

# Why So Many Liquor Stores in Poor Neighborhoods?

The United States of America is the land where anything is possible. A person could move here (or escape from) another country and eventually start their own business while raising a strong family. It seems like such a blissfully progressive place to be. With the African slave trade tucked away in the historical closet, all shades of skin color can occupy the voting lines today. In addition, women can have high power salaries and manage corporations equally as men. Everything seems so wonderfully peachy in America. However, there is a dark side. As much as America likes to boast about offering equality, there is a gap among the American people that is as broad as the oceans are wide. There are a few hundred wealthy people who control more wealth than the rest of the nation combined. There seems to be a silent, malevolent system set up to keep the poor people deprived and the rich people wealthy. Supporting this fact is the evidence of the shrinking middle class.

A person does not need a degree in economics to see that poor neighborhoods are not afforded the same quality of schools. Despite having a church on every other block, the drug dealers continue to **parasitize** these areas as well. There is an abundant availability of alcohol in poor neighborhoods. Are the liquor stores planted everywhere as a result of poor neighborhoods being preyed upon by a niche industry? Or, were they planted first to establish, accelerate and maintain the inevitably impoverished condition that exists today? The purpose of this document is to consider the possible reasons and offer positive solutions to the issue of: liquor stores on every corner. From researching articles and documentaries, there are many reasons why poor neighborhoods have too many liquor stores. Despite consideration of opposing views, there are three explanations that stand out the most. They are basic marketing principles of supply and demand, cultural discrimination and lack of effective community activism against this problem. Together this trio of reasons braid into a thick whip that lashes the Black and Latino communities in particular with deadly intent.

It is difficult to discuss supply and demand without including a comment on advertising. The reason is that advertising targets a minority group. No one could forget the handsome billboard images of the Billy Dee Williams holding a can of Colt 45 Malt Liquor with a beautiful woman at his side. It makes sense to say that the advertising generates the demand for which the liquor manufacturers are so happy to supply. However, opponents of this view would say that **all advertising is targeted**. Cleaning products have commercials aired during the times of the soap operas because the target demographic happens to be females of a certain age who are at home during the day. Targeting is harmless and it represents the diligent hard work that advertisers must endure if they are going to secure profits for the company. That seems so innocent and indeed it is. However, it is the way that products are advertised with the use of tantalizing verbiage, music and imagery that makes it sinister. For example, drinking Colt 45 makes a person attractive, powerful and "it works everytime"™. Using a red bull or other animal featured on the product has subliminal messages. With the help of great advertisements, the targeted minority groups (Blacks and Latinos) exploded the sales volume for products such as Old English 800, Schlitz Malt Liquor, Colt 45 and more. The liquor companies had a legitimate reason to produce massive quantities to meet the demands. "While black Americans comprise 12-14% of the population, they consume 30-33% of the malt liquor brewed in the U.S. It shows why brewers of malt liquor advertise more heavily to black people: As a group, they buy more malt liquor." (Winship). Since malt liquor and other alcoholic beverages are so addictive and poisonous, destruction of the neighborhoods in which the target demographic consumes these toxins is inevitable.

The stable free radical nature of melanin makes it an excellent electron acceptor. This explains the strong ability of melanin to bind with drugs like cocaine, marijuana and amphetamines (Ortiz de Montellano 33-58). Melanin is the biochemical make-up of Black and Latino people that distinguishes them from Whites. There is no secret that discrimination must play a role in the condition of the poorest neighborhoods in the nation. The presence of drugs and violence inevitably accompany the abundance of alcohol in poor neighborhoods. It is hard to believe that this is not a systematic set up by corporate giants and is hatefully denied appropriate attention by the government. Effects include crime, alcoholism and the breakdown of family structures. In 1991 the U.S. Surgeon General Antonia Novella joined Reverend Jesse Brown. Brown is an outspoken force representing the Philadelphia-based National Association of African-Americans for Positive Imagery. He led a protest against G. Heileman's Colt 45 and Novella joined him with her sentiments, "Tell the purveyors of alcohol and their hired-gun persuaders that we have had enough disease, disability and death. Tell them that we simply **will not tolerate** marketing that distorts and deceives the effects of products, or campaigns that are designed to keep our minorities enslaved by

taking away their good health, freedom, and dignity. Despite stern rejection (according to the Marin Institute), an executive at the G. Heileman Brewing Company stated that 75% of Colt 45 (their most popular malt liquor) is consumed by African Americans.

A simple zip code search revealed that the city of Compton in California has 45 liquor stores jammed into a short space that covers about 10 miles. On the other hand, within five miles of other areas such as Irvine or Newport Beach in California, there are no such stores (Hodges). There are 53 liquor stores in West Oakland California. Race plays a role in this issue is because nationwide, state enforced racial discrimination is what gave birth to the ghettos of America. Blacks were subject to violent intimidation if they attempted to live on the same streets as Whites. Racial redlining, limited resources, low academic expectations all make these areas perfect for saturation with drugs and alcohol. In this way, crime can increase along with alcohol consumption and the puppet masters can sit back and watch these poor people kill themselves.

The correlation between high homicide rates in poor neighborhoods and accessibility to malt liquor is easy to see. However, this is a problem that has stirred varied views depending on the political affiliation of the beholder. Conservatives say that racism is not the issue. They believe that the poor (Blacks) represent a culture wherein violence, loose morals and instant gratification are highly prioritized. The American dream is not being destroyed by White racists, but by gangsta rappers. On the other hand, Liberal thinkers have pointed the fingers of blame at covert, unconscious, institutional and environment racism (Ford). In reality, **both sides may have valid points** but it will take the active community involvement to bring about positive change.

In conclusion, some people or groups may speak out against the alcohol industry. However, the fact that this is still a serious issue means that these communities are not fighting hard enough. Some might not be protesting the condition of their streets at all. The store owners should assume some accountability. Sadly, many store owners feel like the Korean family that was interviewed by Rickey A. Hodges. Their primary commitment is to their own families. They only want to "make a living" (Hodges). Activism should include converting liquor stores into grocery and other important retail product sites. Also, nuisance activities that often occur around liquor stores should be prohibited. There should be no close proximity between schools and stores selling alcohol. The people must take action to bring about lasting change. Why so many liquor stores in poor neighborhoods? It is because the entities that worked so hard to isolate minorities contributed to their economic hardships and did not care. Next, the alcohol brewing companies saw a way to capitalize on the vulnerability of this disenfranchised group. They began to parasitize these neighborhoods with fancy ads, persuasive wording, celebrity endorsements and toxic products. Lastly, the people in these poor areas have yet to become disgusted enough to clean up their streets starting with **abolishing the excessive number of liquor stores**. Until then, the problems and consequences will persist like cancer in the body left undetected.

## Works Cited

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