

# Is the Tobacco Industry—"A Friend of Black America"—Being Unilaterally Attacked?

**E**very package of cigarettes distributed in the United States contains the Surgeon General's warning. This warning comes in several differently-worded versions. One reads, "Quitting Smoking Now Greatly Reduces Serious Risks to Your Health." This is considerably mild-tempered compared to one of the earlier versions which stated, "The Surgeon General Has Determined That Smoking Is Hazardous to Your Health."

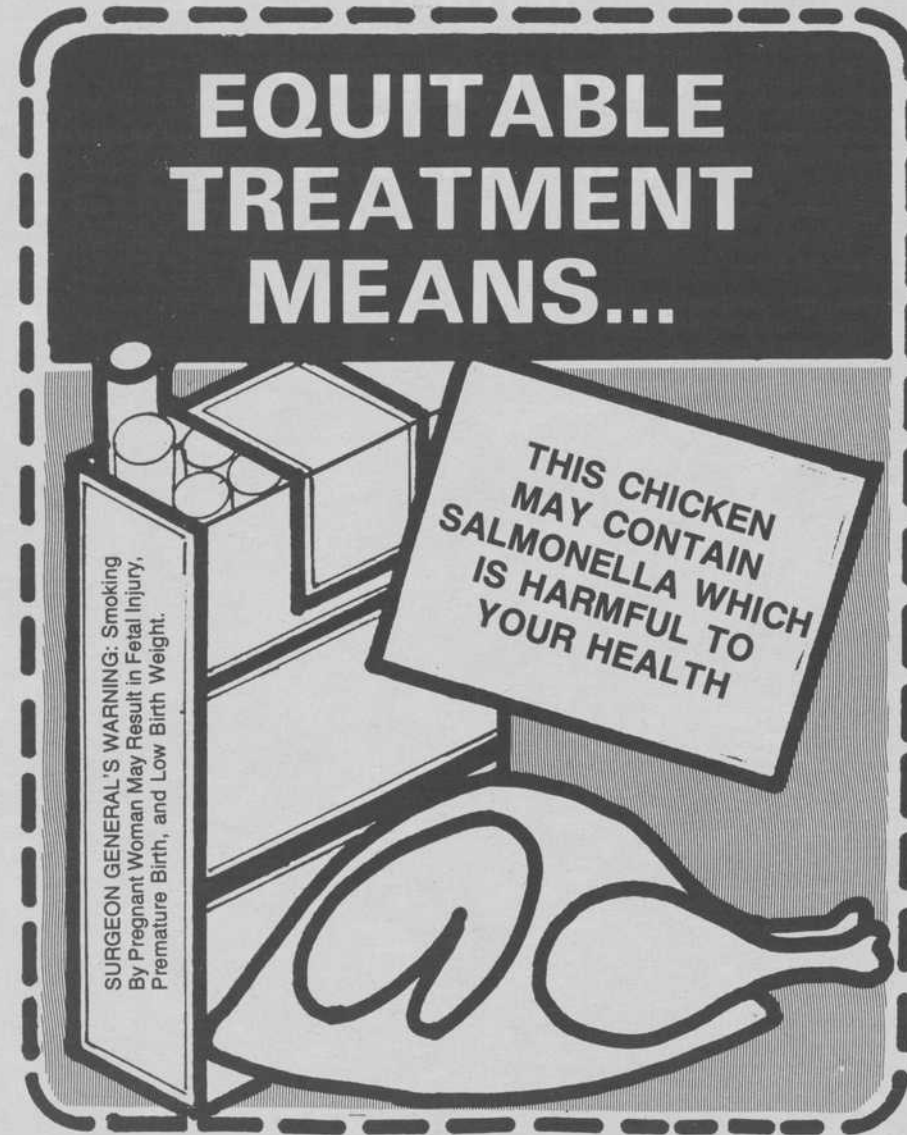
While every right-thinking person is concerned with good health, a clean environment and the government's interest in protecting its citizens, all Americans and Black Americans, in particular, should be equally concerned about inequitable and discriminatory treatment of any kind.

If visitors from another planet came to Earth and saw the cigarette package warnings, they would expect to see similar warnings on other hazardous products like alcohol and chicken (just to mention one such food). They would expect to see warning signs on dumps that contain toxic wastes, and even in some cities where the air quality often exceeds acceptable levels of pollution.

Our visitors would be sadly disappointed and perhaps wonder why the tobacco industry has been singled out for this inequitable treatment.

"As prime victims of inequity and discrimination in many forms, we, as Black Americans, must take a firm stand against inequity and discrimination wherever and whenever it exists."

At first glance the above statement appears to be very reasonable. However, it is definitely not complete. While we, today, as Black Americans—even as descendants of slaves—have



experienced firsthand injustice and inequity, many of us have an inherent need to prove, particularly to the White race, that we are not discriminating against anyone. What we should be saying, individually and collectively, is "We should be supporting the tobacco industry because of what they have done long-term in a positive way for our people."

The tobacco industry, along with some in the beverage industry, has been a long-time friend of Black America, standing almost alone as a pioneer for survival and uplifting causes within our communities. In a July 1986 letter to President Ronald Reagan—congratulating him on his stand against total advertising sanctions against the

tobacco industry—Donald P. Wilson (Grand Exalted Ruler, IBPOEIKs of the World and chairman of the Black Business and Professional Support and Involvement Committee of the Assault On Illiteracy Program [AOIP]), listed the following reasons for being pleased with the President's actions:

- The tobacco industry, for the working masses of Black Americans, represents an unusually high percentage of factory jobs and farming opportunities. [The 1982 Census of Agriculture listed 4,949 Black-operated farms on which the principal product was tobacco.]
- The tobacco industry, for the higher educated Black American, was among the first ever to...hire Black Americans in sales representative capacities and in the upper echelons of management. In fact, three of the most respected and influential corporate executives ever allowed to achieve a high measure of their potential—Thomas Shropshire [of Miller Brewing Company, a subsidiary of Philip Morris Companies, Inc. (which produces such popular cigarette brands as Benson & Hedges, Players, and Virginia Slims)]; Marshall Bass [of RJR/Nabisco which owns RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company (maker of Bright, More and Salem)]; and Stanley Scott [also of Philip Morris]—were produced by the tobacco industry.

Referring to the Miller Brewing Company's new facility in Albany, Georgia, in his capacity as Senior Vice President and Treasurer, Thomas Shropshire said:

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## "Pulling Ourselves Up By Our Own Bootstraps"...A Series