springfield, MA  |
| Pleasure on Wheels (P.O.W.)                       | 11/93–3/31/94     | Detroit; Ft. Lauderdale and Miami, FL; Philadelphia   |
| Newport Promotion Plan                            | 01/94–12/94       | Baltimore/Washington, DC; Albany, Bronx, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse New York; Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven and Stamford, CT; Chicago; Cleveland; Detroit; Ft. Lauderdale; Philadelphia; Pittsburgh; Miami; New Jersey   |
| Newport Special Events Program                    | 01/94–12/94       | Daytona Beach and Panama City, FL; Jersey Shore, NJ; Virginia Beach, VA   |
| <b>Philip Morris, USA</b>                         |                   |   |
| Benson & Hedges (B&H) Inner City Sampling Program | 06/03/85–08/23/85 | Baltimore; Cleveland/Akron and Columbus/Augusta; Chicago; Dallas/Ft.  |
| B & H Inner City Program                          | 06/87–08/87       | Worth; Houston; Jackson, MS; Jacksonville; Los Angeles; Memphis; Miami; New Orleans and Shreveport, LA; Philadelphia; Raleigh/Durham, NC; Richmond, VA; St. Louis; San Francisco  |
| Marlboro Inner City Bar Nights                    | 07/88             |   |
| Soul Food Picnic                                  | 06/18/88–06/19/88 | Indianapolis, IN  |
| Indiana Black Expo Celebration                    | 07/07/88–07/10/88 | Indianapolis  |

(Continued on p. 19)

**Table 3 (continued).**

| Marketing activity                      | Dates       | Locations   |
|---|-------------|---|
| Jazz under the Stars                    | 07/10/88    | Indiana   |
| Golden Memories under the Stars         | 07/88–12/88 |   |
| Region 4 Urban Task Force               | 06/94–07/94 | Chicago; Cleveland; Detroit   |
| Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit             |             |   |
| Menthol Urban Program                   | 06/95–08/95 | Atlanta; Baltimore/Washington, DC; Chicago; Detroit; Houston; Los Angeles; Miami; New York City; Philadelphia   |
| Marlboro/B & H Urban Visibility Program | 12/96–01/97 | Baltimore/Washington, DC; Boston; Chicago; Detroit; Miami; New York City; Philadelphia  |
| Wave 1                                  |             |   |
| Wave 2                                  |             | Atlanta; Houston; Los Angeles; New Orleans  |
| Club B & H Club/Bar Program             | 07/96–11/96 | Atlanta; Chicago; Dallas/Fort Worth; Houston; Los Angeles; New Orleans  |
| <b>RJ Reynolds</b>                      |             |   |
| Bright/Salem Free Pack Coupon In        |             |   |
| Ebony/Essence Magazines                 | 04/81–08/82 |   |
| Bright Black Smoker Trail Sampling      | 03/83–07/83 |   |
| Sterling Sampling Plan                  | 12/83       | Chicago   |
| Salem Black Market Promotion Plan       | 01/84–11/84 | Atlanta; Baltimore/Washington, DC; Chicago; Detroit; Harlem, New York City; Los Angeles; Memphis; Norfolk, VA; Pittsburgh; Other regions in the North and South Atlantic, North and Mid-Central |
| Black Initiative Program                | 04/89–12/89 | Chicago; Cleveland; Memphis   |
| Innovative Sales/Marketing Program      | 04/89–06/89 |   |
| Black YAS Initiative Van Program        | 04/89–04/90 | Chicago; Cleveland; Memphis   |
| Black Initiative Program Expansion      | 07/90       |   |

upscale women in beauty salons and boutiques, suggesting that the company present customers in these establishments with the product sample and a single live long stem flower.<sup>108</sup> Philip Morris chose not to implement SMSi's recommendation, perhaps because it had begun to recognize that Benson & Hedges was gaining "acceptance among the important younger Black smoker group,"<sup>91, p. 8889</sup> ages 18–24, a segment of the population that positioned "the brand very well for the future."<sup>91, p. 8889</sup>

**Sampling and mobile vans.** However it could be accomplished, tobacco companies sought to distribute cigarettes for free. They engaged in street sampling, where sales staff on foot handed out free cigarettes. Sampling included both street corner distribution and *quality sampling*.<sup>116</sup> (Quality sampling indicated an interaction wherein the sampler would spend more time with an individual consumer, as opposed to passing out mass quantities within a small window of time.) At times, samplers were expected to pass out as many as 90 packs per hour, approximately 1.5 packs every minute.<sup>116</sup>

A 1985 sampling manual emphasized, "It is important that sampling be confined to the inner city area to maximize the benefits of Benson & Hedges sampling on the target market,"<sup>116, p. 8013</sup> suggesting that the National Urban League would be a "good recruiting source." Sampling programs sometimes lasted only a few weeks, as tobacco companies implemented intensified, short term targeted menthol marketing programs confined to inner cities to generate interest, trial, and brand-switching among residents.<sup>116</sup> For example, during an 8-week promotional period in 1986, Philip Morris carried out sampling in the top 20 African American markets, passing out free 6-cigarette packs and an attached "Buy 1 Get 1 Free" (B1G1F) coupon.<sup>117</sup> The African American population in each of the markets was used to determine the number of samplers allocated to the market. During a 2-month period in 1991, Philip Morris launched a nationwide Benson & Hedges Menthol B1G1F offer in urban markets that hit some 17,000 outlets, expecting to reach almost 350,000 smokers.<sup>118</sup>

However, street sampling in inner city communities presented challenges. Lorillard, for example, was not only concerned about the lack of high traffic locations in these neighborhoods, but also considered these "minority areas" as "high risk" with the threat of product theft and equipment loss or damage.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, after a dalliance with street sampling, Lorillard introduced an innovation, the Newport Pleasure Van, in 1979.<sup>102</sup> Lorillard's van program started with a single van in the New York metropolitan area and then expanded to 10 vans circulating across the U.S.<sup>119–125</sup>

Vans allowed sample distributors to be protected from "unruly crowds"<sup>122,126</sup> while handing out free cigarettes. Vans not only offered a sense of safety to tobacco company workers as they penetrated what they perceived to be dangerous territory, but provided a way to distribute cigarettes "with a unique attention getting sampling device specifically targeted to difficult to reach minority groups."<sup>102, p. 5434</sup> Vans were reported to have stopped at street corners, perhaps for only 10 minutes, while playing loud music and distributing free cigarettes.<sup>127–128</sup>

Newport van drivers were provided with a daily schedule, detailing a list of cross-street starting points and street corners of interest in the neighborhoods, where free packs of 10 cigarettes were distributed. Vans were parked near selected stores based on their geographic locations and "to reinforce Newport's image as the 'peer brand' among young adult smokers."<sup>129, p. 2731</sup> In a 1981 memo to all division managers in the

Cincinnati, Dayton, and Columbus, Ohio regions, an assistant Newport brand manager wrote that “The Newport Van is proving to be a uniquely effective vehicle for reaching this target market in their own environment [*sic*],” as “Newport’s target group of young adults/blacks is difficult to reach via coupons and standard street corner crew sampling.”<sup>120, p. 6117</sup> The van program catch phrase, shown as a signature on Lorillard van-related documents, was: “When your target group is hard to reach / With a standard marketing plan, / Get out and sample them on their streets / With the ‘Vantastic’ Newport Sampler Van.”<sup>120, p. 6117</sup>

In March 1983, Brown & Williamson instituted its Kool van program for inner cities, determining that vans had “proven to be an intrusive non-traditional media venue as well as an effective, cost-efficient sampling device.”<sup>130, p. 0535</sup> The Kool van program, also known as Kool Music on Tour,<sup>131</sup> was created to access “Kool’s hard-to-reach, low readership starter market and target audience,”<sup>130,132</sup> specifically targeting “inner city, young adult competitive smokers.”<sup>133, p. 1291</sup> (The phrase *starter market* is usually interpreted as referring to youth, since the great majority of smokers take up tobacco before the age of 18.<sup>134</sup>) Kool vans were staffed with a professional DJ and a tobacco company employee who handed out free cigarettes.

By 1985, vans were the primary sampling medium for distributing Kool cigarettes, entering neighborhoods in more than 50 cities where Newport, Salem, and Benson & Hedges Menthol sales were strong.<sup>133</sup> Brown & Williamson evaluated demographic information from the Chambers of Commerce, regional festival directors and groups, state fairs, trade shows and exhibitions to identify sampling opportunities.<sup>130</sup> The Kool Music on Tour program continued until at least 1991 with 3 vans, concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest.<sup>135</sup>

RJ Reynolds had determined that Lorillard’s van program was instrumental to Newport’s growth among African American young adult smokers.<sup>127</sup> Inspired by Lorillard, Reynolds also established a van sampling program, aimed to increase Salem’s visibility in Chicago. Brightly-painted video vans were fitted with state-of-the-art electronic equipment and displayed music videos.<sup>136</sup> Sent to Chicago nightclubs, the vans caught potential Salem customers entering and leaving the clubs. The vans also displayed live video coverage of the inside club action, thereby entertaining the younger crowd hanging around outside the club.<sup>136</sup>

During the day, the three video vans called on retailers and Salem sales teams in the Chicago area.<sup>136</sup> The vans also traveled to parks, construction sites, bingo halls, street corners, parking lots, and local sports events.<sup>128,137</sup> They made appearances at urban street malls, public aid offices, currency exchanges, housing projects, public transit stops, and other venues.<sup>138</sup> Vans were also used to increase Salem’s visibility at street festivals and other neighborhood events. A Reynolds marketing representative proposed that the video vans display community service messages focusing on drug awareness, staying in school, and African American History.<sup>139</sup> Each van took part in as many as 60 events per week. A field marketing manager reported that the vans “work the streets and stores all day and the clubs at night. It can be 20 hours a day, seven days a week.”<sup>136, p. 8941</sup>

Although other companies used vans to distribute cigarettes in inner cities, Lorillard’s van program was the most far-reaching. In 1993, Lorillard decided to change

“the strategic thrust of the Newport Van Program from a sampling vehicle to a more aggressive approach,”<sup>140, p. 4259</sup> whereby retail store sales were tracked and smokers were offered inducements to generate impulsive purchases of Newports.<sup>140-141</sup> Participant “name capture” cards were used to collect contact information from Newport and competitive brand smokers in exchange for a promotional item.<sup>142-143</sup> Lorillard ran this POW (Pleasure On Wheels) van program from February through November 1994. The program drew business away from competitors (especially Kool)<sup>144</sup> in the inner city neighborhoods of New York, Miami/Fort Lauderdale, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Detroit.<sup>145-147</sup> After Newport came to dominate the urban menthol market, Lorillard reduced the number of vans it operated and then shifted its van program to the general market, though the company continued to focus on lower socioeconomic groups.<sup>148</sup> According to a March 1992 memo to regional sales managers, Lorillard’s plan was to “move out of the inner City Core to the general market . . . van sampling will be targeted to blue collar smokers.”<sup>149, p. 7856</sup>

In some cities, such as Atlanta, public restrictions prevented van sampling. There, sampling specialists were used to gain access to privately owned areas including bars, small events, and other allowable venues.<sup>125</sup> Philip Morris relied on local samplers to use their area-specific knowledge to identify the best locations. Samplers were to work at inner city high traffic locations or events, such as sporting events, concerts, factory shift changes, bowling alleys, and outside movie theaters, and “where a relaxed, personalized message can be delivered.”<sup>116, p. 8014</sup> Other locations included nightclubs, beauty salons, barbershops, fashion boutiques, and restaurants. Samplers were instructed not to get involved in conversations about smoking and health. Rather, they were urged to respond to such inquiries with, “I respect your opinion, and I’m sorry that you feel that way. Thank you” or “I’m afraid I am not sufficiently qualified to comment on that question. Thank you.”<sup>116, p. 8025</sup>

**Specialized marketing programs.** All the companies developed special inner city sales programs for menthol brands. For example, during the early to mid-1970s, Kool did well in the inner city market; in 1976, 38% of African American smokers used Kools,<sup>92</sup> a jump of 24 percentage points in 8 years. Among African American male smokers under age 35, nearly 60% smoked Kool. Increased competition for these African American menthol smokers led to a marketing blitz.<sup>150</sup> A summary provided by Brown & Williamson’s advertising and brand management team noted, “Competitors have been increasing their efforts to counter Kool’s success, and means to combat this activity will be a continuing effort.”<sup>151, p. 9109</sup> For the next 10 years, Brown & Williamson focused on maintaining Kool’s visibility in inner cities.

To compete with Kool, Lorillard increased Newport’s marketing efforts in geographical areas with large concentrations of African Americans.<sup>96</sup> Lorillard aggressively targeted Kool smokers, developing inner city sales programs to support markets where Newport sales were already strong and seeking to narrow the sales ratio in those markets where Newport was trailing Kool.<sup>152</sup> Lorillard initially decided to target both African American and Hispanic young adults with a high school education or less who resided “in tough inner city neighborhoods;”<sup>153-154</sup> however, the company soon found that “Newport, along with other menthol brands, have [sic] been unable to crack this [Hispanic] market.”<sup>96, p. 7635</sup> Field sales reps reported that Newport was succeeding “predominantly

among males, in the Black inner city.”<sup>155, p. 4936</sup> Therefore, the company reallocated funds to the African American inner city market’s “more promising opportunities.”<sup>96</sup> By 1988, Lorillard had implemented inner city sales programs in the urban markets of Detroit and Flint, Michigan.<sup>152</sup> Within 2 years, these efforts reached over 30 “ethnic niches” in the Northeast and Midwest, including Chicago, Baltimore, Detroit, Boston, and Cleveland; and nightclubs in New Orleans, Atlanta, St. Louis, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Indianapolis.<sup>156–157</sup>

Lorillard’s strategies included maintaining a highly visible Newport brand presence, focusing on trial and conversion from smokers of competitive brands, distribution drives, increased numbers of point-of-sales materials, sampling, special event coverage, increased levels of advertising support, and rewarding retailers for promoting Newport.<sup>158</sup> Promotional items such as key chains, sports bags, sunglasses, lighters, and B1G1F offers were used as tools to encourage smokers of other menthol brands, but particularly Kool smokers, to switch to Newport.<sup>96,153,159</sup>

Recognizing minority markets as “virgin territories,”<sup>103</sup> Philip Morris implemented African American ethnic and urban programs beginning in 1982 and continuing through the early 1990s. In its 1982 minority marketing plan, Philip Morris proposed to improve the performance of Benson & Hedges among African American smokers.<sup>103</sup> The plan contains pages of demographic profiling of African Americans and Hispanics and charts showing advertising expenditures of competitive brands in African American print media. Philip Morris’s action plan recommended company sponsorship of community and national events and included a list of African American organizations.

In 1984, Philip Morris’s Black Marketing Task Force met in Washington D.C. to discuss “the very important Black smoker segment.”<sup>160, p. 0074</sup> The task force concluded that Benson & Hedges Menthol and Virginia Slims were the only Philip Morris brands “that can be really ‘worked’ [in the] inner city.”<sup>161, p. 1444</sup> Strategies presented by the task force included promotional plans, incentives, advertising, sampling programs, materials, communication, and the assignment of African American samplers to the inner city. As with Lorillard, a heavy emphasis was placed on B1G1F deals, incentives for inner city retailers, and promotional items that would appeal to African American consumers, such as playing cards, blank cassette tapes, cigarette cases, and lighters.<sup>162</sup>

With its share of the menthol market declining from 22.4% in 1981 to 15.8% in 1987, Reynolds began to focus heavily on Black young adult smokers (BYAS), who were considered critical to the success of all menthol styles.<sup>127</sup> Inner city African American young adults were also important because they were seen as trendsetters. As a marketing research report presented to RJ Reynolds suggested, “The daring, flamboyant aspect of YA [young adult] Black smokers’ personalities are evident in **the many trends they start**. And the fact that these trends often spread to the general population speaks to the **unrecognized power and influence** this subgroup yields on society. . . . Trends are often started by lower income Black males who are looking for a way to be important or interesting, to create their own identity . . . [emphases in original].”<sup>163, p. 7657</sup>

Reynolds concluded that Newport was doing so well in the menthol market because Lorillard concentrated its efforts with one brand targeted to one population. Deciding to do the same, Reynolds focused all “BYAS [black young adult smoker] marketing resources” on Salem “since it is an acceptable choice among BYAS and accounts for

two-thirds of RJR's BYAS share.”<sup>127, p. 0163</sup> From April 1989 to April 1990, Reynolds implemented its BYAS Initiative, targeting high density lower-income African American neighborhoods of Chicago, Cleveland, and Memphis.<sup>127-128</sup> To determine specific boundaries of target neighborhoods within these markets, Reynolds conducted interviews in ZIP code areas pre-defined as inner city, at least 50% African American, and with yearly household incomes under \$20,000.<sup>164</sup>

The BYAS Initiative sought to reverse Salem's declining trend among younger adult African American smokers and increase sales by getting African Americans to try Salem. Special advertising, promotions, and “a variety of other carefully coordinated sales and marketing programs”<sup>136, p. 8939</sup> began appearing in these markets. When radio stations featured known performers, Salem would be there, too.<sup>136</sup> Reynolds marketers emphasized that “Salem should be seen as a friend.”<sup>163</sup> “The best way to reach minority consumers,” they argued, was “through their local communities, . . . [which] tend to support brands that they see are doing something for them. [But these efforts] must be seen as authentic and as being backed by other Blacks—not as a big White company's tactic to sell to Blacks.”<sup>163, p. 7655</sup>

**Inner city retailer programs.** Retail outlets located in inner cities presented challenges, including limitations on product availability and visibility, space constraints, retail clutter, high crime rates, and cash flow restrictions.<sup>126,155,160</sup> Additionally, inner city retail outlets were often secured with bullet-proof shields, which not only limited the space available for advertisements and merchandise but also eliminated self-service product selection. Tobacco companies' field representatives and/or ethnic marketing firms developed special efforts aimed at smaller, crowded neighborhood retail outlets in inner cities.<sup>115,136</sup>

Philip Morris acquired “Black accounts,” primarily smaller liquor, grocery, and convenience stores in inner cities. These accounts were intended to replace others lost due to the larger supermarkets moving out of inner cities.<sup>162</sup> Philip Morris sought to remove impediments that prevented these small retailers from maintaining and selling cigarettes at acceptable levels. To save space, suction cups were used to hang signs from bullet-proof shielding; pricing signs incorporated personalized messages concerning such matters as the availability of check cashing services.<sup>162</sup> Product displays, existing versions of which were too large and required a major retailer investment, were specially re-designed for inner city retail outlets.<sup>161</sup> To ensure that cigarette displays were visible and well-stocked, inner city retailers were also offered incentives to display promotional items.<sup>156</sup> For example, Philip Morris paid retailers \$20 to \$40 to expand inventories and maintain visually prominent displays.<sup>165</sup> Additionally, Philip Morris increased the number of promotions offered monthly. This program, described as “the living laboratory,” was initially tested in Detroit.<sup>165</sup> The program then expanded nationwide, including only menthol brand extensions of Benson & Hedges, Marlboro, Virginia Slims, and Alpine.<sup>166</sup>

Using ZIP codes to identify inner city neighborhood boundaries, Brown & Williamson implemented its Kool Inner City Point of Purchase (POP) Program in 1978 “to reach the core of Kool's franchise (young, black, relatively low income and education)”<sup>98, p. 5852</sup> and tackle the issues of poor product display and out-of-stock conditions. Later named the Kool Inner City Family Program, it targeted the top 20 African



American markets in the U.S., concentrating in the Northeast, Central, Southeast, and Southwest. Promotions included free gifts for retailers with monthly payments, a free carton of cigarettes for every 10 cartons purchased by distributors, and a multitude of consumer offers.<sup>167</sup>

Ethnic POP materials were employed, including marketing items with African American models that were poised to be “down to earth and not resemble the Harvard Black . . .”<sup>167, p. 0342</sup> Special community events were also an important part of inner city targeting. In 1974, for example, Reynolds sponsored the Winston/Salem Cadillac sweepstakes in Chicago, in which Cadillacs were the prizes for both smokers and the local retailers of cigarettes. This promotion was intended to “generate excitement” and “strengthen Winston and Salem position [*sic*] in the young urban adult Black community.”<sup>168, p. 0004</sup>

In the 1980s, because event sponsorship was a key element of its “Special Market” activities, Reynolds developed Salem Summer Street Scenes.<sup>169,170</sup> These 2-day festivals were held in the early 1980s “inside neighborhoods that [were] predominantly Black” to position Salem as a member of the community while distributing cigarettes. Reynolds reported that Salem Street Scenes reached at least 50% of the African American population in Memphis, Detroit, Chicago, New York, and Washington D.C.<sup>170</sup> The company also sponsored neighborhood events to “create an association between the brand and culturally relevant activities for the inner city Black smoker.”<sup>171, p. 7889</sup>

Brown & Williamson also determined that involvement in community events was “critical to the success of its inner city program.”<sup>172, p. 3353</sup> It operated the Kool Jazz festivals<sup>173</sup> and Summer Fest inner city music program<sup>174</sup> for years; it also considered funding inner city music festivals that were free to the public as a direct extension of Kool advertising.<sup>175</sup>

Philip Morris, similarly, was urged to “become more intimately involved in community affairs” to increase visibility in inner cities.<sup>160</sup> Philip Morris began sponsoring Black Expos around the country, beginning with the 1988 Indiana Black Expo.<sup>176</sup> Sponsoring national expos gave Philip Morris the opportunity both to advertise its product and to distribute free Benson & Hedges cigarettes to crowds of over 325,000. At the Indiana Black Expo, for example, Philip Morris’s promotion included stage signage, a \$25,000 check presentation, and remarks made on stage during the concert, and distribution of 10,000 samples, primarily Benson & Hedges cigarettes.<sup>177</sup>

Between 1995 and 1998, Philip Morris activities included “Club Benson & Hedges” promotional bar nights, which targeted 21–45 year-old “urban/ethnic markets.”<sup>178</sup> “The brightest up and coming stars in urban music” were showcased in front of an estimated 100,000 consumers, who were “rewarded” with VIP treatment and preferential purchase opportunities. “Passport to 100 Urban Night Clubs,” a promotional item billed as “America’s only national entertainment guide which features establishments located within the inner city, frequented by African-Americans,” was distributed to those attending any Club Benson & Hedges event.<sup>179</sup> It provided information about nightclubs, restaurants, attractions, annual events, and other social happenings in African American communities. After 13 years of using music to promote its Benson & Hedges brand while seeking a “diverse consumer base,” Philip Morris suspended the brand’s promotional activities in 1999.<sup>180</sup>

**The “menthol wars”:** **Summary.** For 3 decades, the major tobacco companies competed aggressively to attract inner city African American smokers. In 1976, Kool had a 32.1% share of the African American market, and Salem followed with 13.5%. Benson & Hedges and Newport trailed behind with 3.1% and 2% shares, respectively. By 1978, Kool was still in the lead, but with only a 4% increase from 1976, compared with Benson & Hedges’s 39% increase.<sup>181</sup> As other brands increased market share, Brown & Williamson grew concerned. Kool’s share of the market was leveling off, possibly due to competitive advertising leading to brand switching.<sup>182</sup> Newport, which had consistently received the largest budget of all Lorillard brands, doubled its share of the menthol market from 22.4% in 1981 to 47.8% in 1987, while its competitors all lost half their market share.<sup>127</sup> As a result, Salem, Kool, and Benson & Hedges Menthol sales faltered during the 1980s.

## Discussion

Our study has limitations. The Legacy Tobacco Documents Library contains more than 7 million internal tobacco industry documents (over 40 million pages). Because our search terms retrieved only those documents where our particular search terms were associated with indexed fields (e.g., title, author, date), we were not able to search the full text within the document pages; thus, we may not have retrieved every document relevant to our research topic, and this may have caused us to understate the true extent of tobacco industry activities in inner city neighborhoods during the late 1970s–1990s. Since we completed data collection for this study, a full-text site containing the documents has been developed (<http://ltdlftd.library.ucsf.edu/queryform.jsp>) which might be used to identify additional documents; however, the sheer quantity of material available forces researchers to make decisions about which search terms retrieve the most relevant material. In any historical or archival study, the possibility always exists that material that later becomes available will shed additional light on the phenomena of interest. However, we believe that the documentary evidence abundantly supports our primary findings, highlighting the consistency of geographical patterns of activities across companies.

Though the targeting of African Americans and poor people has been previously documented,<sup>16,17,78,81</sup> this study shows specifically how temporal intersections between race, class, geography, and corporate marketing shaped and perpetuated “inner cities” as marginalized places and, in turn, how the racialized geography of those places spurred development of innovative technologies for the industrial promotion of menthol cigarettes. Race and class fundamentally shaped the inner city menthol wars described here. While African Americans were not the largest group of menthol smokers, African American smokers overwhelmingly chose menthol, and African Americans were quitting at lower rates than Whites. Thus, geographic areas such as inner cities, with their large concentrations of African American residents, represented efficient sites for promotion and growth opportunities for every menthol brand.

As “White flight” left inner city cores of poverty and racial segregation during the late 20th century,<sup>41–42,183–186</sup> it left behind neighborhoods that were challenging for marketers. Lack of employment opportunities contributed to rising poverty and crime.

These sociogeographic circumstances led tobacco companies to develop the innovation of the mobile van for distributing free samples of cigarettes throughout neighborhoods in which employees felt unsafe on foot. The insulated mobility of vans, accompanied by music and other attractions, enabled tobacco companies to safely counter the threat of crime while covering larger territories.

Other technological innovations were also developed specifically to deal with the geographic particularities of the inner city. As major retailers moved out of urban cores, the multiple small retail outlets that spread throughout these neighborhoods became the only places through which companies could sell goods. As this study shows, the smaller scale of these stores prompted tobacco companies to develop scaled down, specialized display units that served other purposes for retailers, kept products always attractive, visible, and easily accessible, and ensured that retailers did not run out of stock.

The menthol wars were also aided by the refinement during this period of demographic and psychographic profiling that allowed marketers to appeal more effectively to different groups. Even with these tools, however, companies made many missteps in trying to connect with inner city African Americans.<sup>187-189</sup> Companies addressed these missteps by engaging African American marketers who specialized in reaching poor, less educated, and predominantly African American populations.

It would be wrong to suggest that inner city residents were simply passive victims of tobacco marketers. Many within these communities built their capacity and infrastructure to actively resist the targeting of their communities via marketing for deadly products, and in some cases did so with remarkable effectiveness.<sup>16,190-192</sup> One cannot ignore, however, the enormous power differentials that exist between corporations and inner city neighborhood groups, and the ways in which the innovations of tobacco companies allowed them to overcome the disadvantages that inner cities posed for their marketing activities. Those activities, which contributed to increased cigarette smoking, had negative health and economic consequences for inner city residents, reinforcing their marginalized social position and increasing the likelihood that they would be unable to extricate themselves from poverty.<sup>193</sup>

Lung cancer is perhaps the disease most associated with cigarette smoking. Prior to the early 1960s, the mortality rate for lung cancer for White men was higher than for African American men.<sup>194</sup> During the 1960s, African American men and White men were dying of lung cancer at similar rates. However, beginning in the 1970s, the overall age-adjusted death rate for lung cancer for African American men surpassed that of White men. Similarly, beginning in the 1970s, the overall age-adjusted death rate for oral cancer among African American men surpassed that of White men and by the 1980s the death rate was twice as high for African American men than for White men.<sup>194</sup> The overall age-adjusted death rate for cancer of the larynx remained stable for Whites; however, between the 1950s and 1990s the rates had increased by 260% for African American men and approximately 233% for African American women.<sup>194</sup>

This study suggests that the tobacco-related health disparities that disfavor residents of many lower-income urban cores today were not solely determined by factors such as unhealthy habits and unequal access to health services. Tobacco-related health disparities were shaped as well by geographically specific and (when compared with White neighborhoods) intentionally disproportionate levels and *types* of aggressive

cigarette marketing and promotion,<sup>16,31,81</sup> carried out over multiple decades. They were in a fundamental way *industrially created*. Ending health disparities, therefore, cannot focus merely on identifying individual health behaviors or risk factors: it also means naming, resisting, and politically organizing resourceful defenses against corporate vectors of disease and attending to the social injustices that shape inner cities as targets. Recent efforts to emphasize community participatory research<sup>195–198</sup> could represent opportunities to organize efforts to counter industry influence and re-shape the racialized geography of health in inner cities.

## Notes

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