

# “THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGING”

...And The People Said Amen!

Carol O. McGruder, Co-Chair

African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council

[cmcgruder@usa.net](mailto:cmcgruder@usa.net)

It has been over ten years since “African American leadership groups: *Smoking with the enemy*” (Yerger & Malone, 2002) was published. This groundbreaking research paper documented the relationships between the tobacco industry and Black leadership groups. It was written by Drs. Valerie Yerger and Ruth Malone, two health policy researchers from the University of California, San Francisco. At the time of its release, the paper created quite a stir, garnering national media attention. Yerger and Malone had meticulously researched previously secret but now publicly available internal tobacco industry documents released during litigation to expose how the tobacco industry supported and strategically cultivated relationships with almost every major African American organization. Yerger et al. identified three purposes motivating the tobacco industry to develop these relationships: 1) increase tobacco use among African Americans by creating and maintaining positive images of tobacco and tobacco companies; 2) use African Americans to defend tobacco industry policy positions at the federal, state and local levels; and 3) defuse public health efforts stemming from within African American communities. Yerger et al. found that almost every African American organization with any standing or clout was on the list.

While at the time many Black organizations thought it was okay to take the money and run (even proudly mingling with the industry at their social events), some organizations were simply cash strapped and willing to take money from anyone. Unfortunately, too many did not seem to make the connection that taking tobacco money would buy their silence and put their organizations in bed with the industry, an industry responsible for enticing their children to start smoking cigarettes, perpetuating an unending cycle of death and heartache. But a growing number of African American community members, especially those related to the 47,300 Blacks who die every year from tobacco related diseases, found that African American leadership groups taking money from tobacco companies was reprehensible. This internal grassroots advocacy has led many groups to distance themselves from the industry.

It has been ten long years since *Smoking With The Enemy* was published but it is more relevant than ever. There have been positive changes, but for African American tobacco control advocates these gains have come slowly and painfully incremental, advancing two steps and backing up three, always miserably trailing and disparate from the tobacco control gains of the mainstream (read white) population. And while it is true that in one way or another all groups are segmented and targeted by the tobacco industry (it is their specialty), it is also true that the tobacco industry has a particular relentless perniciousness when it comes to the African American community - the industry has yet to cease its pervasive presence. That pervasive presence has been documented once again by Stanford researcher Dr. Lisa Henriksen et al. Her study published in 2012, *Targeted Advertising, Promotion, and Price for Menthol Cigarettes in California High School Neighborhoods*, found that for every 10 percentage point increase in Black high school students, the proportion of menthol advertising increased by 5.9 percentage points. Furthermore, the odds of a Newport promotion were 50% higher and the cost of a pack of Newport cigarettes was 12 cents lower. Tobacco companies control the promotional activity,



product placement, and the cost of cigarettes at the stores that sell their products and they know that lower prices in poor and Black neighborhoods make cigarettes more accessible for young and low income smokers. And some wonder why, despite Lorillard Tobacco Company no longer being able to give away its free Newport cigarettes, 95% of young Black smokers initiate smoking with mentholated cigarettes.

Marie Evans victim of  
Lorillard's predatory marketing



Free cigarette giveaways to children were a common practice of Lorillard in the 1970s and 80s. In fact, Lorillard gave out these free Newport cigarettes in Boston's Orchard Park housing project, enticing children to smoke. Marie Evans was one of those children. She received her first free cigarettes at the age of 9, she initially traded them for candy and then began smoking at the age of 13. Ms. Evans continued to smoke for 40 years, until she died of lung cancer at age 54. Her son sued Lorillard Tobacco Company and won \$152 million dollars in punitive and compensatory damages. The case is currently in the appeal process.

As the community awaits the final judgment in this case, Marie Evans has become the poster child against these predatory activities. And times are changing as people grow weary of needlessly losing their loved ones to Big Tobacco.

Though the average person who has lost a loved one to Big Tobacco would find it daunting to file a lawsuit, there are practical things that the average citizen can do to speed up the winds of change. People can make sure that the groups to which they belong and support financially adopt policies to not accept money from the tobacco industry; they can bring up issues of tobacco control with their elected officials and let them know where they stand; they can support increasing the cost of cigarettes, as increasing the price of cigarettes is one of the most effective ways to deter our children from experimenting and getting hooked on cigarettes; and people must demand that appropriate funding be allocated to tobacco control to fund community-appropriate tobacco prevention programs, provide services, and defend our communities from a foe who never sleeps...and the people said Amen.

#### Cited Studies

Yerger, V.B. & Malone, R.E. (2002). [African American leadership groups: Smoking with the enemy](#). *Tobacco Control*, 11(4), 336-345

Lisa L Henriksen, Nina C NC Schleicher., Stephen P SP Fortmann, [Targeted advertising, promotion, and price for menthol cigarettes in California high school neighborhoods](#), *Nicotine Tob Res.* 2012 Jan;14(1):116-21. doi: 10.1093/ntr/ntr122. Epub 2011 Jun 24.