

Communities (rising) under siege: Locating and listening to the history of tobacco, health activism, and the legacy of cultural mistrust in an urban community's struggle for a smoke-free environment

Mark A Bolden, Research Associate, Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA.
mark.bolden@morgan.edu

Other Authors: Payam Sheikhattari,¹ Fernando Wagner,¹ Darin Wall²

¹Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD USA; ²People's Community Health Centers, Baltimore, MD USA

History is often the loudest silenced participant in community action research. Therefore, to hear its voice, a local history of health activism and action research towards smoke-free community empowerment will be discussed in three emerging narrative periods in Baltimore, Maryland. The narrative approach uses psychohistory as a collaborator in research and will allow for an examination of trust and mistrust in sites of health and disease such as community health centers and the tobacco industrial complex. Currently (Period 1), there exists an effort to reduce and prevent tobacco use through action research in southwest Baltimore. A partnership between university, local health centers, and community leaders formed to address the problems associated with tobacco use as reported by a community-wide survey. However, the history of the current efforts is tied to the development of a community health center with its radical beginnings as a by-product of local health activist groups such as the Women's Collective and the Baltimore Chapter of the Black Panther Party (Period 2). The periods of activism during the height of the Civil Rights and Human Rights movements corresponded to the highest levels of health for Black communities in the United States. During these liberation movements, the action-oriented process of the Panthers resulted in the first sickle cell testing efforts along with free breakfast programs. Guided upon the periods that espoused theories of liberation from internal colonialism-coterminous with action research in the late 1960s and early 1970s-, the Panther Party and the Women's Collective developed a Community Health Center that currently services over 14,000 patients yearly at multiple sites. One site is situated in a community besieged by tobacco advertisements and some of the highest rates of smoking in Baltimore-the largest urban city in Maryland. This same community contains a nefarious history of one of the largest tobacco plantations in Baltimore during enslavement (Period 3).

This catalyst paper seeks to engage the audience at examining history as a facilitator of trust and mistrust for action research in Black communities whose conditions can be examined through the internal colonialism model. Thus, this presentation will: contextualize the three aforementioned periods of local community history; address the legacies of trust and mistrust in the tobacco industry as a risk and protective factor for participation in tobacco cessation clinical trials; provide follow up with the activists who created the People's Community Health Center through interviews; and, seek audience recommended strategies on how to include history in the action research process in order to combat the tobacco industrial complex as a microcosm of the multiple forces at play against community emancipation.