

FOX CHASE  
CANCER CENTER

Robert G. Robinson, Dr.P.H.  
Associate Member

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Alan Blum, M.D.  
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Dear Alan:

I want to express my appreciation for the contributions you made in helping the Coalition Against Uptown Cigarettes to win its' struggle with the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. There are a great many lessons to be learned from this event. These lessons bear on the interrelationship between community organizing, health education, and policy. This was an incredibly dynamic process. The mistakes made were minimal, and in part explain why it was possible to maintain unity over the course of the struggle. It was a unity that would have continued even if RJR had chosen to delay its' decision.

The major drama concerned the ability of the African American community to emerge as the central focus both in terms of leadership and in defining the issues. A sub-drama was the ability of the major voluntaries and research centers such as FCCC to submerge their agenda in the interests of serving the coalition. Process is hardly ever prioritized, and it is not well understood. I would advise that it was first process which determined this victory, and second a clear delineation of the issues which reflected the process because at every stage definitions with the potential to divide were rejected. The primary focus of the Coalition was to remain true to the African American community, avoid divisiveness, and maintain a singular focus on the Tobacco Industry. Sensitivity to this demanded that individual and organizational agendas be secondary to the needs of the Coalition and the perspectives of its leadership. Independent initiatives would not have been appropriate. This lesson, and the principles upon which it is based, can provide the larger public health community with very positive lessons.

*RJR - This letter is significant, I believe, for it acknowledges the role of academics in public health issues. The title of the talk I gave at the Thrasher Fund was "Scholarly Activism" in which I attempted to create a working term for the 1990's. This may be one of the first pieces of evidence from within the academic community of the importance of strategies of the industry based on the study of how (in this instance) the tobacco industry has operated over the past few decades and of how past efforts to counteract tobacco advertising have failed. As a consultant to the weeks leading up to their public action, I provided many pieces of advice and gleaned extensive information from the process. AB 2/12*

Alan Blum, M.D.  
February 9, 1990  
Page 2

Information, advice, and analysis were critical during this process to evaluate both immediate and long term objectives. We were beginning to determine the latter more fully when the victory cry was sounded. Your input was extremely important. Your support was valued and will be long appreciated and remembered. I look forward to other moments when we can join. I am sure they will occur. Moments are battles. We all understand that this is war. I trust you understand how much I appreciated your willingness to share your time and energy in this struggle. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Robert G. Robinson, Dr.P.H.

RGR/ss

cc: Yvonne Allison  
Jesse Brown  
Carl Mansfield  
Tracy Orleans  
Charyn Sutton