

# Quid Pro Quo: Tobacco Companies and the Black Press

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Tobacco use is a leading cause of health disparities affecting African Americans.<sup>1-4</sup> Older African Americans (≥ 44 years) have the highest smoking rates of any group (about 30%).<sup>5</sup> Among lower-income African Americans, smoking rates are as high as 59%.<sup>6,7</sup> Over 45 000 African Americans die from tobacco-related diseases each year,<sup>3,8,9</sup> which constitutes the highest smoking-related disease burden of any US group.<sup>7,10-12</sup> African American communities also disproportionately bear lost productivity from tobacco-caused diseases. Although constituting only 6% of California's population, African Americans account for 8% of smoking-attributable expenditures and 13% of smoking-attributable mortality costs.<sup>13</sup>

Although smoking prevalence results from complex interactions of multiple factors, including socioeconomic status, cultural characteristics, acculturation, stress, advertising, cigarette prices, parental and community disapproval, and abilities of local communities to mount effective tobacco-control initiatives,<sup>14</sup> the disproportionate tobacco-related disease burden among African Americans suggests the need for closer examination of the factors related to smoking prevalence that may be unique to the community. One factor in creating a climate in which smoking seems acceptable is the influence of the tobacco industry on cultural and social institutions,<sup>15</sup> including the media.

African American communities have long been targeted with tobacco advertisements, products, and philanthropy.<sup>7,16-18</sup> Tobacco companies have also sought to influence journalism<sup>19</sup> and sustain extensive ties with African American leadership groups<sup>15</sup> to undermine tobacco control. Although some research has previously recognized tobacco company support of minority-targeted media,<sup>20,21</sup> no previous studies have examined the longstanding relationship between tobacco companies and the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), the most important Black media organization. We explored the role of tobacco industry patronage of African American newspaper publishers and the expectations that such patronage involved.

**Objectives.** We explored the relationship between tobacco companies and the Black press, which plays an important role in conveying information and opinions to Black communities.

**Methods.** In this archival case study, we analyzed data from internal tobacco industry documents and archives of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), the trade association of the Black press.

**Results.** In exchange for advertising dollars and other support, the tobacco industry expected and received support from Black newspapers for tobacco industry policy positions. Beginning in the 1990s, resistance from within the Black community and reduced advertising budgets created counterpressures. The tobacco industry, however, continued to sustain NNPA support.

**Conclusions.** The quid pro quo between tobacco companies and the Black press violated journalistic standards and represented an unequal trade. Although numerous factors explain today's tobacco-related health disparities, the Black press's service to tobacco companies is problematic because of the trust that the community placed in such media. Understanding the relationship between the tobacco industry and the NNPA provides insight into strategies that the tobacco industry may use in other communities and countries. (*Am J Public Health.* 2012;102:739-750. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2011.300180)

(Note that we use the terms *Black* and *African American* here interchangeably, as is common in US minority health research.<sup>22</sup> Additional terms may be used, depending on the context and historical period; for instance, *Negro* was a common term used to refer to people of African descent through the 1970s.)

## BACKGROUND

The African American experience was irrevocably shaped by the legacy of slavery, which itself was perpetuated by labor demands from tobacco plantations.<sup>8,23</sup> From the founding of the United States, African Americans' fortunes have been linked with tobacco. The fortunes of African American media have likewise been intertwined with tobacco-company interests, long after slavery's abolishment.<sup>8,23</sup>

The Black press was established in New York City in 1827, at a time when public media were unavailable to Blacks.<sup>24-26</sup> The first African American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, proclaimed, "Too long have others spoken for us."<sup>24-26</sup> The Black press gave voice to a marginalized community, "molding self-esteem

and public opinion. . . setting the public agenda"<sup>27(p203)</sup> and advocating for rights rarely addressed in White mainstream media.<sup>24</sup> By 1910, more than 275 Black newspapers reached over 500 000 people<sup>25</sup> and became trusted sources of information for the community.<sup>26,28,29</sup>

For decades, however, many Black newspapers struggled because few White-owned businesses advertised in African American media. The tobacco industry was one early exception.<sup>3,30-32</sup> Tobacco companies were early supporters of civil rights for Blacks and were among the first companies to desegregate facilities.<sup>8,33</sup> This early support was undoubtedly critical to sustaining civil rights discourse in Black media and could thus be interpreted as representing a laudable commitment by tobacco companies, as the tobacco industry later frequently claimed. However, as documented in other work,<sup>15,34</sup> an alternative or coexisting interpretation is that cultivating these media relationships was primarily a matter of accessing a "new" market for tobacco and later of controlling potential community opposition.

In 1941, the National Negro Publishers Association was established, later becoming the NNPA.<sup>26</sup> The NNPA currently represents more than 200 African American newspapers, with a US circulation totaling 15 million.<sup>26,35</sup> Circulation figures likely understate its reach, however, because NNPA papers are often free and passed around the community.<sup>36</sup> The NNPA has moved into electronic media with BlackPressUSA.com.<sup>26</sup> African American newspapers reach an estimated 25% to 28% of all African Americans.<sup>37,38</sup>

## METHODS

Between July 2009 and June 2010, we searched previously confidential tobacco company documents archived in the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library (LTDL; <http://www.legacy.library.ucsf.edu>). Released following the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement, these documents constitute more than 60 million pages, and more are still being added.<sup>39–41</sup> Using snowball sampling,<sup>40</sup> beginning with the search terms “Black press” and “Negro press,” we retrieved documents and identified additional search terms, including “NNPA” and the names of individuals. After screening for relevance and duplication, we reviewed more than 250 documents dated from 1968 to 2004 that referenced NNPA. We also searched Web sites related to the Black press and the NNPA.

In addition, during April 2010 the first author visited Howard University’s Black Press Archives in the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center Manuscript Division and searched 35 NNPA-related boxes for tobacco company names and relevant correspondence with individuals identified through the LTDL. We reviewed over 500 pages from these archives. Materials were analyzed thematically to prepare this descriptive case study.

## RESULTS

Almost from its inception, the NNPA and its newspapers had relationships with tobacco companies (Figure 1).<sup>3,18,26,32,39–69</sup> Tobacco companies began advertising in African American media in the 1940s, recognizing a burgeoning market.<sup>3,8,15,31,32,70,71(p337)</sup> Philip Morris announced a major Black press campaign in 1947, including the NNPA paper *Chicago*

*Defender*.<sup>32</sup> Few companies then advertised in Black newspapers<sup>25,30,31</sup>; tobacco companies later frequently reminded publishers of this early support.<sup>72–75</sup>

The patronage tobacco companies provided came with expectations of support for industry positions. Black papers, in turn, developed reciprocal expectations of the industry. The now-infamous “Frank Statement” ad of 1954 (a public relations effort by major tobacco companies aimed at dispelling worries about links between smoking and lung cancer) was published in more than 400 newspapers in 258 cities, but not in the Black press.<sup>42,76–78</sup> The ad announced the establishment of the Tobacco Industry Research Committee, now known to be part of an industry conspiracy to deceive the public about the risks of smoking.<sup>42,79</sup> Black newspapers were apparently excluded from this ad buy because the industry assumed major newspapers reached Blacks.<sup>80</sup> However, excluding Black papers caused problems, as Philip Morris executives observed:

[A]ll Negro newspaper people are greatly peeved because the Tobacco Association announcement ad wasn’t run in the Negro press. . . . Hill and Knowlton [the tobacco industry’s public relations firm] is going to have a very tough time getting any editorial support from the Negro press.<sup>81</sup>

There was apparently discussion later of adding publications to the circulation of the “Frank Statement,”<sup>80</sup> but we found no evidence that it appeared in the Black press. Thus began a pattern of treating the Black press differently while expecting its ongoing support.

### Solidifying Relationships

During the civil rights era of the 1960s, the tobacco industry initiated a number of NNPA-related sponsorships. For example, Philip Morris executives helped plan a 1965 event honoring the founders of the first Black newspaper; free cigarettes were distributed at the event.<sup>43</sup> Later in the 1960s, when a public relations firm recommended that R.J. Reynolds become involved with “Negro assemblies” to benefit the company, the NNPA was the first organization listed.<sup>82</sup>

After the broadcast cigarette advertising ban in 1971,<sup>44</sup> print media became even more important to tobacco companies, and the companies cultivated NNPA relationships through more forms of support.<sup>20</sup> For example, R.J. Reynolds partnered with the NNPA in 1972 to

establish an undergraduate journalism scholarship.<sup>83,84</sup> R.J. Reynolds executives attended NNPA conventions to present scholarship checks.<sup>85–95</sup> During this time, R.J. Reynolds executives announced a doubling of advertisements in NNPA papers.<sup>45–54</sup> Correspondence with the NNPA president in 1974 showed that R.J. Reynolds executives anticipated ongoing benefits:

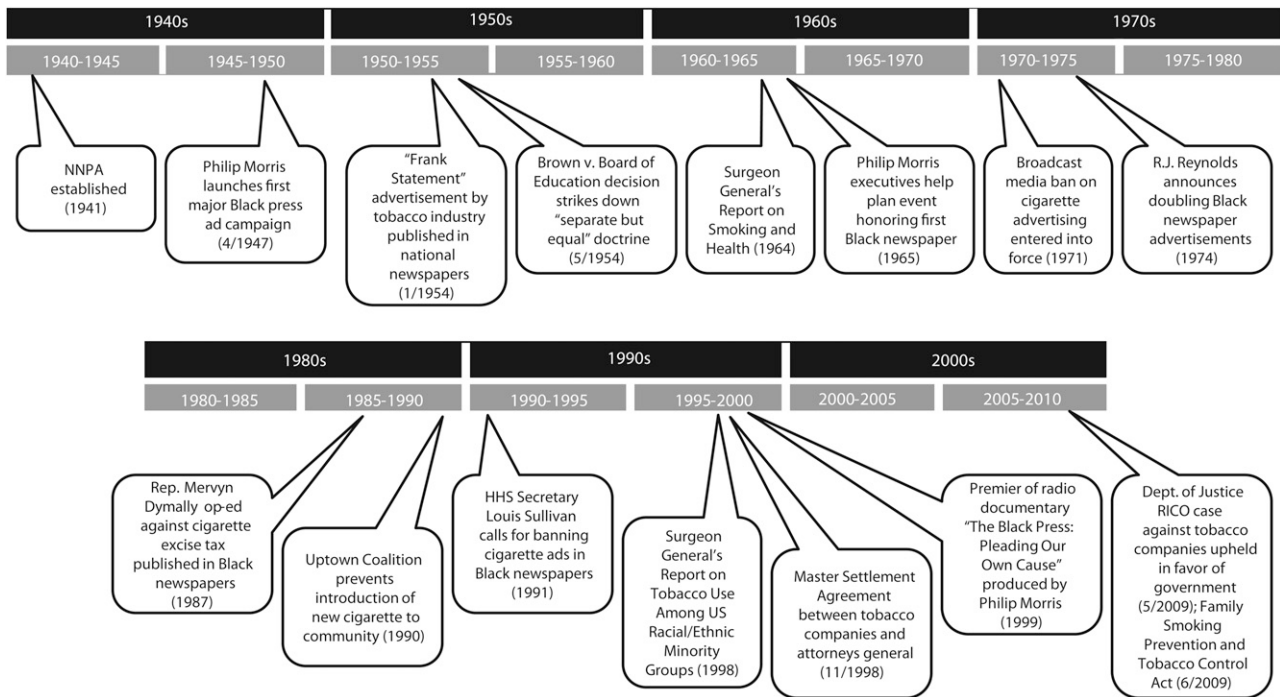
The black press has been one of the best and fastest methods by which to communicate to the black consumers. . . the R.J. Reynolds Scholarship Program in Journalism. . . is a most worthwhile investment for us in that it will produce the quality journalists needed by you to help us continue to sell our products by advertisements and other articles in the black press.<sup>89</sup>

Tobacco companies also sponsored NNPA awards,<sup>96</sup> including Brown & Williamson sponsoring the annual Best Feature Story,<sup>83,97–104</sup> American Tobacco sponsoring Best Sports Page,<sup>97–99,101,103,104</sup> and Philip Morris sponsoring Best Editorial<sup>83,97–99,101,103–105</sup> and Best News Story.<sup>100</sup> Tobacco executives often spoke at events celebrating individual journalists and the Black press.<sup>86,106–108</sup>

At least into the late 1990s, tobacco executives used speeches at NNPA events to argue that tobacco advertising restrictions would harm the Black press and that excise taxes were regressive because they would have disproportionate effects on poor African Americans.<sup>108–115</sup> Common themes included smoking as a “right” and the industry’s right to advertise,<sup>116–118</sup> tobacco company philanthropy,<sup>117</sup> free speech and resisting “unreasonable” policies such as advertising restrictions<sup>117,119–121</sup> and tobacco taxes.<sup>122–127</sup>

The R.J. Reynolds CEO’s 1998 remarks to the NNPA opposing increased tobacco taxes,<sup>122–124</sup> for example, explicitly reminded the group of the tobacco industry’s longstanding relationship with the Black press.<sup>122(p1)</sup> The vice president of external affairs for Philip Morris Management Corporation, Tina Walls, also spoke at 2 NNPA conferences in 1999,<sup>128,129</sup> referencing the “trust, shared values, and common goals”<sup>128</sup> between Philip Morris and the NNPA, while asking the NNPA to communicate Philip Morris’s “social responsibility” message and “other issues relating to [their] various products.”<sup>129</sup>

Tobacco companies also sponsored meals and provided conference gifts, and industry executives—usually African American—and consultants organized meetings between NNPA



Source. See References list for sources.<sup>3,18,26,32,39-69,189</sup>

FIGURE 1—Key dates in Black press and tobacco control history.

leaders and tobacco executives. For example, Stan Scott, an African American with a journalism and Black press background who worked for Philip Morris, established personal relationships with NNPA leaders<sup>90,95,130-133</sup> and sent materials “regarding the ‘Great Tobacco Debate,’”<sup>100</sup> presumably encouraging support for the industry’s position that scientific understanding about disease risks from smoking was still “controversial.” The NNPA welcomed them.<sup>100</sup>

NNPA support for tobacco industry positions, advertising, and philanthropy were linked. In 1979, J. Paul Sticht, chairman/CEO of R.J. Reynolds Industries, planned to meet with 4 leading NNPA publishers.<sup>134</sup> Sticht told a colleague that the publishers wanted to discuss (1) “How the Black Press can support the Tobacco Industry in the smoking-health controversy,” (2) “General advertising,” and (3) the “R.J. Reynolds Industries–NNPA Scholarship Program in Journalism.”<sup>134</sup>

### Quid Pro Quo: Tobacco Industry Expectations

The Tobacco Institute (TI), the industry’s multicompany-supported lobbying group, in 1983 suggested that tobacco companies could

indeed expect editorial support from the Black press. The TI Communications Plan for High Priority Issues, under a section entitled “Tactics,” recommended

Through black publishers (National Newspaper Publishers Association [NNPA]), seek editorial comment on tax impact on black smokers, discriminatory nature of such taxes.<sup>135(p13)</sup>

A handwritten margin note said, “quid pro quo” (Figure 2).<sup>135(p13)</sup> (Quid pro quo means “something for something of more or less equal value.”<sup>136(p1282)</sup>)

The TI planned to

place a minimum of two stories annually pointing out [the] heavy burden placed on middle and lower income smokers by cigarette taxes with print and electronic media nationally, with *concentration on minority media* [italics added].<sup>135(p12)</sup>

It is unclear whether “stories” indicated articles or the “editorial comment” the TI later planned to seek from the NNPA,<sup>135</sup> but the plan appeared intended to influence content.<sup>137(p7)</sup>

“Leaders of Black publications,” according to the TI, were “very influential individuals. . . sensitive to the political impact of the contents of their papers.”<sup>138</sup> In fact, “influence is more important

than numbers as far as newspaper ads are concerned,” so the TI intended to “use these publications for issues, editorials, ads. . . , and, of course, providing information or comment on proposed legislation.”<sup>138</sup>

The TI proceeded,<sup>139</sup> providing information on proposed legislation and seeking NNPA assistance in opposing it (e.g., a 1986 NNPA resolution opposing an advertising ban<sup>140,141</sup>) and encouraging NNPA papers to run industry-favorable editorials. In 1985, for example, a *St. Louis Sentinel* editorial asserted that the Black press would continue to advertise cigarettes to avert greater harm:

the merchants of anti-smoking should do their total homework, and realize the irreparable harm that can occur to the Black Press if they have their way.<sup>142</sup>

The TI worked to maintain the NNPA relationship because it paid off for tobacco companies:

The [NNPA] as a whole, and various individuals, have already shown an understanding of our issues, and a willingness to help. . . NNPA support on the advertising, public smoking, and tax issues could only be a plus. . . The NNPA, several members of the [NNPA] board, and individual

-13-

12. Through black publishers [National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA)], seek editorial comment on tax impact on black smokers, discriminatory nature of such taxes.
13. Seek editorial support in Hispanic media.
14. Select leading tax authority -- attorney or economist -- to serve as source for print and electronic media stories on tobacco's unfair and excessive tax burden. In states where tobacco tax measures are being considered, he would also serve as spokesperson at business and civic organizations.
15. Prepare a presentation for meetings of city and county tax officials (most are members of at least a statewide group) keying on fact that cigarette taxes rarely produce the revenue forecast and discussing their long-term detrimental impact on business.
16. Mobilize and enlist other industries whose products are subject to excise tax. Publish monthly features on how such taxes affect those least able to pay.

*quid pro quo*

*forget it!*

03521208

Note. NNPA=National Newspaper Publishers Association.  
 Source. The Communications Committee of the Tobacco Institute for the Tobacco Institute Public Relations Division. A Tobacco Institute Interim Communications Plan Addressing Four High Priority Issues. November 15, 1983. Lorillard. Bates no. 03521195/1214. Available at: <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/ydc81e00>. Accessed October 7, 2009.<sup>135</sup>

**FIGURE 2—Excerpt from the Tobacco Institute's 1983 communications plan for high-priority issues, including a note about "quid pro quo," suggesting that the NNPA would print editorials supporting the tobacco industry.**

publishers have actively opposed advertising restrictions of tobacco products, workplace smoking restrictions that disproportionately affect minorities, and public smoking restrictions that mandate personal behavior.<sup>143</sup>

In a memo, TI Public Affairs Senior Vice President Susan Stuntz supported purchasing a table at a Black press event to show

appreciation: "Our participation. . . at the request of the NNPA's president, would be a small gesture of our thanks."<sup>144</sup> "Appreciation" was due from tobacco companies not because the NNPA papers printed paid advertisements, but because they supported the industry.<sup>142,145,146</sup>

Given tobacco patronage and the TTs solicitation of particular positions in editorial comment, it would likely have been problematic for NNPA papers not to write supportive editorials. There is suggestive evidence that op-eds supporting the tobacco companies were ghostwritten—unsigned—by the tobacco industry or its consultants, and then bylined by influential black leaders.<sup>147a</sup> For example, the TT's public affairs firm, Ogilvy & Mather, was involved with coordinating an op-ed signed by Congressman Mervyn M. Dymally<sup>15,147b</sup> arguing against a federal tobacco excise tax, which was published in 20 Black publications.<sup>55,147c</sup> Identical in all newspapers, it featured Dymally's byline, with no reference to Ogilvy & Mather or its client. Titled "Look Who Would Carry The Burden. . . Again," the op-ed described excise taxes as regressive, only briefly mentioning tobacco (Figure 3).<sup>55-61</sup> Although some papers might not have known that the piece was ghostwritten by an industry public relations firm, some NNPA publishers actually requested op-eds from the TI.<sup>148,149</sup>

A 1995 Philip Morris e-mail planned "message points and canned opinion pieces" that West Coast Black Publishers (an NNPA subgroup) members could sign. Referring to the NNPA and the national Hispanic publishers' group, the e-mail said

With all the advertising we offer them, they will run any editorial we like. They all need to be different however because they run as editorials rather than guest opinion pieces.<sup>150</sup>

Op-eds suggested by R.J. Reynolds for NNPA publication included "Federal Government Has No Basis for Tobacco Industry Lawsuit" (opposing federal litigation against tobacco companies)<sup>151,152</sup> and an op-ed against tobacco class action litigation.<sup>153</sup>

### Developing Tensions

While the NNPA appeared supportive of the industry into the 1980s, it expected sustained or increased support. Carlton B. Goodlett, a physician and NNPA leader,<sup>154,155</sup> corresponded frequently with tobacco companies about equal opportunities for Blacks and Black publications. Typically, companies took his complaints seriously.<sup>156-164</sup> Philip Morris, for example, was concerned that Goodlett would cause a commotion about the withdrawal of some advertising from Black papers at a shareholders' meeting.<sup>159,160</sup> A 1987 Philip Morris document

2-The Philadelphia New Observer, November 4, 1987

## Look Who Would Carry The Burden . . . Again

by Mervyn M. Dymally

When Congress suddenly realized that all the fiscal slight-of-hand it could conjure would not disguise this year's budgetary shortfall, the search for creative solutions was on.

During this process a particularly ill-advised proposal for raising revenue was put on the table — an increase in excise taxes. Not all of the options being considered are popular or easy. However, no other option is so blatantly unfair to America's working people as an increase in excise taxes.

Originally designed as a "luxury" tax on the wealthy, excise taxes have become the road to fast — yet minimal — revenue for the federal government. These random taxes constitute a penny here and a penny there, yet, when added up, the increase will mean an immense loss to lower and middle income families.

Our system of taxation is based on the notion of progressivity — those who earn more will shoulder more of the burden. Excise taxes on the other hand, extract the same amount from everyone regardless of income, or ability to pay. It is disturbing to see such an unfair measure being considered.

The regressive nature of excise taxes was given factual weight recently by a Task Force study that I commissioned as Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus. The study found that an increase in excise taxes would be two to three times larger for a family earning \$10,000-\$20,000 compared to families with an income of \$50,000 or more. The Task Force findings add to the growing volume of evidence on the inequity of excise taxes including a study by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office which found "an increase in the excise tax would be the most regressive of all the tax increases."

There are those who attempt to justify the increase in excise taxes by terming them "sin" taxes placed on products that will reduce consumption of tobacco and beer. Yet, it is anything but fair to tax middle and lower-income individuals on the basis of their personal choices rather than on their ability to pay.

Congress has several options for raising revenues to reduce the burgeoning budget deficit and it would be unjust to embrace excise taxes which are so obviously regressive. Not only will lower income people suffer but so will the economy as a whole as the burden is increasingly transferred to working Americans rather than those who have the ability to pay.

The debate over excise taxes boils down to choosing a politically easy solution over one that is consistent with the fairness inherent in our tax system. It is clear that the end does not justify the means in this situation. Congress would be wrong to adopt such a harmful policy that is really no solution at all.

It is time we realized that President Reagan may never take responsibility for his actions and attempt to correct the deficit, and if he does, he will almost certainly try to do it on the backs of the poor and working Americans. He will not consider fair methods to reduce the deficit. He will not keep the tax rate for the rich at 38 percent; he will reduce it to assure that the rich get richer while the poor and the middle class pay the bills. He will not raise the corporate income tax which would finally force the fat cats to pay their fair share. Instead he will once again reduce the services needed to provide working Americans with housing, education and medical attention.

It is therefore left to Congress to bring Reagan's deficit under control in a fair and equitable manner. We would not be fulfilling this responsibility by raising excise taxes and taking what little the poor have to try to correct a disaster that Ronald Reagan has created.

TITX 0034271

Source. Dymally MM. Philadelphia New Observer. Look Who Would Carry the Burden. . .Again. November 4, 1987. Tobacco Institute. Bates no. TITX0034271. Available at: <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/qwx32f00>. Accessed March 8, 2010.<sup>60</sup>

**FIGURE 3—1987 op-ed published in Black newspapers and signed by Congressman Mervyn M. Dymally, which involved the Tobacco Institute's public relations firm.**

indicated that additional NNPA papers should receive advertising because

[t]hey've run editorials and/or Op Ed pieces on proposed ad bans and the dangers of censorship; spoken out vehemently against smoking restrictions on airlines and in restaurants; written and called state legislative leaders concerning these issues; religiously run press releases, news releases and given coverage to events sponsored by our company; and attended various company sponsored events to show their support.<sup>165</sup>

In the mid- to late 1980s, counterpressure from within African American communities emerged, straining the NNPA–tobacco industry relationship.<sup>18,166</sup> African American public health leaders began challenging tobacco company target marketing. The numbers of NNPA-related LTDL documents from the 1980s and 1990s suggest the organization's continued importance to the tobacco industry (Table 1). TI memos about the 1988 NNPA convention

reported that health advocates had accused the Black press of "selling out" the community by accepting tobacco advertisements.<sup>148,149</sup> When Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan (an African American) called for banning cigarette advertising in Black newspapers<sup>162</sup> and for the recognition of Black-targeted tobacco marketing,<sup>18,63–65</sup> the industry recognized that "ugl[iness]"<sup>66</sup> and threats<sup>167</sup> to its legitimacy were growing.<sup>168</sup>

NNPA publishers expected tobacco companies' support as they endured such criticism, as a conflict over ad budgets revealed. Philip Morris's advertising in Black newspapers rose from 1988 to 1991<sup>169,170</sup> but dropped by about \$1 million in 1992.<sup>167,171,172</sup> This decrease did not satisfy the NNPA, as a 1992 memo between Philip Morris corporate affairs vice presidents Ellen Merlo and Craig Fuller noted.<sup>167</sup> Merlo explained that after the cut,

**TABLE 1—Unique Documents With NNPA in the Text Found in Legacy Tobacco Documents Library by Year: 2010.**

Years	Documents, No.
1951-1955	2
1956-1960	9
1961-1965	17
1966-1970	17
1971-1975	44
1976-1980	81
1981-1985	163
1986-1990	334
1991-1995	394
1996-2000	456
2001-2005	33

Note. NNPA = National Newspaper Publishers Association.

[t]he publishers were pretty threatening. . . indicating that they have been out front supporting us on tobacco and corporate issues, and they will not accept a budget cut.<sup>167(p1)</sup>

The publishers also discussed requesting meetings with Philip Morris's affiliated companies.<sup>167</sup> Merlo suggested "pool[ing] resources. . . that would placate" Black publishers.<sup>167(p2)</sup> Eventually, Merlo reported to NNPA president Robert Bogle an approximately \$500,000 increase in Black newspaper advertising for 1992 to 1993.<sup>173</sup>

### Sustaining Connections

Well into the 1990s, scholarships, advertising, sponsorships, and speaking engagements continued to be used to sustain NNPA–tobacco company connections.<sup>174-183</sup> R.J. Reynolds, perhaps responding to its 1989 to 1990 "Up-town" fiasco (a new brand targeting African Americans, aborted following African American community activism),<sup>18,63-65</sup> planned a major media campaign in 1990 to inform the "Black community of [R.J. Reynolds's] heritage of social responsibility and commitment."<sup>184</sup> The program apparently resulted in "extensive favorable publicity."<sup>184</sup> R.J. Reynolds's Journalism Scholarship Program was mentioned in industry documents through at least 1994, establishing a corps of journalists supported by tobacco funding.<sup>176-181</sup> Among numerous other contributions, an article from Philip Morris's files noted that R.J. Reynolds

sponsored a luncheon at NNPA's 1995 Mid-Winter Workshop, "culminat[ing] with Brown & Williamson host[ing] a fabulous evening cruise around Tampa Harbor."<sup>185</sup>

R.J. Reynolds included NNPA leaders, such as former NNPA presidents Bogle and Dorothy Leavell, in discussions about combating the rising community opposition to tobacco. Bogle was quoted as saying, "Tobacco companies were our friends before anybody else was."<sup>186</sup> Leavell was quoted as admitting that "Tobacco ads influence us,"<sup>186</sup> but she argued in a *New York Times* article that the impact of a tobacco advertising ban "would be devastating."<sup>187,188(p12)</sup> Philip Morris created an award-winning radio documentary series featuring African Americans, including a program on the Black press, which premiered in 1999.<sup>189</sup>

Despite growing concerns from the community<sup>190</sup> and fluctuating advertising budgets, the ties between the NNPA and the tobacco industry were sustained. Tobacco companies supported key NNPA events almost every year from 1996 to 2000.<sup>183,191-197</sup>

## DISCUSSION

We have documented a longstanding, complicated relationship between the tobacco industry and the Black press, and have revealed the nature of the quid pro quo involved.<sup>135</sup> The industry regarded its patronage as ensuring that the Black press remained a reliable ally. Although such editorial support was forthcoming, our study did not permit us to assess the extent of this support.

It would be unfair to assume that Black newspapers were alone in facing pressure from advertisers; these tensions always exist between media and their advertising patrons.<sup>20,34,198,199</sup> However, earlier research on *Ebony* and *Life* magazines demonstrated the trajectory of cigarette advertising in an African American magazine versus a "mainstream" magazine between 1950 and 1965, concluding that "Blacks were subject first to less and then to more advertising than [W]hites."<sup>200(p56)</sup> A similar content analysis of NNPA newspapers would be useful in appraising the extent to which Black newspapers supported the tobacco industry.

It would also be inappropriate to suggest that editorial support for tobacco industry positions "caused" today's tobacco-related health

disparities among African Americans. Establishing causal links between media messages, media consumption, and health behaviors is difficult, particularly because behaviors are also influenced by beliefs, norms, and intentions.<sup>20</sup> However, a wide body of literature<sup>20,77,201-204</sup> suggests that media coverage contributes to social understandings about tobacco. Media convey (or omit) information about health practices and disease risks and thus have important roles in shaping health practices within communities.<sup>205-207</sup>

The term "quid pro quo" as applied to the tobacco-NNPA relationship should have a simple meaning: money paid to NNPA papers in exchange for valuable advertising.<sup>136</sup> However, the tobacco industry expected more than this equal exchange. Tobacco companies viewed their support of the Black press as buying its loyalty and securing its favor.<sup>150</sup> This relationship represents a quid pro quo plus, that is, expecting a return of more than equal value.

As NNPA publishers were frequently reminded, tobacco companies bought ads when few other companies would do so<sup>74,75,189</sup>; thus, the NNPA was still paying its "debt" to the industry decades later. The NNPA, in turn, was apparently convinced that it warranted special treatment from tobacco companies and demanded advertising support after it supported tobacco industry issues. This support continued even amid emerging pressure from African American health advocates who challenged tobacco industry targeting of minorities. The "threatening"<sup>167(p1)</sup> stance taken by publishers when tobacco advertising budgets dropped in the 1990s suggests that publishers were beginning to realize how their allegiance was being taken for granted.

The Code of Journalistic Ethics holds that journalists should "deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests."<sup>208</sup> The quid pro quo between tobacco companies and the NNPA violated this standard, which was officially adopted by the Society of Professional Journalists in 1996 (and which had existed in a different form since 1926).<sup>208</sup> Yet 2 years later, NNPA president Leavell asserted, "Tobacco ads influence us."<sup>186</sup> As advertisers, the tobacco companies sought and received favored treatment; publishers justified their position by claiming that they could not survive without tobacco advertising.<sup>186</sup>

But this position did not merely violate an abstract principle. Ethnic media, and African American media in particular, have a "triple role—reinforcing ethnic identity, transmitting culture, and facilitating advocacy and political participation."<sup>27(p213)</sup> As a Black press historian said, "The black press was never intended to be objective. . . . It often took a position. . . . This was a press of advocacy."<sup>25</sup> If African American readers across the decades of the last century assumed that the Black press advocated positions on their behalf, then the quid pro quo we have described takes on new significance. NNPA newspaper readers likely expected that publishers had their best interests at heart and assumed that they conveyed complete, accurate information about tobacco's harmfulness and about public policy measures to reduce it. These publications' apparent prioritization of serving the tobacco industry over safeguarding their readers' health suggests that they may not have fully appreciated the extensive harm that tobacco caused the Black community. The NNPA-tobacco alliance was understandable in earlier decades, when advertisers were fewer, evidence of tobacco's harmfulness to health was unclear, and the industry was actively working to further the "controversy" idea. But the alliance continued even as the evidence became irrefutable and African American communities began resisting tobacco marketing and industry overtures.

## Limitations

Additional relevant documents may exist that we could not locate. The LTDL is limited by the legal discovery process (i.e., it is unlikely that states' plaintiffs specifically requested all NNPA-related materials), and we did not have access to the full NNPA archives. We had limited access to more recent materials. We focused on the NNPA because it represents a significant share of African American media, but other groups (and other media, such as radio<sup>70</sup>) also influence information dissemination in African American communities. It was beyond the scope of this study to fully examine NNPA publications for content, so we cannot draw quantitative conclusions about the extent of newspaper support for industry positions.

## Conclusions

Today's tobacco-related health disparities among African Americans<sup>1-4</sup> result from

numerous intertwined factors. Historic racial oppression surely contributed to the NNPA's willingness to continue to serve industry interests because it feared losing the Black press's voice without tobacco money. Yet, this does not seem to fully explain the continuing ties still linking many African American leadership organizations to tobacco industry patronage.<sup>209–214</sup> Recently, a *Wall Street Journal* article described how an African American public relations consultant and founding member of the National Association of Black Journalists pitched an editorial opposing a menthol cigarette ban on behalf of the firm's client, Lorillard tobacco company (maker of the leading menthol brand).<sup>215</sup> Progressive African American leaders have called for a reevaluation of these relationships. The quid pro quo some organizations still sustain with tobacco companies is the legacy of an inequitable trade that has contributed to incalculable harm to African American communities. ■

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### Contributors

All authors participated in conceptualizing the study. P.M. McCandless and V.B. Yerger collected the data. P.M. McCandless analyzed the data and wrote the first draft of the article. V.B. Yerger helped to refine and contextualize the analysis and reviewed all drafts of the article. R.E. Malone supervised the research, refined and contextualized the analysis, and reviewed and edited all drafts of the article.

### Acknowledgments

Support for this study was provided by the National Institutes of Health (grant 5R25 CA 113710-03A2), the National Cancer Institute (grant R01 CA120138), the California Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program (grant 9RT-0095), and the National Institute on Drug Abuse San Francisco Treatment Research Center (grant P50 DA009253).

We acknowledge the data-retrieval assistance of Vera Harrell and Antwi Akom.

### Human Participant Protection

No protocol approval was necessary because no human participants were involved in this research.

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