

## Puff Daddies

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The window of R.S. Health Fair, filled with giant stuffed bears, kitty cats and Tweety birds, is bound to catch kids' eyes—exactly as intended. No way they're going to miss the plush animals and cartoon characters.

There's also little chance they'll miss the loud cigarette ads taking up the rest of the window.

"The ads are placed right among the baby stuff," says Rev. Jesse Brown, standing outside the Frankford Avenue store under the shadow of the El. "Advertising right where children will be looking. That's classic."

He shakes his head, adding, "If it wasn't so sad, it'd be laughable."

Brown has spent more than 15 years battling tobacco companies, which for decades have targeted poor blacks in urban neighborhoods. And with Philadelphia's smoking ban just a few months old, Big Tobacco shows no signs of letting up. As communities look for ways to combat the death and destruction that cigarettes wreak upon them, the tobacco companies have gotten only more sophisticated in marketing to those they believe are most likely to become addicted.

"Nothing's changed," says Brown. "They're still trying to target kids—particularly African-American kids."

**To lure young blacks to take up smoking**, tobacco companies sponsor concerts, tours and parties with artists they think are likely to appeal to black audiences—including hometown heroes like the Roots and Jaguar Wright, and even supposedly socially conscious performers like Common and Erykah Badu.

They carefully tailor ads and promotional materials, persistently using black imagery, themes, sounds and artists they think will resonate.

And they concentrate advertising in black neighborhoods, flooding the areas with posters and signs in ways never seen in white neighborhoods.

"They're still losing a high percentage of their customer base to illness or death," Brown says, "and they've got to replace them."



**Less than a year** after Rev. Brown landed in Philadelphia, the city became ground zero in the fight against racial profiling by the tobacco industry.

After attending seminary in Chicago, the North Carolina native came to Christ Lutheran Church in Strawberry Mansion in 1989. Soon after, R.J. Reynolds announced it was releasing a new cigarette called Uptown, designed for the African-American community, and Philadelphia would be the test market. The name was derived

in part from the city's historic Uptown Theater on North Broad Street.

"R.J. Reynolds was actually boasting of the fact that they were paying attention to the African-American community," says Brown, now 50. "African-Americans don't smoke cigarettes as much as their white counterparts, so they believe the African-American community is underserved, and therefore is a prime target."

Brown and a few colleagues quickly formed the Uptown Coalition, which worked with health and community organizations to kill the Uptown cigarette brand before it even hit the market. In just 13 days R.J. Reynolds pulled its plans for Uptown.

"Nobody had ever fought the cigarette companies and won," says Brown.

"We framed the issue around community empowerment and the right of a community to choose what comes into the community," says Bob Robinson, another Uptown Coalition member who was working at Fox Chase Cancer Center at the time, and later went to work for the Office on Smoking and Health at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

"It was the first time the African-American community said in an organized, coherent voice to the tobacco industry, 'No, we don't want this. We're not going to allow it. Get your product out of here,'" says Robinson, 63. "It was very different from previous campaigns because it was reported not on the health pages, but in the economic section of the newspaper."

With a heightened awareness of how tobacco companies were using marketing and advertising to target blacks specifically, Brown soon formed the North Philly-based National Association of African Americans for Positive Imagery (NAAAPI), which has spent years shining light on targeted campaigns from tobacco to alcohol and even chewing gum.



*Minister of information: Rev. Jesse Brown sees educating the community about how it's targeted by advertisers as part of his calling.*

But a quick look at Kool's website proves that in the face of such grassroots initiatives, the tobacco companies have only hit back harder.

The “DJ Downloads” section of the site, for example, features video clips of three up-and-coming DJs—DJ Noumenon, DJ Miranda and DJ Rob Dinero. In the profiles each DJ is seen working turntables bathed in the soft green light of the Kool logo. A warm color for sure, but hardly an accident.

The “Lounge” section of the site features the so-called “Be True Video,” a 60-second montage laden with black faces, language and imagery.

“It’s a way of being,” the ad begins, showing a black man and woman, with half of a white woman’s head in the background. On an image of another black man holding both a trumpet and a cigarette in one hand come the words, “It’s about uptown attitude.” The photo then switches to another black man and woman—he’s leaning in to her—“mixed with a downtown vibe.” The ad continues, “It’s about pursuing your ambitions and staying connected to your roots,” and then we see a photo of a black man wearing headphones and standing at turntables.

Jazz and hip-hop imagery is pervasive, with trumpets, keyboards and guitars throughout. Of the 13 total people whose faces appear in the ad, eight are black, two are white, one is Asian and two are ambiguous.

But the ad’s overall message isn’t the least bit ambiguous: If you’re black and cool, then Kool is for you.

**“I couldn’t sleep at night,”** says La Tanisha Wright, who used to do trade marketing and managing for the tobacco company Brown & Williamson, which was later bought by R.J. Reynolds. “We’d have to put more signs and advertising up in the black community than in the white. More promotions were sent to black neighborhoods than the whites, and more heavily mentholated cigarettes were placed in the black community than in the whites. I slowly started realizing there was something wrong here, and I didn’t want to be a part of it.”

Wright jumped ship and started doing surveillance for the National African American Tobacco Prevention Network (NAATPN), which picked up where NAAAPI had left off.



*Ads hocked: Whether hanging ads amid children’s toys or turning the front of a store into a cigarette billboard, tobacco companies pay big money to get their logos well placed in poor neighborhoods.*

“You see three to seven times the amount of advertising in convenience stores, supermarkets and shops in African-American communities,” says NAATPN executive director William Robinson. “Those incentives aren’t there for other communities. If one advertisement is closer to the door or the counter, if it’s more accessible, the store gets paid for the placement of the product—even in a convenience store.”

Philadelphia is one of the cities with targeted placement.

“I had black neighborhoods in both Atlanta and Detroit,” La Tanisha Wright says. “They were targeting kids by



placing signs below the counter, where candy was located. They'd put signs above toys. There were the Kool Mixx packs, with cartoon-character graphics of little black kids. When you placed them side by side, it created a mural."

Until last year tobacco companies sold candy-flavored cigarettes, including such flavors as Midnight Berry, Mocha Taboo and Caribbean Chill—all names incorporating black imagery. Attorneys general of 40 states agreed that in selling candy-flavored cigarettes, R.J. Reynolds was violating its 1998 agreement not to market to kids.

Wright regularly attends tobacco-sponsored events to monitor how cigarette companies target blacks. At a February Kool-sponsored event at a club in Dallas, for example, she observed 10 Kool banners, three video screens flashing Kool advertising, four R.J. Reynolds marketing reps (three black, one Hispanic), and lights on and around the dance floor changed from their usual colors to flash Kool brand colors.



Last year's Kool New Jazz Philosophy Tour, which came to the Electric Factory in August, featured Philly's own Roots as headlining performers. Kool flooded local publications—including this one—with ads featuring their logo and the Roots together, and throughout the concert cigarette advertisements flashed on screens behind the performers. This year Common and Erykah Badu are slated to perform at Kool's South Beach Bash in Miami, which has been advertised as far north as Philly, including in the pages of *PW*.

**"Chillwill on the ones and twos! Tony2Tek's in the house! Kool cigarettes in the building!"** the MC calls out from behind the turntables. Just in case anyone missed the five giant green and blue Kool banners, each one about 7 feet tall, in every corner of the club and by the bathroom doors.

"If you want a free drink, stop by the Kool stand," he shouts over the mike, while a hard hip-hop beat blares under him.



Drinks aren't the only things Kool is comping this Friday night at Mango Night Club on Aramingo Avenue. Everyone in attendance willing to give Kool reps their name and address gets two free packs of cigarettes: Kool's new flavors entitled Groove, which comes in a green pack, and Flow, which comes in blue.

"Y'all smoke? Did you get your free cigarettes?" says Micah, 26, as she approaches in her low-cut green dress with a Kool logo right in her cleavage—where eyes are sure to be drawn. Micah, who when asked says she herself doesn't smoke, is one of two "party-starters" working the room; her companion is wearing a matching skimpy Kool dress in blue.

They direct patrons to Zaneta Aycox, who's circulating through the crowd in a green, black and white dress with a big bag full of free cigarettes. After scanning the patrons' driver's licenses, Aycox gives them two sample packs and an entry form to win a trip to Kool's South Beach Bash in Miami.

When asked, Aycox, 24, says she doesn't smoke either.

It's all part of Kool's sponsorship of the night—one of three local Kool sponsorships over the weekend. Thursday night was at Diesel near Second and Erie in North Philly; Saturday will be at FiSo at 15th and South. All three clubs draw almost exclusively black and Hispanic crowds.



Also part of Kool's sponsorship: Kool logos and colors crowding every field of vision inside the building.

Some of the branding is overt: Besides the banners, there's a video screen showing Kool ads, a Kool table with the new cigarettes on it, Kool-logo drink napkins, Kool logos on the straw holders on the bar, Kool logos on the lemon and lime holders on the bar, Kool logos on the rubber splash-guards lining the bar, a Kool logo taking up the entire display of the cigarette machine by the front door, and more than half the slots in the machine containing Kool cigarettes.

But there's subliminal branding as well. Lining the bar and the tables around the room's perimeter are lights flashing the Kool green and blue. The mirror ball on the dance floor is illuminated with a green spotlight.



While some of the Koool reps are dressed in the brand's colors, others are dressed in plain street clothes, but working the room all the same. On all the banners that have spotlights shining on them, the surgeon general's warning at the bottom remains obscured in darkness.

When pressed, Mango's boss and bouncers won't allow a *PW* photographer to shoot pictures of anything with a Koool logo on it.

**It's almost 9 a.m. at Broad** and Erie where some kids are still waiting for the school bus.

Across the street a single corner newsstand is plastered with no fewer than 10 cigarette ads: "NEW KOOL XL \$4.25 SPECIAL PRICE!" "Newport Pleasure!" "USA Gold \$3.65 Everyday Low Price." "KOOL: BE TRUE \$4.25 SPECIAL PRICE!"

On the corner right behind the newsstand the windows of J's Variety Discount have two "Newport Pleasure! FIRE IT UP!" signs and two "Newport: Alive With Pleasure!" signs. Just a couple of doors down the window of Young's Deli has two signs, each a few feet tall, reading, "Newport Pleasure! \$4.35."

All this on one corner.

"I have never gone into a mom-and-pop store in Philadelphia that didn't have tobacco advertising," says Rev. Jesse Brown, leading the way down North Philadelphia's trash-strewn sidewalks to survey tobacco advertising in the neighborhood. He periodically photographs cigarettes ads, noting their placement, to stay on top of how tobacco companies are targeting his community.



He points to Lopez Grocery on the corner of Sydenham and Butler, where the door and window are covered in ads for Newport, Maverick and Kool. “They’ve taken over the outside of it,” he says, “and this is a small street with children and families.”

Hopping in his car to further survey the neighborhood, he points to the J&C; on Ontario Street, whose door has ads for Newport, Maverick and Boaz: “That’s half a block from Kenderton Elementary School. Not even a block. Half a block.”

Soon Brown passes a Dunkin’ Donuts and a BP gas station, and as he spots hanging Newport and USA Gold ads, he does a quick U-turn and pulls the car up onto the sidewalk to take a closer look. The ads are both fastened to fences and hanging from tall streetside display signposts, which became tobacco advertising’s venue of choice when billboards were outlawed in the ‘90s. According to Brown, such signage is illegal, but it goes unenforced. (The city’s Department of Licences and Inspections didn’t return repeated requests for comment.)

“One of the sure signs of deterioration of a neighborhood or a lack of political control is the lack of control of the signage,” he says. “You’re not going to see that happen in East Falls, Chestnut Hill, even parts of the Northeast.”

Pulling into the parking lot of a 7-Eleven on Torresdale Avenue, Brown, hoping to avoid being noticed, doesn’t even get out of his car. He instead leans over the passenger seat to take snapshots of the Gold Coast cigarette ad hanging from the streetside display of gas prices, and of the Marlboro, Camel, Kool and Newport ads covering half of one of the doors. Directly facing the door across the street is the front entrance to Northeast Catholic High School.



Brown continues up to Frankford Avenue and drives under the EI, all the while taking drive-by photos of particularly egregious advertising. There’s the Quicky Mart at Frankford and Unity, where its six huge windows and two glass doors are completely covered in tobacco ads. “Can’t get too much more than that,” Brown says driving by—and yet it does. Closer examination reveals more cardboard ads hanging from streetside signposts.

“The whole storefront is tobacco advertising,” Brown says walking by Dynamic Dollar. “You don’t need a billboard when you turn a building *into* a billboard.”

Similar scenes are found in the windows of the Frankford Family Market and the Neighborhood Market, where the tobacco ads are new and shiny, featuring the latest cigarette marketing campaigns, even though the store logo looks like it hasn’t been repainted in decades.

“This is an area that’s struggling just to stay a viable business district,” Brown says by a run-down newsstand plastered with Newport, Maverick, Camel and Kool ads. “Controlling tobacco advertising is a low priority.”



Back in Center City a couple hours later this reporter can't help but notice a newsstand at the corner of 16th and Locust has just one lone display on its outside: an ad for *The New York Times*.



**Kool manufacturer R.J. Reynolds (RJR)**, for its part, doesn't claim to see anything wrong with its marketing approach.

"No, that's not the case at all," RJR spokesperson David Howard replies when asked if the company disproportionately targets blacks. "Kool is recognized as a brand that's very multiethnic, multicultural, and that is really our approach, to communicate with a wide spectrum of adult smokers."

What about the brand is "multiethnic" and "multicultural," when all of the cigarette's targets seem to be black?

"If you look at some of the featured artists, yes," Howard replies, "but if you look from a wide range and over the years, there have been multiple artists. There have been multiple music styles from rock to reggae to jazz to rap, funk—all kinds of musical styles, different artists, different venues and different cities."

Asked for any specific examples of performers, venues or events that could in any way illustrate the brand's "multiculturalism," he replies, "We perform at a wide range of different types of venues in different areas in different cities. To me, that sounds pretty multicultural."

But no specific examples?

"Despite the fact that we're in multiple venues in multiple cities with multiple performers with multiple music styles with multiple all that, that doesn't satisfy that it's a broad spectrum of audience?"

Howard then declines to offer any further specifics.



**"Of course they'll tell you it's not targeted** to African-Americans, but when you see it in our stores down here, clearly it's the African-American community," counters Rev. Jesse Brown. "They'll deny it, but they always

deny everything.”

Bob Robinson, formerly of the CDC, says after 50 years of smoking at higher rates than whites, African-Americans cut their smoking rates to lower than those of whites for the first time in 2001. Though the landmark went largely unreported in the media, tobacco companies surely noticed.

“You have no problem finding bad news about the African-American community. But here you have what could possibly be the most important public health victory in 200 years, and no one knows about it,” says Robinson. “Since then the tobacco industry has attempted to integrate the hip-hop community with hip-hop-related campaigns using music contests and competitions among DJs. National networks have been very vigilant and have organized against them, but they have about as deep pockets as oil. It’s tobacco and oil in this country.”

Philadelphia’s smoking ban was a step in the right direction, but there’s still plenty to be done.

“The big issue at the moment is ensuring compliance, making sure businesses know the rules and regulations, and making sure we have regular inspections,” says mayoral candidate Michael Nutter, who shepherded the smoking ban through City Council.

“We need to be very careful about the relationship between Big Tobacco, through some of their subsidiaries, and their sponsorships of different events and activities,” Nutter says. “Taking money from those organizations influences people’s behavior, and ultimately is deadly for citizens—and especially kids.”

On a national level, some headway is being made. Sens. Henry Waxman and Ted Kennedy have proposed legislation that would address the regulation of tobacco-controlled products by the FDA. But that the legislation is being supported in part by tobacco manufacturer Philip Morris makes NAATPN’s William Robinson wary.

“We have to be extremely careful and sophisticated when we’re going into this that we aren’t getting taken for a ride somewhere down the road in the fine print,” says Robinson. “Why has it taken so long for cigarettes to be regulated by the FDA, when everything you use to quit—nasal sprays, lozenges, patches—already is? When you begin to ask those questions, you begin to understand the power of the lobbying dollars of the tobacco industry.”

“Until we apply the same standards we apply to food and drugs—is it safe and is it effective?—the tobacco industry will continue to wreak havoc in Philadelphia, and they’ll continue to market to kids,” says Brown, who’s planning a November run for an at-large seat on City Council. “We always know the odds are against us, but then again, they told us we’d never stop R.J. Reynolds from marketing Uptown either.”

The Uptown Coalition was successful in framing the debate in terms of economics instead of health. According to Bob Robinson, as long as the fight against tobacco can be looked at through a social justice lens, it will remain an issue that resonates with African-Americans.

“Racism still determines a great deal of what occurs politically, socially and culturally in this country,” says Robinson. “The notion of what constitutes power and self-determination in a community is a very powerful theme. It becomes an issue of what a community decides to do about its collective well-being. That is the embodiment of social justice.”



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## Market Forcers

### **Poor blacks are hardly the only demographic being targeted.**

"Every demographic group you can think of," says Rev. Jesse Brown, "whether it's gays, lesbians, tall people or purple-eyed people, they've segmented this market to figure out a marketing plan for them."

The nature of the targeting, of course, varies by group. A new Camel brand called Camel No. 9—named after Chanel No. 9 perfume—goes after women. The ads feature roses and the lowercase slogan, "light & luscious," and Camel has been sponsoring targeted parties similar to the black-oriented ones thrown by Kool.

A Camel No. 9 event at Shampoo last month featured a performance by MisShapes, and promised in its all-pink ads, "An evening to tantalize and entice your restless soul, featuring an exclusive beauty lounge to pamper the ladies in the house."

According to the National African American Tobacco Prevention Network's William Robinson, a similarly lavish event took place in New York just a few weeks earlier. "They had a Camel-sponsored spa day for women at one of the major hotels," he says. "You came in and got aromatic treatments, facials, manicures and pedicures, all to promote the product.


"As we're getting more successful fighting the traditional things, they're going underground and getting more sophisticated," he adds. "They keep changing this process. We have to train people how to look out for this."

Hispanics are also finding themselves increasingly targeted by the same brands that target blacks. Kool's website includes a page where viewers can play online dominoes—a game traditionally popular in the Hispanic community.

"Latino smoking preferences are close to African-Americans'," says Brown, indicating that both groups tend to prefer mentholated cigarettes. "Poor folks are treated the same regardless of race or creed."

Upcoming local Kool-sponsored events include "El Combate Noche" at the Alley in North Philly, a Cinco de Mayo pay-per-view battle royale between Oscar De La Hoya and Floyd Mayweather.

Gays too have been targeted by tobacco companies—albeit with different brands—over the years. In a session called "How the Tobacco Industry Targets Queer America" at last month's LGBTI Health Summit in Philadelphia, Ted Guggenheim of the California LGBT Tobacco Education Partnership noted that Lucky Strike cigarettes sponsored the GLAAD Awards for years. Additionally, gay California state Sen. Carole Midgen has come under fire for accepting a \$25,000 contribution from tobacco manufacturer Philip Morris.

The LGBT community has seen some success in fighting the tobacco industry's targeting. GLAAD has since dropped its Lucky Strike sponsorship, and one gay blogger created a fake antismoking ad featuring two cowboys puffing away on a mountain,  *la Brokeback*, with the tagline, "I wish I knew how to quit you." (J.B.)

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