

Where There's Smoke . . .

A campaign by cigarette makers to woo black smokers has sparked a heated debate.

By Ellen Schultz

Every day, on his way to work, Dr. Harold Freeman, chief of surgery at Harlem Hospital, passes a billboard in the middle of 125th Street. A vibrant, glamorous

Nonetheless, the tobacco industry spends millions each year on outdoor advertising, print ads in the black newspapers and magazines, promotional efforts and good-will contributions to black organizations. Those dollars are hard to

more than three times as many eight-sheet tobacco ads are targeted to blacks as to whites or Hispanics.

The tobacco industry's presence in the black community is felt in even more direct ways. R.J. Reynolds sponsors Salem

This Virginia Slims billboard, focusing on glamor and success, is part of an intense marketing effort aimed at black consumers.

young black woman in the ad holds a smokeless cigarette and assures any passer-by that "you've come a long way, baby." The rest of the day, Dr. Freeman confronts a steady stream of emphysema, lung cancer, cancer of the esophagus, and pulmonary heart disease. Most of the cases are terminal. In fact, as is all too clear at Harlem Hospital, 43% of all blacks dying in the U.S. succumb to smoking-related diseases.

The statistics paint a distressing picture: The incidence of smoking-related diseases is much higher in blacks than whites. As a result, health associations such as the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association and the American Lung Association have criticized the tobacco industry's intense marketing efforts aimed at blacks.

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turn down. The majority of the ads in black newspapers, for example, are for cigarettes. Magazines also get their share; in 1986 tobacco ads accounted for a substantial 9% of the ad pages in *Ebony* and 8% in *Essence*. A walk through most

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predominantly black neighborhoods will show the heavy saturation of billboards hawking cigarettes. According to a recent study by the Eight Sheet Outdoor Advertising Association, 35% of the reported total expenditures for eight-sheet advertising in the U.S. is spent on tobacco ads placed in black communities, and

Spirit Street Scenes at black neighborhood festivals and distributes More cigarettes, which are positioned to appeal to young women, at the Ebony Fashion Fair, a traveling fashion show that drew 350,000 people in more than 180 cities last year. The Brown & Williamson Co. used to be known for putting on the Kool Jazz Festival; it now sponsors the Kool Achiever Awards for people who have improved life in the inner city.

Of more concern to critics is the fact that tobacco companies contribute heavily to black organizations, such as the United Negro College Fund and the NAACP. (Neither group will disclose the amounts contributed.)

Does this raise a conflict-of-interest issue for black leaders? Critics charge that contributions are merely part of the tobacco industry's marketing efforts and that the donations serve to silence black leaders on the topic of smoking-related

HOTTEST MARKETS 1987

illnesses. "Their promotional activities are meant to buy the good will of the black communities, and their philanthropy is designed to buy off the black leadership," says Michael Pertschuk, former chairman of the Federal Trade Commission and now co-director of the Advocacy Institute, a Washington-based group that trains citizen-advocacy groups.

The American Cancer Society recently started monitoring the influence of cigarette companies on black organizations and keeping track of how often they take the same side on issues of public interest. Last year, for example, the NAACP joined Philip Morris in urging black journalists to help defeat clean-air bills on the grounds that such laws discriminate against black smokers.

Dr. Freeman, who will be the president of the American Cancer Society next year, is touched by the tobacco companies' concern for black smokers' civil rights but believes the rights of non-smoking blacks are equally important. "It's quite clear from the Surgeon General's report that passive smoking causes respiratory illness, so we should be concerned with the rights of blacks who choose not to breathe other people's smoke."

At a time when cigarette consumption among whites is declining, demographic characteristics of the black population make it highly attractive to marketers of cigarettes. Blacks smoke more than whites; 40% of black males smoke, compared with 31% of white males. And 31% of black women smoke, compared with 28% of white women. Other factors make blacks attractive targets: As a population they're younger, less affluent and less educated—the basic smoker's profile. (It's interesting to note that *Black Enterprise*, whose readership skews upscale, received only 2.5% of its 1986 ad revenue of \$10 million from cigarette advertisers.) And though blacks are just as likely as whites to become addicted to smoking, they're less likely to quit. According to the National Institute for Health Statistics, only 15.8% of black male smokers between the ages of 20 and 44 have quit, compared with 23% of white males. And 9% of black

women in the same age range have quit, compared with 17.7% of white women.

James A. Swomley, managing director of the American Lung Association, says that, given the decline of white male smokers, the tobacco industry has taken advantage of young people and women with clever marketing techniques that glamorize smoking and try to identify it with social success. "Now they're trying

American Cancer Society, black magazines run no articles or public-service ads about the hazards of smoking. (Black newspapers and magazines declined to comment on their policies concerning cigarette ads or stories about smoking.)

Efforts to educate young blacks about the hazards of smoking have picked up. The American Cancer Society has an anti-smoking spot aimed at young blacks.

The spot shows how a young woman is constantly rejected by other young people because she smokes. The tag: "Don't be a Draggin' Lady."

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst was recently awarded a \$2.5-million grant to investigate why blacks smoke more than other minority groups and to develop programs to help blacks stop smoking. Both the Tobacco Institute, an industry trade group, and the NAACP have criticized the project on the grounds that such a program is racist and paternalistic. "Anti-smoking groups can't accept that blacks understand the Surgeon General's warning and can make their own decisions about smoking," says Walker Merryman, a spokesman for the Tobacco Institute. The reason that anti-smoking groups are paying attention to blacks, he says, is that "the ad-ban effort is going down in flames" and such groups are merely using the issue of black-aimed tobacco marketing to attract publicity.

Harlem Hospital's Dr. Freeman says, "If there's any paternalism, it's on the part of the tobacco industry, which goes into black communities like a missionary, saying, 'This is what you should do to look and feel good.'"

George Edwards, president/chief executive officer of NBN Broadcasting, which owns the National Black Radio Network, says that those who criticize black media for accepting cigarette advertising are hypocritical. "They have nothing to lose. They don't know about the problems of black media and what it has to do to survive. They don't get their fair share of ad revenue anyway, so should they decide to ban tobacco ads, a lot of publications might as well close their doors and auction off the furniture." □



A building in Newark, N.J., is the site for a cigarette hard-sell.

to exploit blacks by targeting them with ads of similar themes." Such cigarette ads typically show role models—successful, glamorous young blacks in night clubs and on ski slopes.

Dr. Alan Blum, founder of Doctors Ought to Care, a national community-action group of physicians, is concerned by studies that show that 90% of all tobacco users become addicted as children. He worries that young blacks don't hear anti-smoking messages from the black media. Black organizations, such as the NAACP, sponsor no anti-smoking campaigns. According to a spokesman for the