

January 10, 1990



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Dr. Tracy Orleans
Fox-Chase Cancer Center
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Dear Tracy:

Thank you for thinking of me in regard to the effort to counteract the introduction of the RJR cigarette brand Uptown in Philadelphia next month. It's good to know that Fox Chase, Irv Rimer, Bob Robinson, and you will be working to attract attention to this test market campaign. De-marketing Uptown by laughing it out of town may be an important step in undermining RJR.

Enclosed are a few items that I hope will provide some background on the subject in general as well as on DOC's and my involvement in opposing tobacco industry targeting of minority groups.

This is an uphill battle, to say the least. RJR and Philip Morris have not only insinuated themselves into the black community, they have succeeded in receiving the blessing and support of black civic organizations, black publications, and the black establishment. Criticism of this relationship has been met with outraged cries of racism and threats of litigation. At a recent meeting of the NAACP, its head the Reverend Benjamin Hooks publicly denounced a reporter for raising the question of the NAACP's acceptance of tobacco industry funding and challenged critics to look at the far more extensive financial relationships between the tobacco industry and non-black institutions.

He recalled when Philip Morris was picketed by the KKK for hiring blacks. Similar sentiments were expressed to me by Chris Edley, head of the United Negro College Fund, in 1984 when I asked him about the organization's close ties with Philip Morris. The company was supporting the UNCF "long before there was a cancer scare," he said. When a CBS reporter asked him whether he had any problem with accepting money from RJR, he replied, "it comes to us green." (Hooks, Jesse Jackson, Marva Collins, and Earl Monroe currently appear in a corporate ad for Philip Morris products.)

All of which is to point out that national leadership is in short supply when it comes to smoking issues--in black and non-black communities alike. (I seem to recall that the

Miami division of the American Cancer Society was a beneficiary of the Doral cigarettes Golf Tournament and the Virginia Slims Tennis Tournament until the mid 1970's; so black organizations aren't alone.) As much progress as has been made in the past five years, it is important to point out that the AMA had no position on cigarette advertising (and barely one on smoking itself) as late as December 1985, and the voluntaries had also pretty much avoided the advertising issue until the early 1980's. There is still no national paid counteradvertising strategy to oppose the annual \$3 billion in tobacco industry promotion. The reason the ACS does not buy ad space is because it feels it should rely on free donated public service ads and also because it genuinely does not believe it can compete against the money cigarette advertisers spend. This logic is flawed on counts too numerous to mention. For one thing, I believe that the industry needs to spend every penny of the \$3 billion to reach and hold its market; counteradvertising dollars need only be allocated in a miniscule amount compared to the cigarette ads to get attention (unfortunately, most of the money that goes for paid counterads is frittered away into market research and testing). For another, the multifarious organizations fighting smoking seem more concerned with promoting their own "brand name" organization than combating the source of the tobacco problem--the tobacco industry.

Because I believe that a very small investment in mass media will go a long way, I'm not ultimately as pessimistic as I may sound. Some very caring and angry people are beginning to get involved in opposing the tobacco industry's exploitation of the black community, most notably Reed Tuckson, D.C. health commissioner and a few of the syndicated columnists such as Carl Rowan and Robert Newberry.

As we discussed, the fact of the matter is that mere moral outrage over "Uptown" may accomplish little more than one day's press coverage. If this is indeed the straw that broke the camel's back, why not call for a boycott of all RJR products, notably Nabisco cookies and cereals? Why not call attention to the already enormous toll taken in the black community by RJR's other "premier" brands Winston, Camel, Salem and More (the last two heavily promoted to blacks, while Winston and Camel are heavily targeted to Hispanics)? Why not expose the consumer fraud of cigarettes in general (enormous mark-up from cost-of-manufacture, chemical additives, menthol an anaesthetic)?

My suggestion is to decide as precisely as possible what the coalition would most like to see happen. If it's the withdrawal of Uptown, then that strikes me as no big deal.

It would be akin to the Newport ad with the possibly pregnant woman that caused outrage a couple of years ago--so the company pulled that particular ad and its other ads came off looking more "responsible." Or the RJR ads in 1985 saying that the evidence on smoking and heart disease wasn't conclusive. Four years after the campaign ended the FTC said Reynolds was off-base.

I would not be surprised if some black publications and political figures are tromped out by the cigarette company to accuse Uptown critics of racism and paternalism. This must be anticipated and be addressed in a non-defensive way. If I were in RJR (which is what you have to try to think of if you want to understand how the industry works), I'd sponsor jazz concerts and nightclubs coinciding with the introduction of the cigarette. Indeed, this is what Philip Morris did with its Blues brand in the Cleveland test market (DOC paid a housecall on the nightclub with signs that read, "lung cancer gives you the blues"). It is also what Philip Morris has been doing in Philadelphia for the past two years, with the cooperation of the city government, in the sponsorship of free Benson and Hedges jazz concerts and Parliament rock concerts. When I gave the banquet address at the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Thoracic Society last September in Philadelphia, I was unable to identify a single member of the audience who would volunteer to attend Parliament's free Kid Creole and the Coconuts concert the following night.

In addition to expressing outrage (especially by citizens most directly being targeted), the coalition, various constituent members, or unaffiliated groups or persons needs to create other angles. Humor is essential, and we will provide you with the Upchuck artwork for appropriate unveiling at a press conference. (If there is objection to Upchuck, then DOC can take out a separate ad if need be.)

Hypocrisy is a third and perhaps most important objective:

1. RJR remained heavily involved in South Africa long after most other American corporations departed (ranked, I recall, number 2 in American corporations in South Africa for a time). This could be checked with the Reverend Leon Sullivan in Philadelphia.
2. Billboards are a blight on the black community. Such visual pollution is a problem over and above the lung pollution the cigarette ads lead to. Professor Ed McMahon of Scenic America (202-546-1100) will be a tremendous help on this important aspect.
3. Enlisting local jazz stars to recount the number of their colleagues who have died from smoking may help undermine the Uptown image.
4. Coming up with a cartoon-like character to spoof RJR would be worthwhile; you may even be able to

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get Gary Trudeau's approval for a surprise visit by Mr. Butts. Street theater is essential. 5. Understanding the use of "us vs. them" and African-American is essential to successful strategy; we need to discuss this.

Mailing

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I would urge you to keep the press packet simple, with a 2-3 page press release, two or three background articles, and a reproduction of the Upchuck logo. Above all, try to avoid using the occasion to promote the agenda of any constituent member or organization in the coalition. A list of co-sponsors and a one or two line statement from each sponsor who chooses to be quoted will suffice. The more co-sponsors the better. Please try to recruit nurses' organizations, teachers groups, black sororities, and the Pennsylvania Academy of Family Physicians (Ed Nielsen). I hope Bill Gottshall of Pittsburgh could be included in some way; he did a terrific job in mobilizing anti-smoking efforts for the American Cancer Society and was fired for his efforts.

I hope we can get together soon. I'd also like to follow-up with Bob Robinson on some project ideas we tossed around. Please keep me posted on Uptown.

Sincerely,


Alan Blum, M.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Family Medicine

AB/tw
Enclosures