

# Reynolds right to drop black-aimed cigarette test

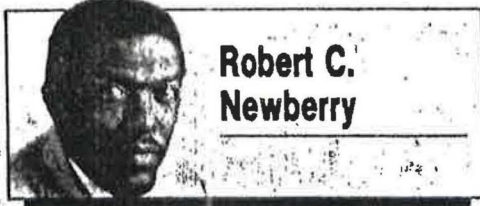
**T**HE R.J. REYNOLDS Tobacco Co. could not have made a better decision than the one it made when it canceled the planned test-marketing of a new mentholated cigarette brand aimed directly at black smokers.

The company did not say whether it could ever introduce its new Uptown brand at all, but it would be just as well if it didn't bother.

The new cigarette was scheduled to be introduced with a test-marketing campaign in Philadelphia beginning Feb. 5, but Reynolds gave in to the mounting criticism from black groups, Hispanic groups, and anti-smoking interests. The organizations are mounting national campaigns against the tobacco company because they believed targeting one race was wrong.

In Houston, Dr. Alan Blum of the Family Practice Center at Baylor College of Medicine, was gearing up his nationwide 5,000-member Doctors Ought to Care (DOC) organization, comprised of doctors and medical students, was planning a counter-campaign called Upchuck.

In the midst of the harsh criticism, Reynolds acknowledged that Uptown was indeed intended to appeal to blacks. The company was hoping the new menthol brand would find a place in the cigarette



Robert C. Newberry

market, which is shrinking and becoming more segmented. Giving up on the campaign was a wise public-relations move, if nothing else.

Even the nation's top health official criticized the company. Dr. Louis Sullivan, secretary of Health and Human Services, bitterly denounced Reynolds and urged it to cancel its plans for the test-marketing.

Before that, the president of the Charlotte, N.C., chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People chapter attacked the company.

That was a bit unusual for the NAACP. Black organizations don't often attack tobacco or alcohol companies because the industries pump a lot of the money they make off black people back into black organizations, black newspapers and magazines, galas, and extravaganzas. That's more than most U.S. companies do.

Without a doubt, that seeming generosity toward black causes makes the compa-

nies appear to be friends — but don't they get to write off all that money as charitable contributions?

Although their products can be detrimental to health, the companies donate more than most other companies, and they do help some worthy causes in the black community. Too bad so much misery and anguish accompany their generosity.

But it was probably the scathing speech by Sullivan in Philadelphia that got Reynolds to throw in the towel in this one. The company announced its plans to call it quits a day after the speech. Sullivan said it was time to "resist the unworthy efforts of the tobacco merchants to earn profits at the expense of the health and well-being of our poor and minority citizens."

Reynolds complained that the new brand was receiving "unfair and biased attention" and that "this represents a loss of choice for black smokers and a further erosion of the free enterprise system." What? It's a little amusing that Reynolds would have the nerve to say that.

Peter Hoult, Reynolds executive executive vice president for marketing, said in the company's news release, a "small coalition of anti-smoking zealots" forced the tobacco firm to cancel its plans.

"Our intentions in test-marketing

Uptown in Philadelphia have been misconstrued and misrepresented by the anti-smoking lobby," Hoult said. "Our sole purpose, plainly and simply, was to test-market a cigarette among smokers who currently buy competitive products."

That could be, but the ad campaign certainly would have been enticing to young, impressionable non-smokers.

The campaign featured black people enjoying urban night life in an ad that read "Uptown. The Place. The Taste."

In his speech, Sullivan noted that blacks are more likely to be smokers and therefore suffer higher rates of lung cancer, heart disease and strokes.

According to Simmons Market Research Bureau, about 7 million blacks smoke cigarettes, representing about 34 percent of the nation's black population and about 13 percent of all American smokers.

And According to an article in the July, 1985 issue of the New York State Journal of Medicine by Drs. Richard Cooper and Brian Simmons, "smoking is a crucial example of how the health of the black population has worsened . . . Blacks now suffer the highest rates of coronary heart disease and lung cancer of any population group in this country."

Are those companies doing us a favor?